

# Quincy History



Quincy, Massachusetts

Quincy Historical Society

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## Diary of a Local Soldier – 1775

By Ruth H. Wainwright

### Introduction

Today is not the first time that young men from our area have left home as part of a military unit that stood ready for any service that their country might ask of them. In those days of travel by foot, they too were a day's journey from home. The story of a soldier's life at that time is therefore of special interest today.

The name of the writer of this diary in the collection of the Quincy Historical Society is unknown. Names of Old Braintree men that he mentions allow us to identify the company to which he belonged.

In Colonial days, most young men belonged to a militia company. Many mentioned in the diary were in Captain Silas Wild's Company that was called on April 19th, 1775 for nine days' service as minutemen.

In May, the Provincial Congress passed a resolution to raise twenty-four regiments to serve around Boston for six months, each general officer being responsible for raising a regiment. Capt. Wild and men from a number of militia companies in this area, enlisted to serve in the regiment of Col. William Heath. They served first in Dorchester and then in Cambridge.

After General George Washington took command on July 3, 1775, the army was organized to first contain the British in Boston, and then to force them out. William Heath, now Brigadier General, served under General Israel Putnam who was in command of the center of the line in Cambridge. His regiment was at Fort #2 on the Charles River below the Harvard area of Cambridge.

The diary is largely the transmission of General Washington's orders.

These are not of great interest, but from the diary, a picture of a soldier's life can be gleaned. The original diary was transcribed and annotated by Dr. James R. Cameron.

### The Diary's Story

In his short tour of duty during forty-two rather inactive days of active duty, the concerns of this South Shore's unnamed soldier differed greatly from those of today's men and women in service. Scud and Patriot missiles, air attacks and modern long distance warfare were far in the future. There were certainly no hourly or even daily progress reports of battle activities to the general public.

Of equal note is the contrast between the well organized, highly trained and well-equipped men (and women) starting active service today, and the men who first manned the battle lines for General Washington. The tremendous accomplishment of Washington and his generals in producing an army from this raw material can be better appreciated from the picture presented by this story.

The author opens his "diary" with the immediate problem at Dorchester of distinguishing General Officers from the regular soldier, all indiscriminately stopped at the outposts and asked for papers by sentries. "Their being something awkward as well as improper in the General Officers being stoped in the outposts and ask'd for papers by the sentries, and obliged often to send for the Officer of the gard, who it sum times happens is as much unacquainted with the persons of the generals as the privets themselves, before they can pass in or out. It is recommended to both officers and men; to make themselves acquainted with the persons of all the officers in general command."

Further, on July 14, 1775 – It was

recommended that the Commander in Chief wear a blue ribbon across his breast; the Major and Brigadier General, a pink ribbon, and the aide de camp a green ribbon. Later, on July 20, noting there were no uniforms, field officers were to have a red or pink cockade in their hats; the captains, yellow or buff; the subalterns, green; sergeants, a red stripe on the right shoulder; "the Corp," green.

"Parole" (officers' password) and "countersigns" of the enlisted men were changed daily. Each morning at 9 a.m., orderly sergeants attended the reading of general orders, which they transmitted to their companies. They were also to see that all barracks were washed by that hour.

A problem noted on July 18: "The general hears with astonishment not only soldiers, but officers ... are continually conversing with the officers and sentinels of the enemy." A court martial followed by punishment of the "utmost severity" was to be the policy. The General alone was to judge the propriety of any intercourse, with no interference.

On July 18, 1775, a maneuver at Nantasket involved four men from each company at Dorchester as oarsmen, and six others to fetch boats. Men included John Mills, David Burrell, Samuel Crain, Robert Milton, John Tower, Ebenezer White, Uriah Thayer, Daniel French and Elijah French, all familiar names in Old Braintree.

Public support was enlisted for the cause by the Continental Congress in a proclamation which a 1991 Congress probably would not consider – but which might still be effective. An unusual "Day of Public Humiliation" was scheduled for Thursday, July 20, to "be observed by the inhabitants of all the English colonies upon this Continent as a Day of Public Humiliation,

fasting and prayer that they may with united hearts and voice Confess their sins before God and Supplicate the Allwise and merciful (disposer) of Events, to Avert the Desselation and Calamities of the Unnateral (unnatural) War."

General orders that day were to be "religiously observed." "It is therefore strictly enjoined on all officers and soldiers (not up on duty) to attend Divine Service at the accustomed Places of worship, as well in the lines as in the Camps and Quarters; and it is expected that all those who go to worship do take their arms ammunition and accuterments; and are prepared for an immediate action, if called upon. "Men were to abstain from all Labour on the sollom day."

Dorchester Camps, July 19, 1775. All men sent to the hospital would require a certificate from the surgeon who treated him, time of his sickness, his disorder and symptoms, and medicine.

Furloughs were discouraged. July 18 - "The General hears with astonishment the very frequent applycation that are made to him as well by officers as Soldiers, for furloughs; brave men who are engaged in the nobel cause of Liberty should never Think of removing from their Camp while the Enemy is in Sight, and anxious to take every advantage any indiscretion on our side may give them."

On July 22, the General divided the army into three "Grand" divisions; and each division into two Brigades, with commanders over each. Two Brigades were to remain at Roxbury, while the other Brigade was stationed on Winter Hill. Another brigade was to be posted upon Prospect Hill. Still other regiments were to be stationed upon Sewell's Point, with companies at Chelsea, Malden and Medford.

A punishment of 39 lashes was meted out for many misdeeds, usually after the culprit was court marshalled.

Dorchester Camps, July 23, Michael Berry of Capt. Parker's Company and Col. Prescott's Regiment was "Tryed by a gen Coartmarshel for refusing his Duty and enlisting in another Company, the Court con-

demns the prisoner and order him to receive 39 lashes, the general orders the sentences to be put in execution at the head of the Regiment the delinquent belongs to". August 18 - John Conner received the same punishment for stealing a cheese. Aug. 21 - Michael Berry received "30 lashes on his naked back" for stealing a hat from Capt. Waterman.

Unsanitary conditions were deplored. In July the General received a report that "the main gard room is kept abominably filthy and dirty." The commanding officer was not to be relieved "until he is assured that the officers and men's apartments are clean and in decent order."

At Dorchester, the focus appears to have been on organization and basic training. At Cambridge, discipline appears to have required much attention. There is a break of two weeks in the entries when the writer was on furlough.

Cambridge Camps, Aug. 1, 1775, Major Tupper, officers and soldiers of his command, were thanked by the General for "their galynte and solder-like behavior in possessing themselves of the enemy's post at the lighthouse and for the number of prisoners they tuck. There, and Dought not, but the Continental Armeiy will be as Famous for their mercy as their valour." This referred to the attack from Squantum and Dorchester upon Boston Lighthouse in which two British were killed and fifty-three taken captive. The prisoners were later escorted to Worcester by some thirty men.

In response to complaints by some soldiers that they have not "received the allowance pay of forty shillings agreeable to the resolution of provincial Congress, a committee was appointed forthwith to apply to the colonels of the several regiments raised by this colony and to the mustermaster and paymaster in the camps at Cambridge and Roxbury, to obtain of them a complete list of the noncommissioned officers and solders in their respective regiments, distinguishing those that have been mustered and paid from those that have not." Officers were ordered to pay attention to this resolution.

There was a concern for private citizens. "Notwithstanding the repeated orders against damageing privet propertes the (General) hears and sees with astonishment Daily outrages ... comitted." All officers were ordered to keep "Street watch". If they found

their men guilty of so "Hainous" a crime as the destruction of private property, they were to be court martialled immediately, "especially those who wantonly destroy the finest corn and potatoes." Aug. 11, complaints were made from East of Watertown that their gardens were robbed, fences pulled down, and fields laid waste with stuff destroyed and burned. Such practices were to be "punished without mercy." Twelve men were placed as sentinels to guard the corn purchased by the commissary and to see that any damage to the corn be answered for.

Aug. 4, 1775, Guards in Cambridge included the familiar names of Eben White, Joseph Porter, Joseph Niles, Elijah French Jr. and Elijah Thayer, while those receiving "Fatigue" or extra duties, sometimes allotted as punishment were Joseph Arnold, Jacob Hunt, Samuel White and Sergeant Jonathan Nash.

Aug. 7 - Capt. Rilton of Col. Parsons Regiment was tried by a general court martial for neglect of duty, found guilty of the "Breach of the 49 articles of the rules and regulations of the Massachusetts army." He was sentenced to receive a severe reprimand from the Chief Commanding Officer of the Regiment.

Arrangements were made for "Sutlers", vendors who sold provisions to the soldiers. "No officer directly or indirectly is to become a setteler in the army." The commanding officer of each regiment was to see that a store of shoes and shorts was laid in for men - as these are at all times necessary. Provision of Indian boots or leg-gins instead of stockings were recommended.

Aug. 15 - The quartermaster was ordered to survey housing arrangements for the troops. Those not staying in houses were to have tents or boards "sufficient for their accommodation. At the same time he is to take care to prevent any unnecessary waste of the latter and to put a stop to the officers building such large houses as som of them are doing (unless they are intended for the accommodation of a number sufficient to fill them or are to be built at their own expense) but no large house to be placed near any of the redoubts or lines."

A strict accounting of ammunition was directed, "The number of cartridges which each man is possessed of ... at evening roll call have them examined as directed in the said order, when if any are wanting and cannot

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be accounted for, the delinquent, over and above the punishment due to his offense is to be charged with the deficiency and so much of his pay stopped accordingly."

Aug. 16, 1775 - Capt. Eleazer Lindsey (of Col. Gerrish's Regt.) was tried by a general court martial "for absenting himself from his post which was attacked and abandoned to the enemy. The court martial are of the opinion that Capt. Lindsey be discharged the service as a person improper to sustain a commission."

Aug. 19, 1775: Col. Samuel Gerish of the Massachusetts forces "tried by a gen court martial of which Brigadier Gen. Green was president, is unanimously found guilty of the Charge exhibited against him that he behaved unworthily an officer; that he is guilty of a Breach of the 49th article of the rules and regulations of the Massachusetts Army." He was sentenced by the Court to be cashiered and rendered incapable of any employment in the American Army.

Aug. 18, 1775: John Conner of Capt. Oliver's Company, was court martialled for stealing a cheese, the property of Richard Cornell, found guilty and sentenced to receive 39 lashes upon his bare back.

Aug. 21, 1775: Private Michael Berry was tried by a general court martial for stealing a hat from Capt. Waterman, found guilty, and sentenced to receive 30 lashes on his naked back - but was pardoned "in consideration of his long confinement."

Headquarters, Aug. 22 - Capt. Perle of Col. Woodbridges Regiment "Tryed by a general Courtmarshal for defrauding his men of their pay." The Captain was acquitted as the charge was found "vexatious and groundless."

The diary closes on Aug. 24 with a long account of the sentence of Ens. Joshua Troston, tried by a court martial for "offering to strike his Col (Col. Seamons)", and for "Disobedience of orders." Found guilty of the Rules and Regulations of the Massachusetts Army, he was "sentenced to be confined to his tent (for three days)."

The forty-two days General Orders preserved by this unnamed South Shore soldier are a small part of the Revolutionary War, which lasted eight years, from 1775 to 1783. It covers only three days less than the 45-day encounter in the Persian Gulf which opened January 16, 1991 at 8 a.m.

even while  
to Montpelier the other & John Doe

Dutch camp 8

Notwithstanding the Orders already  
Given, The General hears with a astonishment  
Not only Soldiers, but Officers are gathered  
& are continually conversing with the Officers  
And Sentinels of the Enemy;  
And officers ~~Some~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~Army~~. Soldiers  
Or any other Person, who is Detected, of  
Holding any Conversation or Enquiry  
Or any Conversation with any of the Officers  
Or Sentinels, of the ~~Enemy~~ advanced  
Troops of the Enemy.  
Will be immediately will be immediately brought  
A General Court Marshal and Punished  
With the utmost severity;  
The General is a Lover to Justice of the  
Propriety of any Interference; and no one shall  
So to presume to interfere;  
And where Adj<sup>t</sup> Brown had his Gun & Baggage  
Stolen a way out of his Office.  
are desired are desired to search the army  
belong to their <sup>respective</sup> Companies and if they find a private  
arm with the booty cut away to let the fact  
Come Down to the Light are desired to acquaint  
Adj<sup>t</sup> Brown

**A page of the diary, actual size. It is 30 pages, leather covers, bound at end.**

with a missile launched from the deck of the USS Wisconsin toward Baghdad, reaching its target with the help of electronic devices. In a little more

than six weeks Liberation Day was declared in Kuwait.

After more than two hundred years wars change but continue.

# In the Name of the Law

It is said that history repeats itself. It seems to have no choice as long as lawlessness persists and steps are needed to control it.

In present-day towns and cities, law enforcement rests essentially in the hands of the police force. These are trained men and women whose full-time duty is to see that the law is observed, to apprehend law-breakers and to bring them to justice. Their numbers and training constitute a force of real authority in the community. In spite of this, situations arise that are beyond the power of the police to control. At such times, people form groups such as neighborhood watches to help the police in protecting their lives and property.

In earlier times there was no police force. Law enforcement was among the duties of the constable. (See QUINCY HISTORY, No. 22, Winter 1989.) He was the presence of authority in the community. In the small towns, the presence of authority was all that was required. There was very little law-breaking. Everyone in town knew everyone else, and a stranger was easily spotted. With assistance as needed, the constable could pretty well keep things under control.

As towns grew in population and more distant areas became populated, the constable's job became more complicated. The presence of authority was stretched very thin. In Quincy the coming of granite workers and others in the 1820s, was a time of change here. Even with more help, some situations were beyond the constable's power to control.

In 1830 there was formed in Quincy "an Association for the detection and prosecuting of Trespas and Theft in Gardens, Fields, Orchards, Woodlands, etc." The notice of the formation of the Association was posted in public places. The portion reproduced here is followed by the act signed by the Governor of the Commonwealth on June 12, 1818, in small print. In Section 1 it states that "if any person shall enter upon any grass land, orchard or garden, without permission of the owner thereof, with intent to cut, destroy, take or carry away, any grass, hay, fruit or vegetables, with intent to injure or defraud such owner..." shall pay a

**An Association has been formed in the Town of Quincy for mutual protection against and to prevent *Trespasses in Gardens, Fields, Orchards, Woodlands, &c.***

**At a meeting of said Association held at the Town Hall, in Quincy, on Wednesday, the twelfth day of May, A. D. 1830---Voted, That an Act in addition to the Act for the more effectually preventing Trespasses in divers cases, passed June 12th, A. D. 1818, be printed and posted up in the several districts in this Town, and that Committees of vigilance be appointed to aid in detecting and bringing to punishment all future offenders against the Laws made for the protection of *Gardens, Fields, Orchards and Woodlands*, belonging to members of this Association.**

**By Order of the Society,**

**THOMAS GREENLEAF, *President.***

**WILLIAM SEAVER, *Secretary.***  
**QUINCY, May 12th, 1830.**

fine for each offense of not less than two dollars, nor more than ten dollars. Section 2 adds "...or shrub, cultivated thereon for ornament or use...", and increases the fine to not less than five dollars, nor more than fifty dollars. Section 3 adds "...break, bruise, cut, mutilate, injure or destroy any fruit tree, tree for ornament or shade...", and increases the fine to not less than ten dollars, nor more than one hundred dollars. Section 4 states that if an offense is committed on the Lord's Day or in the night time, the fines shall be doubled.

The size of the fines for the year of 1818 would indicate that the situation had become truly serious.

The story of the 1830 association is not known. Either it failed in its purpose, or it eliminated the cause for its existence. In any case, the Quincy Historical Society has the documents relating to the formation of a new association to take up the work of the old.

On October 1, 1838 "A meeting of Citizens was held at the Center School

house for the purpose of forming an association for the detection and prosecution... Voted to organize under Rules and Regulations of the society formed in 1830 for the same purpose." In the records are sheets on which were collected the signatures of subscribers. There are two hundred and fifty-one names. It is truly a who's who of the town with all the Quincy families from Adams to White represented. It is probably very close to a list of active Town Meeting members. There are Popes and Rawsons from North Quincy, shipbuilders from Quincy Point, and Nightingales from South and West Quincy.

Most significant is the fact that the Association was organized by leaders in the town. It was not a group taking matters into their own hands. It was the citizens of Quincy organizing to meet a town problem in accordance with and for implementation of laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; an example of resident involvement at its best.