

Connecticut's Involvement in the War of Independence

Here we are attempting to give the modern reader a sense of what was going on when Colebrook and Barkhamsted were in their infancy.

It is interesting that during the War of Independence, the interior of the colony/state especially Litchfield County was used by most of the surrounding states and by congress as a place to confine prisoners. They were confined in the jails, the public buildings and even in some of the private houses. Most of the British captured at Ticonderoga and in Canada were placed there. They were uniformly treated well in contrast to the treatment of American prisoners on the British prison-ships.

After the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19th, 1775, the Connecticut General Assembly conceived a plan to counterbalance those British successes. This was to capture Ticonderoga, the great fortress that commanded the road from Canada into New York. Accordingly, Silas Deane and ten associates, having assurances of the Assembly's approval, took £800 sterling out of the treasury of the colony and with it raised an army of sixteen Connecticut men and forty Berkshire men from Massachusetts and about one hundred Vermont volunteers under Ethan Allen and Seth Warner, both of whom were Litchfield County men who held Connecticut military commissions. The fortress fell to the Americans on May 10, 1775.

At the beginning of 1777, the war was carried right into Connecticut's boundaries by New York's royalist governor Tryon's raid on Danbury. The Patriots had collected a considerable supply of stores there, and British General Howe, before leaving for Philadelphia, determined to have them destroyed. He accordingly placed a force of nearly 2,000 men under Tryon, and in April dispatched him up the Sound with a convoy of twenty-five vessels. They landed at Saugatuck Harbor late in the afternoon of April 25, 1777, and reached Danbury by a hasty march overland the next day. The British instantly set to work, and by night had burned most of the buildings in the town, except those belonging to Tories, and had destroyed a vast amount of provisions. By the end of the following day they had destroyed the meetinghouse, nineteen dwelling houses and twenty-two stores and barns.

As for military events, Connecticut, in 1779, suffered the most that she did during any year of the war, primarily because of New York's Governor Tryon's invasion. This occurred in July. During the early winter months, however, several little engagements took place around Putnam's winter quarters at Redding. About half of his troops (two brigades) were Connecticut men. While at Redding, they suffered severely from lack of food and clothing. They brooded over this for a while and then formed a plan of marching to Hartford and demanding redress at the hands of the Assembly. Putnam, however, rode up just as they were about to start and in a few words persuaded them otherwise and brought them once more to a sense of duty. On February 25th there occurred a little engagement with the British at Horse Neck, near Greenwich, in which the Americans were beaten.

The state had soon to undergo more than a few such little raids as culminated in the skirmish of Horse Neck. On July 6 1779, a fleet from New York cast anchor near West Haven and disembarked 3,000 British soldiers under Tryon, the royalist governor of New York. They advanced on New Haven in two detachments of 1,500 men each. The first detachment was stopped by some militia near West Haven and so entered the town

by the Derby Road. The other detachment captured a fort at Black Rock and also entered the town. They instantly started in to plunder, and when they finished had inflicted a money loss of about £25,000 (about \$111,000). Twenty-seven Americans had been killed and nineteen wounded. Tryon sailed leisurely along the coast after he left New Haven on the sixth, and on the eighth landed at Fairfield and burned that town to the ground. The next morning this was repeated at Green's Farms. Then, crossing the Sound, the British remained in Huntington Bay till the eleventh, when they journeyed forth again, attacking Norwalk and destroying the entire village except for a few houses belonging to Tories. Before this, Washington, learning of the raids, sent General Parsons from the Highlands with a few Continentals and a considerable body of Connecticut militia. Tryon very prudently withdrew to New York. He had done his work well, however, for he had inflicted upon the little state a loss of about £250,000 (about \$1,110,000). This score against the British was partially paid back on September 5, 1779, when Major Tallmadge set out from Stamford with 130 men and destroyed a British battery at Lloyd's Neck.

During the next year, 1780, there was very little warfare in which Connecticut was directly involved.

In 1781, however, the year that Richard Smith's industrial complex burned to the ground and was immediately rebuilt, bigger and better, with state funds because of the forge's inestimable value to the Patriot cause, the war again came into the heart of Connecticut. In June, about 150 British attacked Leete's Island, in Guilford, burning a few buildings, and on July 22nd they attacked the meetinghouse at Middlesex, now Darien, and took all the men there prisoners. In September came the worst attack. Arnold, who, in 1780, had played the traitor and attempted to deliver West Point into the hands of the British, was sent by Clinton with 1,700 men to capture New London. He landed at the mouth of the Thames on the morning of the sixth. His troops were in two divisions, one of 800 men under Lieutenant-Colonel Eyre, and the other of 900 under Arnold himself. There were two forts guarding the harbor, Fort Trumbull, which was an untenable breastwork and was consequently almost immediately evacuated by the Americans, and Fort Griswold. Eyre was directed to take this latter, while to Arnold fell the more congenial task of burning the town and the shipping. Fort Griswold was commanded by Colonel Ledyard, one of the bravest of Connecticut's soldiers. He offered a long and stern resistance to the enemy, and it was only after a hard struggle that the British under a certain Major Bromfield (as Eyre had been seriously wounded) were able to enter the fort. "Who commands this fort?" called Bromfield. "I did sir, but you do now," said Ledyard, offering his sword. Thereupon Bromfield, infuriated by the long and unlooked-for resistance, took Ledyard's sword and plunged it to the hilt in his breast. The soldiers, inspired by this, followed suit and either bayoneted or shot all but twenty-five of the 150 defenders of the fort. Not satisfied with this, thirty-five of the most seriously wounded were put in a cart and rolled down a hill till the cart struck the trunk of an apple tree near the fort. The shock killed several. No excuse can be offered for this brutality on the part of the British, and all excuses are vain in the face of such overwhelming evidence as we have. After setting fire to Groton the enemy sailed for New York.

This essentially ended the military campaigns in Connecticut; the Peace Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783.