

**Military Journal, During the American Revolutionary War describing the Events and  
Transactions of the Period with Numerous Historical Facts and Anecdotes.**

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**MILITARY JOURNAL - 1775-1776.**

*January* [1775]. - AT the precise period when my medical studies and education are completed, under the patronage of Dr. Abner Hersey of Barnstable, and I am contemplating the commencement of a new career in life, I find our country about to be involved in all the horrors of a civil war.

A series of arbitrary and oppressive measures, on the part of the mother-country, has long been advancing to that awful crisis, when an appeal to the power of the sword becomes inevitable. The event of this mighty struggle is to decide an affair of infinite magnitude, not merely as it respects the present generation, but as it will affect the welfare and happiness of unborn millions. The great fundamental principle, in the present controversy, is the right which is claimed by the Parliament of Great Britain, to exercise dominion, as the only supreme and uncontrollable legislative power over all the American Colonies.

"Can they make laws to bind the colonies in all cases whatever; levy taxes on them without their consent; dispose of the revenues, thus raised, without their control; multiply officers at pleasure, and assign them fees, to be paid without, nay, contrary to and in direct violation of acts of our provincial assemblies, and approved by the crown? Can they enlarge the power of admiralty courts; divert the usual channels of justice; deprive the colonists of trial by a jury of their countrymen; in short break down the barriers which their forefathers have erected against arbitrary power, and enforce their edicts by fleets and armies?" [If so,] Then indeed are we

reduced to a state of abject slavery; and all resistance to acts of Parliament may justly be called by the name of treason and rebellion...

All acts of Parliament therefore, for raising a revenue in America, are considered as depriving us of our property, without our consent, and consequently as a palpable infringement of our ancient rights and privileges. They are unconstitutional and arbitrary laws, subversive of the liberties and privileges secured to us, by our royal charters.

...Among the odious acts of the British Parliament they passed one which imposed a duty on the article of tea, and several cargoes of this commodity were shipped to America to obtain the duty and a market. On the arrival of the tea ships at Boston great indignation was excited among the people; town meetings were called to devise some legal measures to prohibit the landing of the odious article. It was universally understood that if the tea was once landed and stored, it would by some means come to a market, and the duty to the government be secured. In order to defeat this object a number of persons in disguise entered the ships at the wharves, broke open three hundred and forty-two chests of tea, and discharged their contents into the water at the dock. This was on the 16th December, 1773. When intelligence of this summary proceeding reached England, it was condemned by the government as enormously criminal. They menaced our province with the most exemplary vengeance, and Parliament soon passed the Boston Vindictive Port Bill as a part of their coercive system, so that merely the name of tea is now associated with ministerial grievances, and tea drinking is almost tantamount to an open avowal of toryism. Those who are anxious to avoid the odious epithet of enemies to their country, strictly prohibit the use of tea in their families, and the most squeamish ladies are compelled to have recourse to substitutes, or secretly steal indulgence in their favorite East India beverage.

*March [1775]* - For the purpose of enforcing submission to the cruel mandates of the royal government, a reinforcement of the British army has arrived at Boston and General Gage is appointed Governor and Commander in Chief. An armed fleet also occupies the harbor; and the whole port is closed against all but British vessels. In short, the horrors of civil war seem stalking, with rapid strides, towards our devoted country.

...At the regular term of the Court of Common Pleas at Barnstable in September last, I witnessed the following prompt procedure. A body of about twelve hundred men assembled and obstructed the passage to the court-house door. The leader of this assemblage was Dr. Nathaniel Freeman, a bold son of liberty of Sandwich. Colonel James Otis, the chief justice of the court, preceded by the sheriff, approached; and the venerable chief justice demanded admission. Dr. Freeman replied that it was the intention of the people to prevent the court's being opened to exercise those unconstitutional powers with which they are invested by Parliament. The chief justice, in his majesty's name, commanded them to disperse, and permit the court to enter and proceed to business.

But his majesty's name had lost its power; it can have no charms with the sons of liberty. The venerable judge then said he had acquitted himself of his duty, and retired...

The public indignation is now greatly excited by the following shameful transaction[:]

The people from the country, whose business called them into Boston, were suspected by the officers of purchasing guns from their soldiers. In order to furnish an opportunity to inflict punishment... Lieutenant Colonel Nesbit of the forty-seventh regiment ordered a soldier to offer a countryman an old rusty musket. A man from Billerica was caught by this bait, and purchased the gun for three dollars. The unfortunate man was immediately seized by Nesbit, and confined in the guard-house all night. Early next morning they stripped him entirely naked, covered him over with warm tar, and then with feathers, placed him on a cart; and conducted him through the streets as far as liberty-tree, where the people began to collect in vast numbers; and the military, fearing, for their own safety dismissed the man and retreated to their barracks... What an honorable deed for a British field officer and grenadiers! The selectmen of Billerica remonstrated with General Gage respecting this outrage, but obtained no satisfaction.

*April 21st.*-Intelligence is now received that the British regulars have marched out of Boston, and actually commenced hostilities against our people at Lexington.

...The sword is now unsheathed, and our friends are slaughtered by our cruel enemies; expresses are hastening from town to town, in all directions through the country, spreading the melancholy tidings and inspiring and rousing the people *To Arms! Arms!* The people of New England have taken the alarm, and their hearts are animated even to enthusiasm. There is an enthusiasm in religion, in politics, in military achievements, and in gallantry and love, and why not an enthusiasm in the love of country? No species of enthusiasm surely can be more laudable, or more honorable. Never was a cause more just, more sacred than ours; we are commanded to defend the rich inheritance bequeathed to us by our virtuous ancestors; and it is our bounden duty to transmit it uncontaminated to posterity; we must fight valiantly therefore, for our lives and property, for our holy religion, for our honor, and for our dearest friends.

July 3d,-Orders are given to inoculate for the small-pox, all the soldiers and inhabitants in town as a general infection of this terrible disease is apprehended. Dr. Townsend and my-self are now constantly engaged in this business.

[July] 12th, - The very important intelligence from Philadelphia is now proclaimed that on the 4th instant, the American Congress declared the thirteen United Colonies, "*Free, Sovereign, Independent States*" The subject has for some time agitated the public mind, and various opinions have been entertained relative to this momentous transaction. Opinions of much weight and authority have been and still are in collision, and it has been considered very doubtful whether the grand object would be accomplished at the present time. Objections, however, have yielded to imperious necessity, and a new epoch for United America has now commenced. We are now, in the 16th year of the reign of his Majesty King George the Third, absolved from all allegiance to the British crown; and all political connexion between us, as subjects, and his government is totally and for ever dissolved, unless indeed Providence shall so order, that we shall be again reduced to a state of dependence and vassalage.

[July] 18th.- [The Declaration of Independence] is the theme of every circle and topic of universal discussion, and it receives the sanction and approbation of a large majority of the community. When we reflect on the deranged condition of our army, the great deficiency of our resources, and the little prospect of foreign assistance, and at the same time contemplate the

prodigious powers and resources of our enemy, we may view this measure of Congress as a prodigy. The history of the world cannot furnish an instance of fortitude and heroic magnanimity parallel to that displayed by the members, whose signatures are affixed to the declaration of American Independence. Their venerated names will ornament the brightest pages of American history, and be transmitted to the latest generations. The instrument was signed by John Hancock, Esq. as President, and by fifty-four others, delegates from the thirteen United States. The Congress have in their declaration, recited the grievances and oppressions, for which we could not obtain redress; and proclaimed to the world the causes which impelled them to a separation from the crown of Great Britain. A sensible and popular writer [Thomas Paine], in a production entitled "*Common Sense*," argues the necessity of the measure from the following considerations.

"We had no credit abroad because of our *rebellious dependency*. Our ships could obtain no protection in foreign ports, because we afforded them no justifiable reason for granting it to us. The calling of ourselves subjects, and at the same time fighting against the prince we acknowledge, was a dangerous precedent to all Europe. If the grievances justified our taking up arms, they justified our separation; if they did not justify our separation, neither could they justify our taking arms.

At home... our currency had no foundation; and the state of it would have ruined whig and tory alike. We had no other laws than a kind of moderated passion; no other civil power than an honest mob; and no other protection than the temporary attachment of one man to another. Had independency been delayed a few months longer, this continent would have been plunged into irretrievable confusion; some violent for it, some against it - all in the greatest cabal; the rich would have been ruined, and the poor destroyed. The *necessity* of being independent would have brought it on in a little time, had there been no rupture between Britain and America. The increasing importance of commerce - the weight and perplexity of legislation - and the enlarged state of European politics, would clearly have shown to the continent the impropriety of continuing subordinate; for after the coolest reflection on the matter, this must be allowed, 'that Britain was too jealous of America to govern it justly; too ignorant of it to govern it well; and too distant from it to govern it at all.'"