

THE MILITARY RECORD OF BRIGADIER
GENERAL JOHN NIXON OF
MASSACHUSETTS

BY JOHN M. MERRIAM

IN THE annals of the American Revolution are the records of two men of the same name, each one of conspicuous service—John Nixon of Pennsylvania, and John Nixon of Massachusetts. The former has received the greater notice. He was a prominent Philadelphian, the grandson of immigrants from Wexford, Ireland. His father, Richard, was a shipping merchant and had built Nixon's Wharf on the Delaware River, and held office in the city council for many years. The son John was equally prominent, succeeding to the business of his father, serving as a Warden of the Port, a member of the Committee on Correspondence and a Colonel of the battalion which was known in those days in Philadelphia as the "Silk Stockings." When it was ordered that the Declaration of Independence be publicly proclaimed on July 8, 1776, John Nixon was selected for this distinction. He was with Washington at Trenton, Princeton and Valley Forge. He was one of the organizers of the early bank and succeeded Robert Morris as president. His portrait was painted by Gilbert Stuart, and a memoir written by Charles Henry Hart is published in "Pennsylvania Magazine" of 1877.

John Nixon of Massachusetts, however, was of more humble origin, and little has been written about him, although as a soldier his record is the more noteworthy. He was born in Framingham, March 1, 1727, the son of Christopher, supposed to be of Huguenot descent,

a pioneer farmer, the first of his name in Framingham, who cleared some fifty acres of land in the north part of the town and built his home and reared a family as a first settler. John was his oldest son and as such must have shared his father's toil in taming the wild land, cutting into the forest, breaking the soil, hauling out the rocks, hewing the timber, training colts and steers, and mastering the many trades which had to be learned in the country life of those days. The town had been incorporated in 1700, and district schools had been established, and here he received a rudimentary education.

Such was his life until the winter of 1744-5 when the call came for volunteers to go with Sir William Pepperell to capture the French citadel Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, which defied the British supremacy on this Atlantic Coast. This call met with enthusiastic response, throughout New England. Within a radius of a mile or so in the district around Nobscot Hill in Framingham eleven men volunteered in the very beginning, so as to become members of the first regiment under the immediate command of Pepperell as Colonel. John Nixon, not yet eighteen years old, was one of this number. Others were Robert Seaver and his two sons, Nixon's uncle and cousins, and Shears Berry, his future brother-in-law.

His captain was Ephraim Baker, and among the unpublished letters of the Pepperell Papers in the Library of the Massachusetts Historical Society, I have found an interesting letter signed in his fair hand which has made me wish I could learn more about him. In the genealogical notes of the Nixon family in the history of Framingham by Rev. Josiah H. Temple is found this interesting story—that Nixon when a mere lad deserted from military service under the influence of older men, was captured, court martialed and sentenced to be shot; that he was taken to the place of execution, but because of his youth secret orders were given to the firing squad to miss him, that he fell upon

the discharge of the muskets but recovered unhurt, and was permitted to live, as Temple says "to redeem his fame as the hero of many campaigns and battles."

This incident must have occurred, it seems to me, in the Louisbourg campaign. I know of no prior service in Nixon's lifetime in which death would have been ordered for desertion, and I have found no record of any earlier service by him. I have examined with some care the Pepperell and Belknap papers for a verification of this story, and have discovered this letter;

Louisbourg, June 4th: 1746

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR HONOUR

As the Cheife of my Comp^y have inlisted with your Honor in Expectation of Tarrying with me, & they being disapointed, I Humbly ask the favour of a furlow for John Holebrook & John Nixson who were putt under my care, & that I might have the pleasure of carrying them to their friends, & that my promise of a furlow to ye others, may be fullfild at your Honours Leasure:

I Heartily wish your Honour a good passage & safe Return to your Country & the Happy sight of my Lady & family, I take this opportunity at Parting of offering myself & Service to Your Honour and am with the Highest Esteem & Veneration
Yr Honours obedient Humble Serv^t.

EPHRAIM BAKER

To the Honourable
Sir Wm. Pepperell
Barronett

It is a mere inference, but it seems likely to me that following this proforma execution of the death sentence, Nixon was placed in the personal care of his captain, and that possibly Baker had interceded for him. These early papers contain references to the plight of our New England troops. The city had fallen July 17, 1745, but for a year and more the men had remained through the hardship of winter, with scanty clothing, the camps had become unsanitary, small-pox had broken out, and drinking, immorality and desertion are mentioned in these papers as calling for discipline. The environment surely is consistent with this explanation of Baker's letter.

The next event in Nixon's life of which I have found record is his marriage. He probably returned to his father's home, resumed the life of a farmer and courted and won the daughter of a neighbor who lived on the west side of Nobscot on one of the oldest and best known farms of Framingham, called successively the Shears, the Berry and the Slate place, and in early times the familiar haunt of Tantamous, or Old Jethro, the Indian Sachem of Nobscot. Nixon married Thankful Berry, February 7, 1754, the daughter of Joseph and Thankful Shears Berry. In these days of rich blessings beyond the wildest imagination of that time, it quickens our heart throbs a little to read of a mother bearing the name of Thankful and passing it on to her daughter. It may seem a satire to associate life in the lonely woods of Nobscot in the period 1700-1775 given to farm drudgery and the bearing and nurture of children, with thankfulness, but I believe the name was given and borne with real appreciation.

In the year following his marriage came the call of the French and Indian War. On March 7, 1755, forgetful of his sufferings at Louisbourg, he enlisted as lieutenant in Captain Newell's Roxbury Company, but was transferred to Captain Jonathan Hoar's Company of Concord, and succeeded him September 8. Later he commanded a company in the regiment of Col. Timothy Ruggles of Hardwick, Worcester County, as is shown by a muster roll in his own hand dated August 26, 1756. This service, the Crown Point expedition, continued till December 17, 1756. The critical battle was on September 8, 1756, when defeat was changed to victory by valiant fighting out of an Indian ambush into which the troops were led near Lake George. It was in this fight that Ephraim Williams, beloved as the founder of Williams College, was killed. The second campaign followed after a short intermission, and here again Nixon commanded one of the companies in the regiment of Colonel Ruggles. And when Ruggles was sent home sick in

October it was Nixon's company which was detailed as escort. There was further association with Colonel Ruggles in his next enlistment in September 1758. This was the campaign against Ticonderoga under James Abercrombie of the Black Watch of Scotland. On one of the returns we find Captain Nixon's endorsement September 27 "On the roads at work at Half Moon," indicating slow progress through difficult country. Among the papers of this period in the archives of the Commonwealth is a bill presented by Ezekiel How, the landlord of the Wayside Inn, endorsed as follows:

A List of the Soldiers vitiled by Ezekiel How of Sudbury Inholder in there Return from the Cannady Expedition In 1758 Atest Erors Excepted

EZEKIEL HOW

Among these soldiers was Captain John Nixon. With Longfellow's help this landlord could tell a good tale, but he could not spell.

In 1759 a new term of service began again with Colonel Ruggles from March 31 to April 30. At this later date Nixon's company was transferred to the regiment of Colonel John Jones of Hopkinton and placed under command of Lord Jeffrey Amherst for service in Canada ending December 20. A final call for troops came in 1761 and again Nixon commanded a company which served from April 18, 1761 to July 28, 1762.

I must be content with an outline of his service at this time covering the entire period of the French and Indian War. He was in the prime of early manhood from 27 to 35 and it was in this period that he received the training which qualified him for leadership in the Revolution. When 35 years old he had seen service under Pepperell, Abercrombie, Timothy Ruggles and Jeffrey Amherst.

I imagine Ruggles exerted the greatest influence over this young captain. He was a commanding personality, as has been shown in sketches written by Christo-

pher C. Baldwin, by Emory Washburn and Dwight Foster. It is said that he was an officer of cool bravery, excellent judgment and of much knowledge of warfare. He was a trained lawyer, a frequent opponent of James Otis. He had served as Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in Worcester. When the Revolution came, he was a Royalist, and an interesting account of him will be found in Sabine's "Sketches." A summary of his personality is given by that writer as follows: "He was a good scholar, and possessed powers of mind of a very high order. He was a wit and a misanthrope; a man of rude manners and rude speech. Many anecdotes continue to be related of him in the town of his nativity, which show his shrewdness, his sagacity, his military hardihood and bravery. As a lawyer he was an impressive pleader, and in parliamentary debate, able and ingenious." Christopher C. Baldwin said of him, "Had he been so fortunate as to have embraced the popular sentiments of the time, there is no doubt he would have been ranked among the leading characters of the Revolution."

It was by association with Timothy Ruggles that Nixon gained the education which the limitations of his country environment had denied him.

In the interval of thirteen years before the Revolution, Nixon established and developed his own home on the north side of Nobscot over the line from Framingham in the township of Sudbury. All that is left to mark the place today is a cellar hole and a door step, and the clearing in the woods, the work of his axe and plow. It is back from the traveled road possibly a mile and is remote from any present habitation. It is within the area recently purchased by Mr. Henry Ford. Here John and Thankful had their family of ten children, John, Sarah, Hephzibah, Mary, Joseph, Keziah, Anne, Artemas, Benjamin and Betsey, born within the years 1757 to 1775. Although living in Sudbury he and his wife were members of the Framingham Church and here their children were baptized.

With the approach of the Revolution he organized a large company of minute men from Sudbury, of which he was captain, and he led this company to Concord early on the 19th of April, 1775. In the accounts of that day most of the attention has been given to what took place at the North bridge, and but little attention given to the South bridge. This was in the line of approach from Sudbury, and Nixon's minute men arrived there early and found the bridge held by the British. His men were eager to attack but orders had been received from Colonel Barrett to halt and in no case to begin the fight. Old Deacon Haynes, nearly eighty years old, said to his captain, "If you don't go and drive them British from that bridge, I shall call you a coward," but Nixon replied, "I should rather be called a coward by you, than called to account by superior officers for disobedience of orders. We are ordered not to fire until we are fired upon." In his reference to this incident Bancroft refers to the Sudbury captain "as the brave Nixon." His control over his impatient men, with the taunt of cowardice thrown in his face, is evidence of a superior order of bravery. In the pursuit of the British to Cambridge the Sudbury men were foremost and the old deacon was among the killed.

The Middlesex County minute men arriving in Cambridge remained there under arms almost to a man and on the 24th of April commissions were issued and enlistments sought for definite service. John Nixon was commissioned Colonel by Massachusetts, April 24, and a regiment was organized under his command. His brother Thomas was his lieutenant-colonel, John Buttrick of Concord his major, and among his captains were Micajah Gleason and Thomas Drury of Framingham, Joseph Butler and Abishai Brown of Concord, William Smith of Lincoln and David Moore of Sudbury. Further commissions came from the Provincial Congress, June 3 and 4, and the regiment was duly mustered into service June 5.

Nixon's regiment was placed under command of General Artemas Ward, and in May took part in a foray to Noodles Island and Hog Island, the purpose of which was to seize and bring back the stock of cattle there pastured.

In June came the preparations to fortify the hill in Charlestown. Nixon in the meantime had become active in the military organization. Justin Winsor states in his *Memorial History of Boston*, "A good deal of the military spirit of the camp was derived from a veteran of the French and Indian Wars, John Nixon." He was field officer on June 10 and on June 17, and when the alarm came from Bunkers Hill was among the first to start for the battlefield, and arrived with a portion of his command in time to take position at or near the rail fence. Temple says that Colonels Brewer and Nixon were among the first to arrive. Frothingham in his *Siege of Boston* says that the original detachment under Colonel Prescott was at the redoubt and breastwork, and was joined, just previous to the action, by portions of Massachusetts regiments under Colonels Brewer, Nixon, Woodbridge, Little, and Major Moore, and one company of artillery, Callender's. Colonel Swett states "that previous to the action Colonels Brewer, Nixon, Woodbridge, and Major Moore brought on their troops, each about three hundred men." Judge Needham Maynard, who was with General Warren as an aide, says that Nixon was stationed at the hay breastwork below the gap. Temple says that Nixon's men had thirteen rounds of ammunition. As the British came on for the first attack, Prescott moved among his men cautioning them to hold their fire, to wait for his order, and then to "fire low," to "aim at their waistbands," and to "pick off the commanders." After the repulse, the British reformed and advanced for the second attack. In this advance at least one shot was fired as if a similar command had been given by a British officer, and Colonel Nixon had been selected as the mark.

He fell "severely wounded," as Temple puts it, "and had to be carried off the field." Lossing states that he received a wound from which he never recovered. Colonel Swett says that he was badly wounded, and he adds the interesting information that his life was saved by a dollar in his pocket. Usually it is a Bible over the heart which intercepts or deflects the deadly bullet, but here the coins in his trousers pocket are his protection.

About a fortnight later George Washington arrived at Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. He assumed command July 3, 1775, and at once undertook to establish military order. One of his first appointments was a General Court Martial organized July 12, with Col. John Nixon, president. The first defendant was Col. James Scammons of the regiment from Maine, who was charged with "disobedience of orders and backwardness in the execution of his duty." He had halted on the way, and had failed to reach the real hill. William Tudor, a lawyer, who had been associated with John Adams, was Judge Advocate. The Court held sessions July 13, 14 and 15, and made a finding of "not guilty" on the 17th. The proceedings are reported in the *New England Chronicle or Essex Gazette* of February 29, 1776, and I have here a photostat copy from an original in the library of this Society. This is the first important court martial of the Revolution, and it is interesting to note the orderly procedure of organization, arraignment, pleading, presentation of testimony, argument, consideration and judgment, and the president of the court a Middlesex farmer!

During the siege of Boston, Nixon's regiment was stationed at Winter Hill, Somerville, in General John Sullivan's brigade, which was a part of the left wing under Major General Nathaniel Greene. Other colonels in his brigade were John Stark and Enoch Poor, both veterans with service similar to his own in the earlier campaigns.

After the evacuation of Boston came the moving of troops to the New York area, beginning the very next day when General Heath was ordered to march. The next reference I have found to Nixon is on June 15, 1776, when he was President of a Court Martial, probably in New York. On July 1, 1776, he was ordered "to proceed as soon as possible in the morning to Governor's Island in New York harbor to take command there." This was an important post at the very front of Manhattan Island commanding the shore of Brooklyn, and had been strongly fortified. Nixon, however, asked for another regiment and received the following reply from Lord Sterling, in behalf of Washington, stating that he must make the best defence he can with the force already under his command:

D^rSIR

I have taken the Earliest opportunity of Communicating your letter of this day with the papers enclosed to the General, he has ordered me to tell you, that while one Regiment only was on Gov^rs Island, he never had an application of the like kind, that since he has reinforced it with another Regiment, several of these applications have been made, that in our present Scituation, Governors Island is more strong and better guarded than any other post of the Army, that when the Expected reinforcements arrive, your post will have a proportionate Reinforcement and that in the mean time it is your duty to make the best defence you can with the forces under your Command, ever relying that the General will pay the highest attention to every post, and particularly to so important a One as that which is under your immediate Command. I have the honor to be &c

STERLING

Col. Nixon

B. G.

While assigned to this duty Nixon was commissioned a Brigadier General, August 9, 1776. His brigade was organized with the following colonels: James Mitchell Varnum, Moses Little, Daniel Hitchcock, Thomas Nixon, and Jacob Bailey, a list of distinguished soldiers; Varnum a graduate of Brown, a leader of the bar in Rhode Island, later a Brigadier

General; Hitchcock, a graduate of Yale College, lawyer from Providence, who commanded these regiments of Nixon's brigade at Princeton where he received thanks from Washington for his gallant service; Little from Newbury, Mass., honored by the Commonwealth; Bailey also from Newbury, who later served the northern army as Commissary General; and Thomas Nixon who served with honor throughout the War.

The strong defence planned for Governor's Island was in keeping with other preparations by Washington to guard New York against direct attack from sea. The British success came through an indirect attack culminating in the Battle of Long Island, August 26 and 27. This defeat was a bitter blow to Washington. He wrote to Congress, "Our situation is truly distressing. The check our detachment sustained—has despirited too great a proportion of our troops, and filled their minds with apprehension and despair. The militia instead of calling forth their utmost efforts to a brave and manly opposition in order to repair our losses are discouraged, intractable, and impatient to return. Great numbers of them have gone off, in some instances almost by whole regiments, by half ones and by companies at a time." Three new divisions were organized September 1 and Nixon's brigade was placed in the Central Division under Generals Spencer and Greene, the former to command until the latter recovered from illness. The American Army withdrew to a new line of defence across Manhattan Island at Harlem Heights. Nixon was active in this retreat. There are these entries in the orderly books in the Old Records Department of the Adjutant General's Office: September 16, "General Nixon's brigade is to retire to their quarters and refresh themselves, but to hold themselves in readiness to turn out at a moment's warning." September 29. "General Nixon with his brigade is to remove over to the Jersey and will receive orders from General Greene with

prospect to his incamping, and such men of his brigade as are now on duty must be relieved."

On October 15, Nixon was ordered to send a regiment to relieve the guard at Throg's (also called Frog's) Neck. It was here that General Howe made a landing October 12, but after waiting five days, discouraged by the strong defence, abandoned the attempt to advance north from this point.

Washington at this time had withdrawn from Harlem Heights up the Hudson River and had thrown up retrenchments from Fordham Heights to White Plains. Howe made a second landing and advanced against the American line at White Plains. A battle followed October 28 which Howe hoped would be "the decisive battle of the War." The account given by General Cullum in Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History* recalls Bunker Hill. "As the main British body . . . clambered up the steep declivity it was met by a withering fire from the infantry and artillery from which it recoiled and sought shelter. A second assault up the slope met with an equally determined resistance and for some time the enemy was held in check. . . . Two regiments that had forded the Bronx a quarter of a mile below now appeared on the Americans' right and drove the militia from their post. This break compelled McDougall exposed by a heavy fire in front and flank to retreat across the Bronx to White Plains, though with his six hundred Continentals he maintained an obstinate conflict for an hour, and carried off all his wounded and artillery. The American loss was thirty prisoners, and one hundred and thirty killed and wounded." One of the killed was Captain Micajah Gleason of Thomas Nixon's regiment, a Framingham tavern keeper who had been with the Nixon brothers in the French and Indian War and from the Concord fight.¹

¹In Temple's *History of Framingham*, p. 302, it is stated: "Captain Micajah Gleason and his company of Colonel T. Nixon's regiment were in this battle at White Plains, and Captain Gleason was killed."

On the other hand the following paragraph in the "Memoirs of Major General Heath"

In December 1776, Washington moved from the New York area into New Jersey. Fort Washington had fallen and the British had entire possession of Manhattan Island and of the eastern shore of the Hudson. Changes had come in Nixon's brigade. Varnum had been promoted, and Nixon himself was transferred in November to the division of General Charles Lee. I have not found the reason nor the authority for this assignment with Lee.

Although his old regiments were in the battles of Trenton and Princeton they were under the command of Colonel Hitchcock as the senior officer.

In July 1777, the record shows that General Nixon was at Peekskill and that his brigade was composed of the regiments of Col. John Greaton, Col. Rufus Putnam, Col. Ichabod Alden and Col. Thomas Nixon. Here as in the previous formation he had with him officers of superior ability.

Major General Israel Putnam in command of the division had learned of the movements of Burgoyne from the north, and ordered Nixon's brigade to prepare for immediate advance to Albany to strengthen the northern army. He communicated with Washington, who replied July 1,

At sunset this evening I received your letter of the 30th ultimo. The intelligence contained in the copies of the letters you transmitted is truly important, and it appears almost certain to me that General Howe and Gen. Burgoyne design if possible to unite their attacks and form a junction of their two armies. I approve much of your conduct in ordering Nixon's brigade to be in readiness and I desire it may be

published in 1798, seems to be contemporary evidence that Captain Gleason was killed September 16 at Harlem Heights:

"Sept. 16th, 1776.—A little before noon, a smart skirmish happened on the heights west of Harlem Plain, and south of Morris's house, between a party of Hessian Yagers, British Light-Infantry and Highlanders, and the American riflemen and some other troops, which ended in favour of the latter. The troops fought well, on both sides, and gave great proof of their marksmanship. The Americans had several officers killed and wounded; among the former Lieut. Col. Knoulton, of the Connecticut line, and Capt. Gleason, of Nixon's Massachusetts regiment, two excellent officers; and Maj. Beech, of one of the southern regiments, a brave officer, was among the latter. This skirmish might have brought on a general action; for both armies were then within supporting distance of the troops which were engaged."

embarked immediately to go to Albany as soon as General Varnum's and General Parsons' brigades are so near Peekskill, that they can arrive to supply their place, before any troops can come up the river and effect a landing, or as soon as a number of militia equal to them can be got in. They will proceed up the river with the utmost dispatch, on either of these events happening.

Washington also wrote to the President of Congress, July 2, expressing his fear that Burgoyne and Howe were planning "a junction of their two armies by way of the Lakes and the North River. If they have their whole Canada force on the former this is certainly their object," and he adds, "On receiving these accounts I wrote immediately to Gen. Putnam to embark Nixon's brigade for reinforcing the northern army; to wait, however, the arrival or near approach of Gen. Parsons' and Gen. Varnum's brigades for this place, who march this morning, or the coming in of an equal number of militia to supply their place before they sail."

General Nixon's advance was by boat up the Hudson. Washington was concerned in his progress, as he again wrote to Congress July 10, "I am told by a gentleman, who came to Camp yesterday that Nixon's brigade would certainly arrive at Albany on Tuesday morning, as he saw the vessels in which it was embarked, standing up the evening before with a fair wind."

Burgoyne's advance however had been more rapid than Washington or even General Schuyler, who was then in command of the northern army, had anticipated. Ticonderoga had fallen on July 5, but General St. Clair had escaped with his men, so that the loss did not prove overwhelming. St. Clair said at this time that he had "lost a post, but saved a province." When the first news reached Washington, July 12, he wrote still further to the President of Congress.

When I had the honor of addressing you last, I hoped the intelligence received respecting our affairs in the northern department was not true, or at least that they were not so

unfavorable as they were then represented. But the enclosed copy of a letter from General Schuyler, which came to hand yesterday evening, confirms it, most unhappily for us, in its fullest latitude. This event, the evacuation of our posts on the Lake, among the most unfortunate that could have befallen us, is rendered more interesting by the manner in which it took place. I have no further information upon the subject, than what the copy contains, and shall be happy to hear by my next advices, that the main body of the army, of whose situation General Schuyler knew nothing with certainty, have not become prisoners; for I fear, from the disposition they discovered on this distressing occasion, they would have surrendered to the enemy, in case they fell in with them, though inferior in number.

In respect to General Schuyler's demands, it is not in my power to comply with the whole of them. Not a single tent can be furnished, the kettles will be, and are ordered on; and an express is going to Springfield for all the musket-cartridges, sixty barrels of powder, and a proportionable quantity of lead and cartridge-paper for his use. Ten pieces of artillery, with harness, are also ordered, with proper officers from Peekskill. I have written to him to procure horses and drivers himself, as they are to be obtained with much more ease where he is than here; nor can he be supplied with the heavy cannon, which he requests, supposing them necessary, not having one to spare from a more important use, the defence of the Highlands. Colonel Putnam, I imagine, will be with him before this, as his regiment is part of Nixon's brigade, who will answer every purpose he can possibly have for an engineer at this crisis. A supply of intrenching tools was sent to him four or five days ago, in consequence of an application then made.

This reference is to Col. Rufus Putnam of Rutland, Worcester County. Washington clearly remembered his services at Dorchester Heights and at Fort Washington.

General Schuyler's distress is plainly shown in the letter of Washington which I have just read. He wanted men and supplies, and he was impatient at any delay. In Lossing's *Life of Schuyler* it is stated that "he called earnestly upon General Nixon to push on by forced marches from Albany with the troops he brought up from Peekskill." "The least delay", he said, "in marching up your brigade will certainly be

attended with most fatal consequences. Let me, therefore entreat you to march night and day to come up with me." He even wrote to Washington, "From the slowness with which he moved, I was led to conclude that he was at the head of a formidable body, but to my great mortification I find the whole to consist of five hundred and seventy-five, rank and file fit for duty, and eleven sick, several of them are negroes and many of them young, small and feeble boys." Lossing then adds, "This force he (Schuyler) immediately ordered to Fort Ann to assist in putting obstacles in the way of Burgoyne's advance." Schuyler's order given when Nixon had arrived was dated July 12, and there could not have been much time lost after the slow moving boats, referred to in Washington's letter of July 10, had landed at Albany. This order to Nixon is as follows:

SIR,

You will immediately march your brigade to Fort Ann. On your arrival there, you will dispatch two scouts, one on the west and the other on the east side of Wood Creek, to discover if the enemy are approaching either by land or water. You will direct the officers commanding the scouts to be as exact as possible in ascertaining the numbers of any of the enemy they may see, and to give you the earliest intelligence of it, that I may be advised thereof by you as soon as possible. Having dispatched the scout, you will proceed to burn the saw-mills which are near Fort Ann, and then fall the trees growing on the banks of Wood Creek into the same, and if such a superior body of the enemy should move towards you, that it is not probable that you can keep your ground, you are then to retire, advising me thereof, that your retreat may be covered. In retreating, you are to break up all the bridges in your rear, that the enemy may be as much obstructed in their march as possible. Let me frequently hear from you, for much depends upon receiving early intelligence.

Axes will be delivered by Captain Wendell, Assistant Deputy Quarter Master General, to your Quarter Master. If you should be obliged to retreat, be sure to bring the axes off with you, for we have none besides what will be delivered to you. Please therefore to impress your officers and men with the great necessity there is to be extremely careful of the axes.

You will find Brigadier General Fellows, with a body of troops, on your march. You are to take him and the troops under his command with you.

A second order followed dated July 16.

SIR,

Both your letters of this day have been delivered me.

I am quite in opinion with you and General Fellows, that destroying the causeway will be a very material obstruction to the enemy's march. I beg therefore that you will do it in the most effectual manner, as I hope that of felling trees across the road is done; but unless both roads are completely stopped, it will be of little avail. You will therefore please, as soon as that which leads by Jones's is done, to go upon that which leads past Huffnagel's, and stop that also.

You will observe by my orders to General Fellows, that he was directed to send parties to the different farm houses, to drive off all the cattle. This you will please to do without exception, leaving only the milch cows with such families as cannot move off.

You will also bring away the scows, and all the iron work from Jones's and Huffnagel's mills, or see they do it themselves, that the enemy may not have the advantage of those mills.

Pray keep out scouts continually, and order them to go as far beyond Fort Ann as possible. When you have compleatly carried into execution what is hereby directed, you will advise me thereof, that I may give directions for your future destination.

Lossing in a following chapter gives Nixon and Fellows credit for thorough execution of these orders. In describing Burgoyne's slow advance from Fort Ann he says the journey was made ten fold more difficult by trees cut down and cast into the navigable waters of Wood Creek, and by the roads being broken, the cattle driven away and the forage destroyed.

Lieutenant Anburey, serving with Burgoyne, to whom I shall refer later, writes from the British Camp at Fort Edward August 6, 1777: "The country between our late encampment at Skenesborough and this place, was a continuation of woods and creeks, interspersed with deep morasses; and to add to these natural impediments, the enemy had very industriously augmented them, by felling immense trees, and various other modes, that it was with the utmost pains and fatigue we could work our way through them."

I have one of the reports sent back from Nixon while on this march to Fort Ann.

Kingsborough 9 Clock 21st July 1777

HON^d SIR

I sent out a Scout Yesterday under the Command of Capt. Lane of my brigade—consisting of 32 Men officers included, from which this Moment returned a Corporal and four Men, who informs me that Sun about two Hours high this Evening they were attacked by a large body of Indians near the House this side of Fort Ann judged to be near 400, who they suppose has cut off Capt. Lane and the Rest of the party. They likewise inform that a Body of Regulars with two field pieces came out from Fort Ann and that an Inhabitant informed them a little before the Attack, that 2000 Indians arrived at the Block House the Evening before. I have a party which I sent out three Days ago that is not returned yet. I am Sir

Your most obed^t hble Serv^t.

JN^o NIXON

The situation continued without material change for several weeks. The encounter with Burgoyne which Schuyler foresaw as likely to come early in July did not develop until September 19. He continued to appeal for troops but Washington had his own problems, not knowing when or where the attack from General Howe might come, and after sending General Benjamin Lincoln and General Benedict Arnold, wrote that he could do no more. Schuyler's enemies were at work with Congress and finally Horatio Gates arrived August 19 to relieve him of the command of the northern army.

Burgoyne's advance however was only checked. But the tide was turning. The American success at Bennington under John Stark brought renewed courage. Gates received much that had been denied Schuyler, and prepared for a battle with Burgoyne at Bemis Heights, a commanding position near Stillwater. In the formation of his line of defence he took personal command of the right wing, of which Nixon's brigade was a part.

These are the brief entries in the "Orderly Book" of Col. Thomas Nixon, which is in the Library of the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

Sept. 9. Headquarters at Stillwater.

Sept. 16. Gen. Burgoyne's army is marching this way. Every man on this ground is to have two days of provisions cooked this morning.

Sept. 18. The commissary is to deliver half a gill of rum to every man in camp tomorrow morning.

Sept. 19. This day a battle was fought from three o'clock till a quarter after six in the evening."

Bancroft gives this description of the battle:

At three the battle became general and it raged till after sundown. The battle was marked by the obstinate courage of the Americans, but by no manoeuvre; man fought against man, regiment against regiment. An American party would capture a cannon and drive off the British; the British would rally and recover it with the bayonet, but only to fall back before the deadly fire from the wood. Before the sun went down Burgoyne was in danger of a rout, the troops about wavered—but reinforcements arrived and charged the Americans on their right flank. Evening was at hand, and those of the Americans who had been engaged for more than three hours had nearly exhausted their ammunitions and they withdrew within their lines, taking with them their wounded and a hundred captives.

Very interesting information relating to Burgoyne's entire expedition is found in the letters of Thomas Anburey, a lieutenant in the army of General Burgoyne, recently published by Houghton & Mifflin Company under the title "Travels Through the Interior Parts of America." He refers to this engagement at Stillwater as "a severe fought battle" and although he claims victory for the British, he writes October 6,

We have gained little more by our victory than honor, the Americans working with incessant labor to strengthen their left; their right is already unattackable. Instead of a disheartened and flying enemy, we have to encounter a numerous, and, as we lately experienced, a resolute one, equally disposed to maintain their ground as ourselves, and commanded by Generals whose activity leave no advantages unimproved.

Although this battle was a draw, Burgoyne's invasion was stopped and plans were made for the second battle at Bemis Heights which followed October 7, to which there is this reference in Colonel Nixon's

Orderly Book: "This day a battle was fought on Bemis Heights and the enemy retreated; it began about 4 o'clock."

Encouraged by Burgoyne's retreat Gates on the 11th of October ordered his main body, led by Nixon's and Glover's brigades and by Morgan's sharpshooters as advance guard, to cross the Fishkill toward Saratoga. This advance was in a fog, and Nixon had proceeded as far as Fort Hardy capturing a picket of sixty men, when the fog lifted and he was confronted by Burgoyne's main army prepared to receive the American forces, having learned of Gates' plans. The advance guard retreated under fire, and Nixon himself barely escaped a cannon ball which passed so closely to his head as to impair permanently his sight and hearing.

An interesting account of this incident is found in Roads "History and Traditions of Marblehead," Page 182, taken from a report by General Glover, March 18, 1785:

On the following evening the British army retreated to Saratoga; but owing to the badness of the roads and the heavy rain which prevailed, did not arrive there until the morning of the 10th. On the morning of the 11th, General Gates, under the impression that the main body of Burgoyne's army had retreated to Fort Edward, commenced an attack upon the camp at Saratoga. This was a great mistake and, but for a fortunate discovery by General Glover, would have proved disastrous to the Americans. "General Nixon's, being the oldest brigade crossed the Saratoga Creek first. Unknown to the Americans, Burgoyne had formed a line under the cover of the woods, to support a post of artillery where the others meant to make their attack. General Glover was on the point of following Nixon. Just as he entered the water, he saw a British soldier making across, whom he called and examined. The soldier claimed to be a deserter, and said that he was going to the Americans. Glover asked him about Burgoyne's Army. The soldier answered, 'It is encamped the same as days past.' Glover told him, 'If you are found attempting to deceive me, you shall be hung in half an hour; but if you speak nothing but the truth, you shall be protected and meet with good usage.' He then asked him, 'Have not numbers been sent off to Fort Edward?' The deserter replied, 'A small detachment was sent

off a day or two ago, but are returned on finding the passes occupied by the Americans, and the whole army is now in camp,' Glover, though the junior officer to Nixon, sent off immediately to him, to desist and recross the creek; and at the same time despatched his aid-de-camp, with the deserter behind him on horseback to General Gates; who having examined the soldier, hurried away the aid-de-camp, the adjutant-general and others to countermand the former orders and prevent the attack. General Nixon, upon receiving Glover's message, retreated; but before he had recrossed, the fog cleared off, and the rear of his brigade was galled by the enemy's cannon, which killed several of his men . . . Glover's message was received by Nixon in the critical moment; a quarter of an hour later would probably have proved fatal to the whole brigade, and given a turn to affairs in favor of the royal army.

Burgoyne however was now exposed to the fire of the American forces which almost surrounded him, and on the 14th of October sent over a flag of truce, and finally surrendered his army October 17, 1777.

After Burgoyne's surrender Nixon's brigade was ordered to Albany. The Diary of William McKendry, published by the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1886, contains these entries.

October 30, 1777 Albany Committee sent to Provide Barrack for Gen^l Nixon's Brigade.

Ditto 31st. The Brigade moved into the Town and Billed in the houses.

The surrender of Burgoyne's soldiers brought the problem of what to do with them, and General Brickett's brigade was detailed to take them from Saratoga to Cambridge. General Nixon and General Glover accompanied Brickett.

These letters of Anburey contain much information of this march. For example, he writes from Cambridge November 25, 1777:

On our march to this place, we were fully convinced what powerful levies the New England States are capable of furnishing; for exclusive of those that had joined Gates, and were marched to the southward, every town we passed through was raising two or three companies, to join General Washington's army.

The wants and miseries of the inhabitants in general are inconceivable, even to the conveniences of life, yet you would be surprized with what chearfulness they bend to them, to obtain that idol, Independency. In many poor habitations they have parted with one of their blankets, where they had only two, to supply their soldiers, and although the interior part of these states have not been the seat of war, yet the distresses of the inhabitants are equally as great as if it had.

An earlier extract from these letters contains reference to independence as an "idol."

This return to Massachusetts permitted Nixon to give attention to his home, which must have been in sorrow and distress during his absence. His wife, Thankful, had died and there were little children, the youngest only three years old. And there was another family in distress, the widow and children of Nixon's faithful subordinate, Micajah Gleason. His widow, Hannah, was still conducting his tavern near Saxonville, and with such thrift that she was making money. John and Hannah concluded that their burdens could be carried together to mutual advantage and they were married February 13, 1778. While Nixon was in Massachusetts he was still concerned with matters connected with his brigade. In the archives I have found his receipt for shoes and other necessaries delivered to him at Boston in April for his officers.

In January 1778, while Nixon was with Burgoyne's soldiers an interesting proposition was considered which if carried out would have included Nixon's brigade. I refer to the abortive proposition favored by Congress but disapproved by Washington to send Lafayette at the head of an expedition into Canada. I have found an interesting letter from Col. Moses Hazen referring with keen anticipation to this project.

At Camp 29th: Jan^r. 1778

DEAR SIR

Congress have at last determined on an expedition to Canada, the marquis LaFiatte a french Nobel man, and one of the first rank is to command. Major Gen^l Conway, 2nd Starks 3d your Humb^{le} Servant Quarter master Gen^l. for the expedition,

Nixon's Brigade Vanschauks Livingston Warner's and the Congress's own Reg^t will move from this place on or about the 12th Feb^y so as to be at onion River the place appointed for Gen^l Rendervous on the 20th where you are to meet us without fail, by such a Rout as you yourself think fit with all the men and volunteers which you have or can possibly collect for the present purpose. Major . . . will I suppose join you in the rout you take.

I have sent you by Lieut. Jones Parker the bearer of this letter five Thousand dollars in Paper and Two hundred in Specie which with much difficulty I have Borrowed, more will be sent you by Cap^t Green, now on his way from Congress to this place, Now is the time to exert yourself in your Country's Service which I am convinced you will not neglect, I am

Sir

Your very Hum^{le} Serv^t

MOZES HAZEN

P. S. If your Intelligence is good we shall have little to do. I wish you would send into Canada in order to obtain further Information, and to meet us at onion River possibly at the time appointed viz. on the 20th Feb^y from your experience you will see the necessity of such a measure

M. H.

Col. Bedle

In the memorandum prepared by Congress for Lafayette's instruction special emphasis is placed upon the familiarity of the officers of Nixon's Brigade with the territory to be invaded by this expedition by reason of their former service. This was proposed without Washington's co-operation and intended possibly to bring about a misunderstanding between him and Lafayette. While this matter was under discussion we read that Lafayette graciously proposed a toast to the Commander-in-Chief of the American forces thereby pledging his allegiance, and he compelled the officers with him, some of whom were Washington's critics, to join him.

According to Temple, Nixon's furlough at this time was extended to June. His brigade was then in the Highlands in the division commanded by Major-General William McDougall.

While Washington was at Valley Forge in the early

spring he learned that a part of the British troops had gone from New York, and he wrote McDougall, March 31, 1778, to consider a possible attack upon this city "with Parson's brigade, Nixon's and the regiments of Van Schaick, Hazen and Livingston aided by the militia from New York and Connecticut," McDougall replied April 13 that the enterprise was not practicable.

Through July and August there are records showing Nixon's presence at White Plains. His colonels at that time were Greaton, Putnam and Nixon. A former colonel, Alden, had gone with Sullivan's expedition against the Indians, and he had fallen in battle at Cherry Valley. I have a muster roll dated July 3, 1778 at "Chaterdons Hill" which overlooks the scene of the battle of White Plains.

I have also found the following report made directly to Washington in July 1778, describing movements of troops in the neighborhood of White Plains:

Camp White Plains July 1778

SIR:

On the 22^d Inst^t I marched the Party under my Command consisting of about 2000 Foot & 200 Cavalry in the following Order—

I detached Gen^l Parsons with Col^o. Wylly's, Meiggs, Hazens & Grahams Reg^{ts} together with One half the Cavalry under the Command of Lt. Col^o. Blagdon, to proceed on the East Side the Brunks down to East & West Chester, with Orders to make the best Disposition of his party, which would most effectually Answer to the driving in to our Camp all the Stock from that Quarter, while I marched with Col^o. Greatons, Putnam & Nixons Reg^{ts} down on the West Side the Brunks to Mile Square, together with the remainder of the Cavalry under the Command of Col^o. Shelden, and One piece of Artillery. And when Arrived I made a Disposition of the Troops under my immediate Command as follows—Ordered Col^o. Greaton with his Reg^t & a party of Cavalry to Occupy the Road leading from Kings Bridge to Phillips and to Send off Partys on the Road leading from thence to Dobb's Ferry and Saw Mill River Bridge, in order to collect all the Stock on them Roads.—Col^o. Putnam with his Reg^t & a party of Cavalry Occupied the Road leading from Kings Bridge to Mile Square & to Send a party on the Road leading to this place on the West Side the

Brunks.—I remained on Vollentines Hill with Col^o. Nixons Reg^t, the remainder of the Cavalry & the Artillery after Detaching a party from that Reg^t on the middle Road to collect the Stock.—Remained on the Ground till about Sun rise at which time, I ordered the several Reg^{ts} to take the same Rout^s on which they had detached their respective partys, in order to collect such Stock as might escape them.

As to the particulars of Gen^l Parsons progress, I shall refer your Excellency to his Return to me, which I have enclosed.

Seven Deserters from the Queens Rangers with their Arms and Accoutrements, joined me in the course of the Night, which I sent to Head Quarters the 23^d Inst^t.—

I send You by the Bearer, John Johnston, James Pell, David Bonnet & Ned Pell a Negro, mentioned in Gen^l Parsons's Return.

Sir I am with great Esteem
Your Excellency's most Obed^t Humb Serv^t
J^N^o. NIXON B. G.

His Excellency Gen^l Washington.

In September 1778 came the order for a Court Martial, to hear the charges of "neglect of duty" against Philip Schuyler which Schuyler himself demanded should be heard. This to me seems the most important Court Martial of the Revolution, because of the personality of the defendant, the crisis in our affairs which it embraced, the loss of Ticonderoga and the oncoming of Burgoyne and the injustice which had been done by Congress.

Washington selected thirteen distinguished officers to sit on this Court. The names of most of them are commonplace in our history. Benjamin Lincoln, George Clinton, Anthony Wayne, John Peter Gabriel Muhlenburg, John Greaton, Rufus Putnam, William Grayson and Return Jonathan Meigs are among them. And John Nixon was the senior brigadier, next in order to Major-General Lincoln, President.

The details of the trial are given in full in the Proceedings of the New York Historical Society. The finding was "Not Guilty" and acquittal "with the highest honor" and was unanimous.

Nixon at this time was a member of the Council of War called by Washington to decide as to the disposition of the Army during the coming winter, an important question in view of the experience at Valley Forge in 1777-8. Questions were put to the members of this Council, and I have here Nixon's answers addressed to His Excellency General Washington under date of October 19, 1778, in substance advising a division into two camps, one in the mountains, and the other at Danbury.

Upon mature Deliberation of his Excellency's Questions Laid before the council of war, relative to the Disposition of his Army, this winter, I would beg leave to Suggest my Thought, in the following Manner with my reasons for the Same,—as to y^e whole of y^e army being in a Compact Body—these are some Difficulties which operate against it—which (in my opinion) Counter ballence y^e advantages resulting therefrom—such as y^e Difficulties of Supplying the Soldiers with Necessarys conducive to their Health & Constitution, as also in subjecting them to Dangers Sh^d y^e Enemy make an Excursion from y^e Sound to get in our Rear, likewise in procuring sufficiency of Forrage for those Cattle & Horses which would be necessary to keep in Camp to perform the necessary Duty thereof. To divide y^e army exclusive of y^e necessary Posts In y^e Jerseys & West Point—into two grand divisions appears most elegeble to me,—one in y^e Gorge of the Mountains & y^e other at Danbury. Viz about 5 or 6 Brig^{ds} at Danbury & y^e others between y^e Mountains,—Sh^d y^e Enemy salley out of N York and attempt to come up y^e North River, the Troops Stationed at Danbury might be a timely Succour to those at y^e Mountains, or Should they land a Body of Troops at y^e Sound to Penetrate thro y^e Country to get in y^e Rear of West Point and y^e army posted near there, those Troops at Danbury would be ready to annoy them till they could be succoured from y^e other Division—also they might be more commodiously supplied with comfortable necessarys during the winter Sh^d they remain undisturbed, another Reason is—Sh^d y^e Enemy unexpectedly attempt to Capture Count Destang's Fleet—attack Boston & c those Troops at Danbury would be much nearer to march to their assistance.

To build Hutts compact for y^e conveniences of the army whether they Sh^d be seperated or formed into One Body appears to be necessary—for the Defence—good Government &

Regulation of the Troops, should the Enemy remain in their present situation.

Sir

I have the hon^r to be with profound respect
you Excellencys
most obed^t & very humbl Serv^t
JN^o NIXON B G

Fredericksburg 19th: Octo^r 1778

N. B.

I Beg Leave to Suggest to your Excellency the Expediency posting the Troops, belonging to Massachusetts Bay as near each other as y^e service will admit, for y^e Conveniency of their equally receiveing the Benefit of those Necessarys which may be sent from Time to Time from S^d State.
His Excellency Gen^l Washington.

Soon after submitting this report Nixon requests a furlough in this quaint letter of October 28, 1778.

MOST RESPECTFUL SIR,

The circumstances of my family are such as require my immediate attention, which lays me under the disagreeable necessity of soliciting a furlough for a reasonable time.

It is with great reluctance I trouble Your Excellency at this time, and was not the situation of my numerous family very singular, I should not have done it. Col. Greaton who is an able good officer would command the Brigade in my absence.

I shall therefore cheerfully submit my request to the candor & benevolence of him whose tender feelings of humanity will ever prompt to every possible indulgence not inconsistent with the public interest, and the dignity of his character.

I have the honor to be,

Yr Excellency's most faithful
Serv^t

JNO. NIXON B. G.

Camp New Milford
2nd Oct. 1778

This was granted, and Nixon was able to give assistance to his new wife to meet the hardships of winter, probably bringing together into one camp the children of the two families.

Before going on this furlough he writes a letter in behalf of Captain Goodale of Rufus Putnam's regiment held a prisoner of war, for whom an exchange was desired.

Camp Woodbury 1st Nov. 1778

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,

Permit me to Solicit your Influence in y^e Exchange of Cap^t Goodale a worthy officer in my Brig^{de} belonging to Col. Putnam's Reg^t, who was taken Prisoner near mile Square & is now on Long Island. He Distinguished himself as a Partizan y^e Last Campaign, thro his activity, Good Conduct & Intripidity, he captured with his parties at Different times upwards of 100 of L^t Gen^l Burgoynes army, he has wrote to his Col^o for some Clothes & mony, Adj^t Wotter is Dispatched for that purpose, if agreeable to your Excellency. As Cap^t Goodale has bin a very useful officer, his Exchange would be Greatfully Received by your Excellencys

Most obed^t & very Humble Serv^tJN^o NIXON B. G.

He was recalled February 26, 1779. Here is the order. "You will be pleased as soon after the receipt of this as you possibly can to repair to your command in the army. General Patterson has obtained leave of absence which makes your presence necessary."

At this time Nixon made an appeal to Washington for special discount in the purchase of clothing by his officers, and his letter is evidence of this very common hardship of the revolutionary service.

Colla Bargh near Croton River May 3^d 1779

SIR

It has been represented to me by the Commanding Officers of the 4th and 5th Massachusetts Battallions, that the Officers of those Regiments have had no Opportunity to furnish themselves with Cloathing, at a price below the usual Rates, in any of the Continental Stores, as has been allowed by a Resolution of Congress; whilst many Regiments in different parts of the Army, has been Amply Supplied.

I could wish therefore that the Officers of those two Regiments, (Namely Putnam's and Nixons) if your Excellency should think fit, might have an Opportunity of furnishing themselves with Cloathing in the publick Stores to a reasonable amount, so as to put them upon an Equal footing with the rest of the Army in General. Especially as they are very destitute in some particular Articles.

I have the Honour to be with the highest respect

Sir

Your Excellencies most Obedient

Humble Servant

JN^o NIXON B. G.

His Excellency General Washington

The spring of 1779 was a period of watchful waiting in the New York area. Manhattan remained in the possession of the British, and the Americans occupied various posts along and near the Hudson, with Washington nearby in personal command. There are references in the Orderly Books to Nixon's presence in the Highlands, at Middlebrook, New Windsor, Continental Village and other points. His brigade was in the division of Major-General Heath. I have found reports made by Nixon to Heath at this time.

Continental Village, July 20th, 1779.

SIR:

I have Intelligence that the Enemy marched about Eight o'clock this morning from their Encampment below Croton, New Bridge down the Road towards Tarrytown—and that all the Shipping below Kings Ferry are on their way down the River.

I removed my Brigade last Night to the village on account of the Rain, having no Tents to Cover them, and shall still remain here (if agreeable to your Honor) till my Teams (which I have sent for) arrive to bring on my Tents etc.

I have Party of Infantry gone down to make further discovery; Immediately upon their return I shall transmit to your Honor whatever Intelligence they may Bring.

I am Sir with due Respect

Your most Obedient Humble Servant

P. S. I Gratefully Acknowledge }
your favour of last Evening and }
thank you for your Kind present }

Major Gen^l Heath

This postscript indicates that they were on terms of friendly association. Another report follows the next day.

Continental Village July 21st 1779

SIR

Lieut. Cloyes (who Commanded the party I sent out yesterday proceeded down to Mathews's house near Colla Bargh, made no discovery of any of the Enemies Troops below Ver Planks Point, excepting those on board the Ships, where he Discovered the boats shifting the Troops from one Vessel to another—He informs me that Twenty three sail of Vessels lay at Anchor yesterday at three o'clock P. M. between Kings

Ferry and Fallers Point. he discovered about fifty tents pitched on Ver Planks Point near Port De La Fayette; the Troops kept close within their works—none to be seen but Sentinels.

Lieut. Cloyes discovered no Troops upon Stony Point.

I shall use my utmost endeavour to collect and send You the Best Intelligence in my power.

I am with due respect

Sir

Your most obedient Humble Servant

JNO NIXON B. G.

Major Gen^l Heath

On June 24 there is a general order in anticipation of an attack which apparently did not come, that the troops lay in a supply of hard bread and salt provisions enough for two days, and that Parsons and Nixon prepare for a junction upon an attack, the warning of which was to be given by Nixon's artillery.

On July 15 an attack was made on Stony Point, below West Point, led by Anthony Wayne, one of the most daring in the Revolution, which gave the Americans possession for a few days of that headland, long enough to destroy the fortifications which the British had occupied. This was the westerly end of Kings Ferry. The easterly end was Verplanks Point and this still remained in possession of the British. Washington requested advice of his Generals as to a further attack so as to take and hold both points. Nixon's reply is as follows:

Continental Village July 27th 1779

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,

My thoughts Respecting the Disposition of our army—the expediency of making an attack upon Stony & Verplanks points, you have in the following.

The Disproportion of the Two armies, as to their Strength—renders the Disposition of our army very Difficult—to act offensively in any Capital Instance except (against the Two points) would be very hazardous, the improbability of success would be so grate that I should rather decline such an attempt, except, some favourable opportunity should present, in which y^e advantage should be evidently in our favour.

Should it be judged inexpedient to act offensively the next object to be considered is the most proper, Distribution of our troops—so as to best secure the property of the Inhabitants who are most exposed to the Depradations of the Enemy, to effect which after leaving one brigade in the Clove, & about three thousand to Garrison west point and its Dependencies. I should think the right wing of our army sh^d be posted at or near the Continental Village, & a Line to be formed to y^e Left so as to extend our Left wing at Least as far as Byfield, to counter act the enemy, Sh^d they make another excursion into Connecticut. from such a Disposition of our army, we might procure an ample supply of forrage for our Teams & Horses—and also Vegetables for our troops—which would contribute much to their Health in this sickly Season of the year, we might Likewise (in a great measure) prevent y^e enemy from forranging &c.

This Disposition appears to me the most eligible if an attack upon their army sho'd be Judged inexpedient.

To attack Verplanks Point, with any Degree of Probable Success, unless by Regular approaches, appears to me impracticable, & in this case, unless some plan could be adopted to prevent Genl. Clintons marching up to their assistance, it would be altogether fruitless. We should be under y^e Disagreeable Necessity of raising the Siege.

The same reason could not operate respecting an attack upon Stony Point, because that post must be carried by storm, & if Successful would be carried before any reinforcements could be sent them, a faint upon Verplanks point at y^e same time, might prevent their sending over any assentance. However considering the great effusion of Blood in taking Stony point, it might more then Countervail, the advantage we should gain thereby. I could not therefore advise to an attack upon either, unless upon both at y^e Same time, upon Verplanks point by Regular approaches—& upon Stony point by assault in y^e Nights a body of troops to be sent Down on y^e East Side y^e River at ye Same time to prevent the enemy from advanceing into the rear of y^e Beseagers to cut of their retreat—whereby their artillery at Least would be grately Indangered—What I have suggested is Humbly Submitted to your Excellencies Superior Wisdom—while I have the Honor to be with the utmost Esteem

Sir

Your Excellencies Most Obediant

Humble Serv^t

JN^o NIXON B G

His Excellency Genaral Washington

In the fall of 1779 Nixon was under the immediate command of Washington at West Point. The situation on the Hudson for another spring remained unchanged. There are references in the Orderly Books of a routine nature showing Nixon's presence at different points. The scene of the war was shifting to the South, although the necessity of keeping troops along the Hudson still continued. Nixon's health was impaired, and thoughts of his home duties must have been frequently in his mind. Finally, in September 1780, he presents his resignation to Washington, sending a copy to his Major-General Robert Howe as follows:

Camp 8th Sept. 1780.

DEAR GENL.

The present state of my health is such that I am constrained by a necessity that by no means corresponds with inclination to beg leave to resign the command I have the honor to hold in the army, and you may be assured Sir, that this application does not arise from any disgust to the service, but originates entirely from my ill state of health, and it gives me a most sensible pain to find myself reduced to so disagreeable a necessity when honor is to be reaped in the field of Danger.

I have the honor to be with the greatest
respect Your honors Most Obed & most
hum Serv^t

JNO NIXON B G

The Hon^{ble} Major Genl Howe.

He received an honorable discharge dated September 12. A receipt is on record for 9 horses, 8 days, and for 1800 lbs. of hay, 4 bushels of oats and 6½ bushels of wheat "for family use," indicating that his wife may have been with him and that comfortable provision with escort was made for their journey homeward.

Within two weeks after his departure, in the very vicinity of his activities, Major André was under arrest and Benedict Arnold's treason was known. Some of the members of the Court Martial which condemned André were Nixon's associates, and junior in rank, and it does not seem improbable that had he remained he would have served on this Court.

Upon his return to Framingham, General Nixon lived for some time at the Gleason tavern, a highly respected citizen. He was an original member of the old Middlesex Lodge of Free Masons organized under charter from Paul Revere. Later, however, he moved to Middlebury, Vermont, where he lived to an old age in the retirement, so far as I can learn, of a farmer's life. The record shows that he was given a pension of \$150 per year for gun shot wound received at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and this was paid to him from the government agency at Burlington. But beyond this fact I have found nothing of his later life, and have not located his place of burial.

Temple states that "By those who remember him General Nixon is described as a man of middle stature, quiet and affable, but firm and decided in his convictions, fond of the society of the young, never happier than when recounting to his grandchildren the stories of his campaigns and the lessons of life taught by his varied experience."

In the preparation of this paper I have received valuable help from Mr. Frank J. Metcalf of the Old Records Division of the Adjutant-General's Office in Washington, and Mr. J. C. Fitzpatrick, Assistant Chief, Division of Manuscripts, Congressional Library, also from Mr. Brigham, Mr. Tuttle and Mr. Edmonds of this Society, which I wish gratefully to acknowledge.

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