

PART 1

DEBORAH SAMPSON, CONTINENTAL SOLDIER:

THE WESTCHESTER CONNECTION

Jane Keiter

INTRODUCTION

The military service of Deborah Sampson, who fought in the Revolution disguised as a man, has fascinated readers and perplexed researchers for over 200 years. Deborah kept a journal while she was in the army, but it was lost with the rest of her possessions when her boat sank in the mouth of the Hudson River while she was returning to West Point to receive her discharge papers.

Deborah never wrote her memoirs, but instead entrusted her story to Herman Mann, who produced a flawed chronicle. Even the official documents which survive do not clear up the contradictions and ambiguities associated with her tale.

In 1797, when he was 25 years old, Mann printed *The Female Review; or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady*. Almost 30 years later, Deborah expressed her dissatisfaction with this book, so Mann agreed to

rewrite it, expanding the information and correcting the inaccuracies. By this time many works dealing with the Revolution had been published, and Mann inserted passages from these books nearly verbatim into his text. Because he was writing in the first person, it appears that Deborah is the source of this information.

There are many other problems with Mann's 424-page draft. It does not correct all of the mistakes or fill in all of the details. Although it is frustrating to read, it does, however, provide useful additional

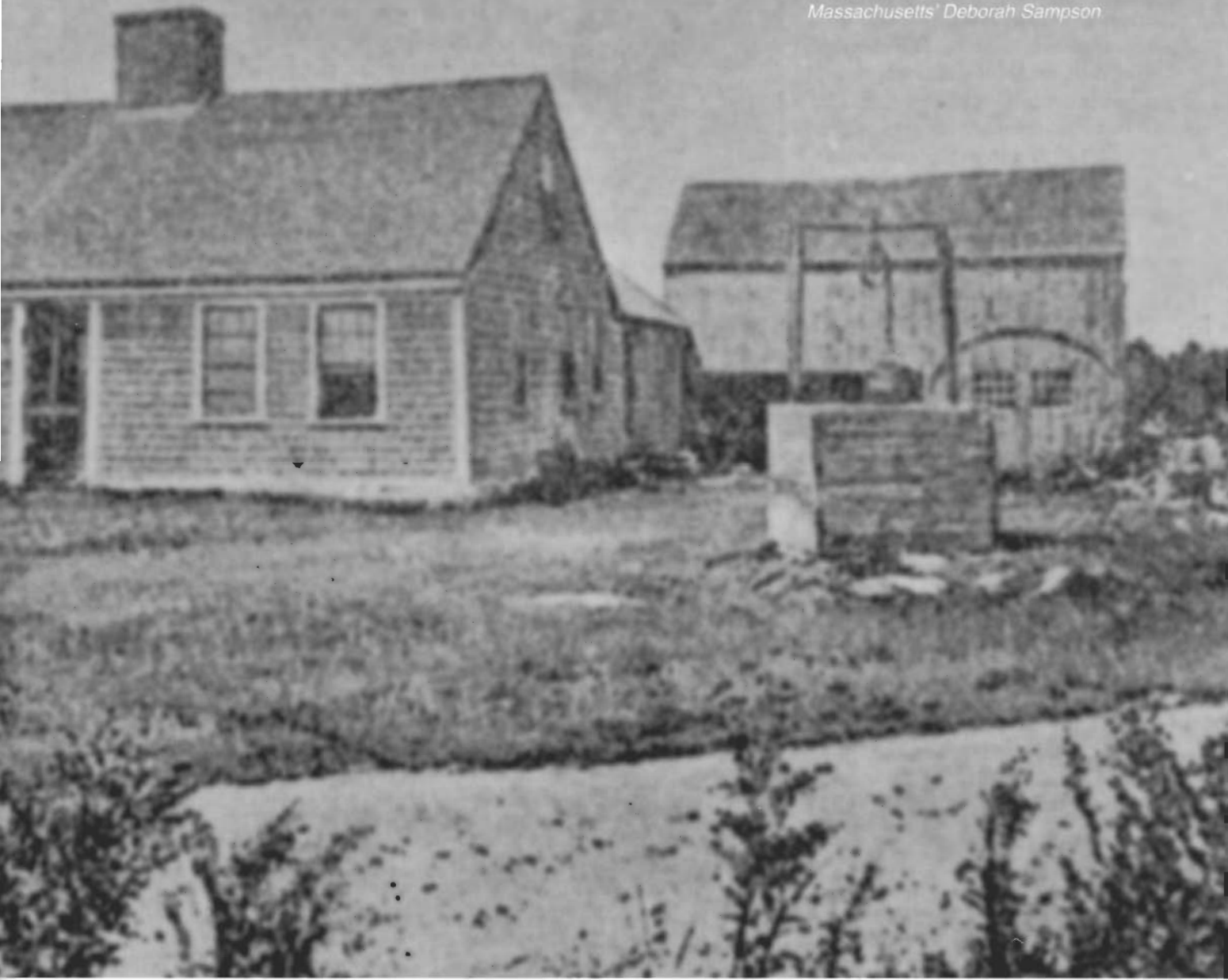
information.

Deborah requested that this manuscript not be published until after her death or, as Mann says, "till her spirit would have soared beyond the reach of criticism, and the cruel reproach of mortals." Deborah died in 1827.

In his preface Mann proclaims, "And it is with a heart-felt satisfaction I here state, that there is not a page nor sentence in that part of the manuscript finished before her decease, which she has not expressed a cheerful willingness to adopt."



Deborah Sampson's birthplace,
Plympton, Mass. From Moody,
Massachusetts' Deborah Sampson



Mann had gathered the information that he needed to complete the manuscript, which he did the year of Deborah's death. His own ill health prevented him from publishing this work before he died in 1833.

In 1850 Herman Mann Jr. copied and edited his father's manuscript. He left out much of the moralizing and several small sections that he seems to have felt were either defamatory, distasteful or perhaps untrue. This manuscript of 336 pages was never published.¹

In 1866 the original 1797 version

of *The Female Review* was reprinted with an introduction and notes by John Adams Vinton, who titled it *The Female Review: Life of Deborah Sampson The Female Soldier in the War of the Revolution*. Many of Reverend Vinton's footnotes incorporate sections of Mann Jr.'s manuscript. Vinton did not believe that Deborah joined the army in 1781, but a year later. In this and various other ways, he tried to undermine Mann Sr.'s credibility. This book was reprinted in 1972 by Arno Press, Inc.

Did Deborah become a soldier in

1781 or 1782? This is the question which has puzzled anyone trying to write about her. In petitioning for back pay and for various pensions, Deborah, in different documents, used both dates. Most people have concluded that the 1782 date is correct; using that date, however, creates many problems that have not been satisfactorily resolved by others. Some things in Mann's narrative do not check out, although many things in it appear to be true. The people mentioned existed and can be placed where Deborah said, even when at

first her statements may not appear logical. Mann's version of Deborah's story is the only one that hangs together as a whole. The year of Deborah's enlistment may never be conclusively resolved, but there is much in Mann's manuscript to support the claim for 1781.

While all of the many different versions of Deborah's story which have been written over the years have been read and the extant documents studied, what follows is a retelling of Mann's 1827 manuscript augmented with research notes. Despite its many shortcomings, Mann's account contains much significant primary source material. It is the closest one can come to Deborah's telling of it, and therefore should not be ignored as it has been in the past. Only the episodes which took place in Westchester County are presented in full for this article. Deborah had many exciting and dangerous adventures while in the army, and those taking place in Westchester were no exception.

DEBORAH'S EARLY YEARS

Deborah was born on December 7, 1760, in Plympton, Massachusetts, near Plymouth. Among her ancestors were several prominent passengers on the *Mayflower*. Her father, Jonathan Sampson Jr., was a descendant both of Miles Standish and of John and Priscilla Alden. Her mother, Deborah Bradford, was the great-granddaughter of William Bradford, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Although descended from distinguished Pilgrim stock, the Sampson family was poor. Jonathan had tried farming, but had given it up to make a living at sea, where he had not been any more successful. He was away often, and eventually, after he had failed to appear for a long while, Deborah had been told that he must have drowned.



The Thomas house. From Moody, *Massachusetts' Deborah Sampson*.

Recent information reveals that apparently Deborah's father was not lost at sea. "He deserted his wife and family, became involved in a trial for murder in Maine, served in the Revolutionary War, and had a common-law wife and second family in Fayette, Maine."² Her mother could not provide for her seven children, so they were placed in other households to be cared for.

Five-year-old Deborah went to live with distant cousins, the elderly Miss Fuller and her brother, on a farm in Plympton. Miss Fuller was kind and taught Deborah some reading and writing. When she died three years later, Deborah was put into the home of a frail widow, Mrs. Thacher, of Middleborough. Caring for a woman in her 80's proved to be too difficult for young Deborah so she was removed.

When she was 10, Deborah was bound out to Deacon Benjamin Thomas, a farmer in Middleborough. How different her new situation must have been from the quiet home of the widow Thacher. Deacon Thomas and his wife Elizabeth had 12 children, a half dozen of each sex, ranging in age from 28 years old to

little Zeruah, aged three. Their oldest child, Susanna, had married a cousin, Jeremiah Thomas, and by the time Deborah arrived, had given birth to four of her five sons. These boys were close in age to the Deacon's younger sons.³

It is not inconceivable that Susanna and her family lived with the Deacon, but, in any event, they were most likely close by. The boys from the two families, though technically uncles and nephews, probably romped together as though they were all brothers. Deborah had ample opportunity to observe male behavior and to compare her strength and skills with theirs.

The days were long and hard, filled with a seemingly endless round of chores, but Deborah was well fed and clothed. While she became accomplished at spinning and weaving, she was equally adept at chopping wood and pitching hay.

Although Deborah had much to be thankful for at the Thomases, she was not completely content. Deacon Thomas had rigid views with which Deborah did not always agree, and he was very strict in religious matters. What irked Deborah the

most, however, was his attitude toward the education of girls, which he felt was entirely unnecessary. Although Deborah had little formal instruction, she borrowed the boys' school books and taught herself.

At age 18 Deborah's service as an indentured servant was over, but she continued to live with the Thomases part of the time. During the winter she moved about, staying in various area homes while she did the owners' weaving. She had educated herself so well that she was chosen to teach school during the summer sessions in 1779 and 1780. She did not think that the girls should be instructed mainly in knitting and sewing; in her classroom, the girls received the same education as the boys.

Ever since the Battle of Lexington in 1775, Deborah had followed the course of the war. She had wanted to help, but sitting at home sewing shirts for the soldiers was not her style. She longed to travel and see the country, something that she could never do as a lone woman with no money. A further inducement to get away was the unwelcome attention of a suitor. She had decided that this "lump of a man" was a fool and that she would never marry him.

Gradually the idea of disguising herself as a man took hold. Could she really succeed in this? That she was tall for a woman at 5'7", had broad shoulders, small breasts and a Roman nose would help. In the fall of 1780 Deborah spun and wove the fabric for a suit of man's apparel which she took to a tailor in a distant town, explaining that it was for a relative of hers who was about her size. Binding her breasts, she tried on the clothes at home a number of times before venturing out, for short periods at first. When she was not recognized, she became bolder, going to taverns and fairs undetected. As spring

approached she resolved that she would join the army no matter what the consequences turned out to be.

THE RECRUIT

Deborah's clandestine departure from Middleborough took place in April. When she reached Bellingham, Massachusetts, she signed up for the army using the name Robert Shurtleiff.⁴

She received a bounty from a speculator, Noah Taft, who was filling the enlistment rolls for the town of Uxbridge. The enlistment was for three years or the duration of the war. In mid-May a regular enrollment took place in Worcester where "Robert" was mustered into the army by Captain Eliphalet Thorp. Soon after, the recruits started their march to New York and the fortifications at West Point. They were commanded by Sergeant Gamble, who had been sent from the lines to bring them there.

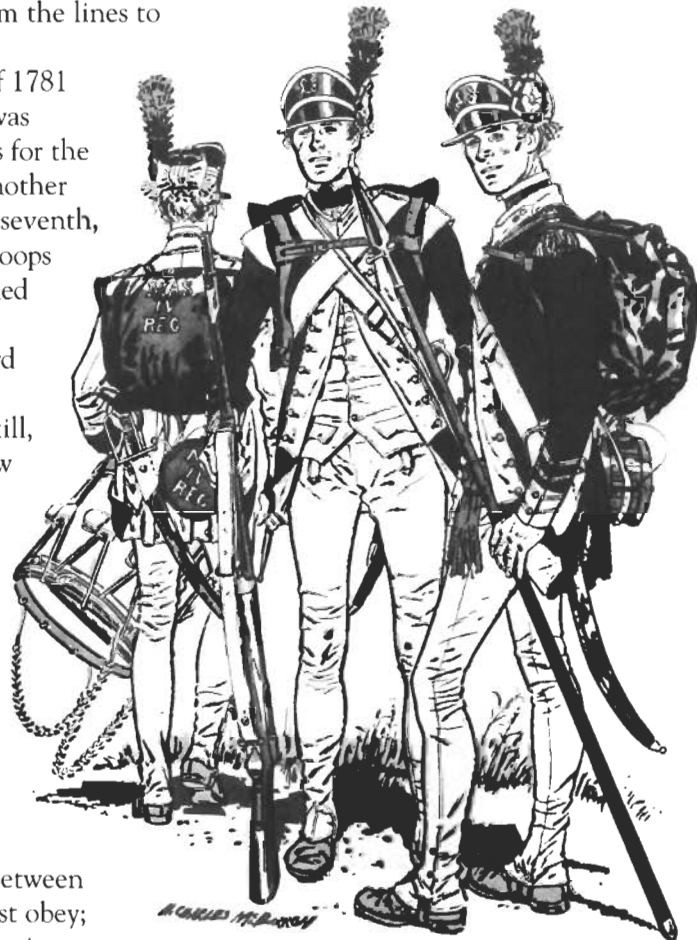
It was the spring of 1781 and a war-weary land was rounding up its soldiers for the summer campaign. Another year of revolution, the seventh, was about to begin. Troops from other regions joined the flow of men and materiel heading toward the Hudson River.

Approaching Fishkill, New York, Deborah saw the road ahead ascend into the shadowy depths of a thick forest. Every muscle seemed to groan at the sight of another peak to struggle up on legs made leaden by fatigue. The mind commanded the body to proceed, but a duel had commenced between the two. The body must obey; the brain must always be in con-

trol. The destiny of her perilous excursion into the world of men at war depended on it. If the body betrayed its secret— if she were exposed as a 20-year-old female instead of a teenaged boy who had yet to grow a beard— Deborah would consider it a fate worse than death. It would mean shame and humiliation, ridicule and disdain.

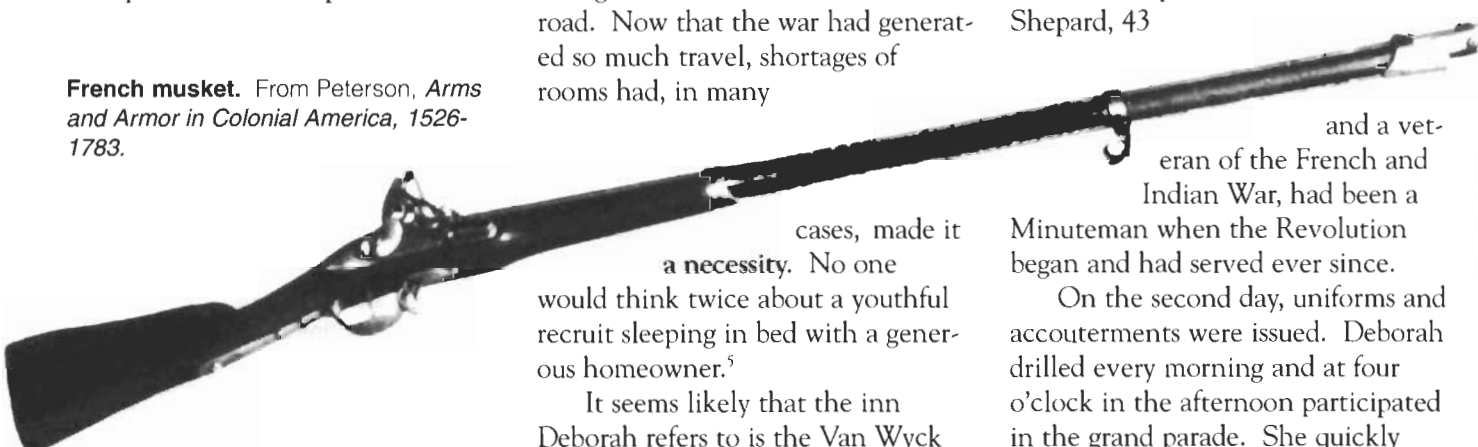
She felt confident that she could sustain her deception as long as she kept her wits about her. Unconsciousness was her greatest danger, and she must stay out of the hospital where the probing fingers of

Uniform of the Light Infantry Company, 4th Massachusetts Regiment, Continental Line, 1781-1782. From Elting, *Military Uniforms in America; the Era of the American Revolution, 1755-1795*.



the surgeon had little respect for a person's privacy. All around her Deborah saw weary men struggling to keep up. They staggered as she did from the exertion of the long march. Deborah heard the trilling of the fife and the staccato beat of the drum as the band urged the men forward. She straightened her back and quickened her step. She

French musket. From Peterson, *Arms and Armor in Colonial America, 1526-1783*.



pledged that no one would ever suspect her sex because she was a laggard or a coward.

Descending the hill, the troops entered Fishkill and turned south on the Albany Post Road. A mile farther, they arrived at an extensive military base and encamped in the vicinity of an inn. Entering the tavern, Deborah stepped close to the fire to warm herself and to dry her clothes, made damp by the day's chilly mist. With horror she realized that she felt faint, but by that point she was already falling toward the floor.

Slowly reviving, Deborah peered up at a ring of faces. Had they found out? Had someone unbuttoned her coat and loosened her shirt to help her breathe? All she saw, however, were expressions of kindness and concern. A young Dutch woman stepped forward, offering her a cordial and whatever other refreshments she wished from the house's stores, of which she apparently was the mistress. Then she insisted that Deborah take her place in bed with

her husband so that Deborah could get a good night's rest. Deborah protested that she was quite recovered and that there was ample room in the barracks, but the woman insisted. It was but a small sacrifice for her to make for a boy going to war for his country.

It was a common occurrence for strangers to share a bed while on the road. Now that the war had generated so much travel, shortages of rooms had, in many

cases, made it a necessity. No one would think twice about a youthful recruit sleeping in bed with a generous homeowner.⁵

It seems likely that the inn Deborah refers to is the Van Wyck homestead, which was in close proximity to the barracks. The southwest room was used as headquarters for the officers in charge at the military post and depot. According to tradition, the house was occupied by the Van Wyck family during the war. If it operated as an inn at this time, no record has been preserved. It also is possible that Deborah mistakenly thought that it was one. Elizabeth (Betsy) Van Wyck was 23 years old; her husband Isaac was 25.⁶

Deborah did sleep well and woke refreshed. Thanking her host and hostess, she rejoined the ranks and marched as the sun rose into a clear sky. Reaching the edge of the Hudson River opposite West Point, the soldiers began crossing the river in barges around noon. After a general parade and inspection of the new troops, the recruits were given their assignments. Deborah was pleased to be put with officers and men from her home state.

She was detached to Captain George Webb's company of light infantry. The 41-year-old captain

had entered the war at the start. He had fought at Trenton and Princeton, had been at the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga and had seen action at the battles of Monmouth and Rhode Island. Captain Webb's company belonged to the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, commanded by Colonel William Shepard. Colonel Shepard, 43

and a veteran of the French and Indian War, had been a Minuteman when the Revolution began and had served ever since.

On the second day, uniforms and accouterments were issued. Deborah drilled every morning and at four o'clock in the afternoon participated in the grand parade. She quickly learned the 27 maneuvers of the manual exercise, snapping her musket, a French Charleville, into the various positions with precision as the drill sergeant bellowed commands.

Deborah was always watching for any sign that her true sex was suspected. Once when she offered to mend the tattered uniform of a veteran, her proficiency with needle and thread elicited comments. The strain of remaining constantly vigilant caused her to lose her appetite for a while.

She was proud, however, that Deborah Sampson, indentured servant, school teacher, spinner of thread and weaver of cloth—Deborah Sampson, woman—was a soldier at the mightiest fort in the land. She had her uniform and she had her gun, bayonet and sword and she was ready for whatever lay ahead.

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Deborah did not have to wait long for a dangerous assignment.

Her light infantry company was part of an elite corps of specially chosen soldiers. These men tended to be younger and smaller—the quickest, the most agile, and the best shots. During battle they were placed in the most vulnerable posts, leading the attack and guarding exposed flank positions. Even when the main army was stationary, this corps was constantly on the move, reconnoitering enemy lines and serving guard duty at advanced locations.⁷

Joseph Plumb Martin, who served in such a unit, described the rigors of a light infantry scouting party.

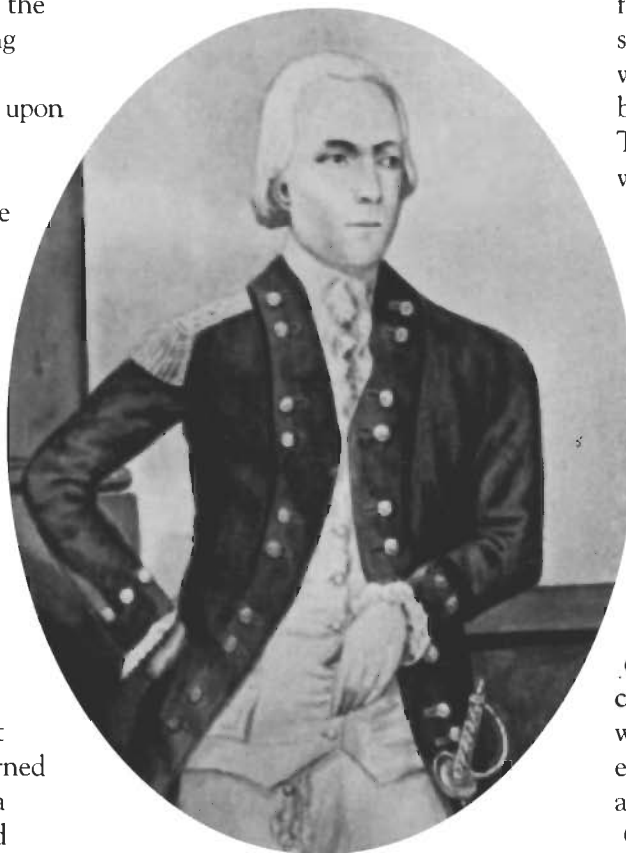
No one who had never been upon such duty as those advanced parties have to perform, can form any adequate idea of the trouble, fatigue and dangers which they have to encounter. Their whole time is spent in marches, especially night marches, watching, starving, and, in cold weather, freezing and sickness. If they get any chance to rest, it must be in the woods or fields, under the side of a fence, in an orchard or any other place but a comfortable one....⁸

Deborah could not help but feel apprehensive when she learned that she had been detached to a corps known as the Rangers and ordered to march through Westchester County to Harlem, which was below King's Bridge. The prospect of going behind British lines was intimidating enough, but she also had heard about the devastated and lawless territory called the Neutral Ground.

During the Revolution Westchester was situated between the British army, headquartered in New York City at the lower tip of Manhattan, and the American army,

stationed at Continental Village near Peekskill. The forward outposts of the two forces varied over the years, but in general the land south of the Harlem River and King's Bridge was considered British territory and that north of the Croton River, American-held. The area in between was referred to as the Neutral Ground.

Both armies made forages into the county to supply their troops, and irregulars known as "Cowboys" (pro-



Colonel James DeLancey. WCHS Picture Collection.

British) and "Skinners" (pro-American) took advantage of the chaotic conditions, often for personal gain. The best known and most feared Cowboy was Colonel James DeLancey, who under British rule had been the High Sheriff of Westchester County. Major Benjamin Tallmadge, a Continental

Dragoon and the head of General Washington's spy operations, called the Neutral Ground "the most rascally part of the country I was ever in."

In the autumn of 1777 Brigade Chaplain Timothy Dwight was in Westchester and described the plight of the people caught between two warring armies:

These unhappy people were, therefore, exposed to the depredations of both. Often they were actually plundered; and always were liable to this calamity. They feared every body whom they saw; and loved nobody.... Fear was, apparently, the only passion by which they were animated.... Their houses, in the mean time, were in a great measure scenes of desolation. Their furniture was extensively plundered, or broken to pieces. The walls, floors, and windows were injured both by violence, and decay; and were not repaired, because they had not the means of repairing them, and because they were exposed to the repetition of the same injuries. Their cattle were gone. Their enclosures were burnt, where they were capable of becoming fuel; and in many cases thrown down, where they were not. Their fields were covered with a rank growth of weeds, and wild grass.⁹

Conditions had not improved during the four years since 1777. Some people, too scared to spend the night in their homes, slept hidden in the woods or concealed in haystacks. All counted their blessings in the morning if their houses had not been raided or burned during the night.

About June 10 a large scouting party that included Private Shurtleiff drew provisions and headed south along the west bank of the Hudson to the fortified promontory at Stony Point. Boarding barges, they crossed

the river at King's Ferry, disembarking near the outpost at Verplank's Point. Again they wended their way southward, now following the eastern shore of the river.

At Tarrytown they bivouacked for one night. The next day the scouting party split into two groups. Deborah's unit continued south to the area of King's Bridge. Under cover of night, they took every precaution to elude the notice of British sentries and so forded the Harlem River to the island of Manhattan. Although they stayed behind enemy lines in the vicinity of Harlem for four days, they went undetected. Deborah shuddered at the thought of being captured and confined in a fetid prison ship. She and her party noted that the British were strengthening their outlying posts with the addition of men and materiel.¹⁰

Again slipping past guards, the soldiers proceeded north, this time to the east of their former route, and arrived at White Plains. Those who had not seen it before were permitted to visit the heights where the Battle of White Plains had taken place on October 28, 1776.

Veterans who had fought there pointed out the positions of the opposing armies as General Washington's retreating forces tried to hold off the pursuing British.

In the summer of 1778, Private Martin, who had fought at White Plains, revisited the site.

We saw a number of the graves of those who fell in that battle. Some of the bodies had been so slightly buried that the dogs or hogs, or both, had dug them out of the ground. The skulls and other bones and hair were scattered about the place. Here were Hessian skulls as thick as a bombshell. Poor fellows! They were left unburied in a foreign land.¹¹

Deborah does not mention see-



Colonel Ebenezer Sproat. From Weston, *History of the Town of Middleboro, Massachusetts*.

ing any bones, but as she was viewing the rough mounds covering the hastily-buried dead, she scuffed at the turf, dislodging a musket ball. Thinking about the tragic losses that it represented, she cradled it in the palm of her hand before pocketing it as a keepsake.

About the 25th of June the soldiers left White Plains and headed west toward the Hudson, where they spent the night camped near the river. Just before dawn the next morning, Deborah's company, led by Ensign Jacob Town, set out on a scouting mission. With his swarthy complexion and dark hair, the 25-year-old officer from Hampshire County, Massachusetts, was a striking man. After three years in the

field, he commanded with confidence.

The sky lightened as her party patrolled the river bank between Tarrytown and Sing Sing. The Hudson was wide here. Deborah looked across the broad expanse known as the Tappan Zee at the distant hills hovering in the morning mist. She could tell that it was going to be hot.

She had begun to relax somewhat as the days had passed and there had not been an encounter. She felt that she had performed well on this assignment, but she was glad that they would soon be heading back to the relative safety of an established army post.

Close by in front of them, a

deafening volley of musket fire shattered the quiet dawn. Deborah had a man in her sights when the party of cavalry wheeled about and disappeared back behind the hill from which it had sprung. So suddenly had the mounted attackers come and gone that there had been no time to return their fire.

"They're some of Colonel DeLancey's refugees, I'll wager. Damn!" someone hissed.

The Americans were ready for the second charge and took deliberate aim. Through the haze of gun smoke, Deborah saw horses rear and men fall. Then the soldier on her left was jolted backwards and lay sprawled beside her, blood spurting from the hole in his neck with each fading heartbeat.

Deborah bit off the end of a cartridge, put some of the powder in the flintlock and then rammed the cartridge down the muzzle of her gun. The more experienced men did this so rapidly that it was almost a blur. Deborah could not keep pace with them, yet she loaded and fired as fast as she could, again and again. The Americans held their ground and checked the enemy. The acrid smell of gunpowder permeated the air.

The cavalry, however, soon rallied and when they approached the next time, they led a large phalanx of Tory infantry. The opposition was now too strong for the American troops and they were ordered to retreat to a nearby wooded area. Ducking and swerving, they sprinted while firing an occasional shot to hold their attackers at bay.

Deborah's hazel eyes widened when she saw British troops landing from the river. There was no way that her unit could withstand the onslaught of the enemy force arrayed before them. She raised her musket when she saw the cavalry begin its charge. The horses pounded up a low hill directly before her.

The sharp crack of gun fire again resonated along the shore. Deborah saw men clutching their chests as they toppled from their saddles. Horses snorted as they were reined in sharply and their heads were yanked about. Deborah did not understand at first, but then she realized that American reinforcements had arrived. She recognized the tall man leading the troops as Colonel Ebenezer Sproat of the Second Massachusetts Regiment. He was from her home town of Middleborough.

At the same time that Colonel Sproat was stopping the cavalry charge, others were attacking the Tory foot soldiers. Deborah's party closed ranks and came up in the rear of the enemy and opened fire. The smoke was so thick that they could barely distinguish their own troops from those of the enemy.

The shooting lessened, then became sporadic. The smoke broke up into wisps and drifted away, revealing that the entire opposing force was engaged in a disorderly retreat. Deborah's group pursued them for a considerable distance, and the action did not end until the sun was high overhead.

It was afternoon before Deborah returned to camp. She never knew exactly how many of the enemy were killed or wounded. Although she saw the corpses of several horses and men scattered about, some of the dead and all but one of the wounded had been carried off in boats during the retreat. Neither did she know how many of her own number had fallen, although three of the wounded later died. Deborah found that she had two bullet holes through her coat and that the plume on her cap had been shot away.

It was late that evening before she had time to reflect on the events of the day. The warm night air soothed her skin and the soft earth

cushioned her tired body as she stared up at the stars. Exhausted men lay on the ground about her, guns by their sides. There was no stacking of arms while in the Neutral Ground.

Deborah had thought that she would feel trepidation before battle, but today there had been no warning. It had been so unexpected, sudden and furious that she had been in the midst of it before she had had time to think. Had she been afraid? No. She had suffered from fatigue, heat and thirst, but not from fear. She had seen men shot. She had leapt over the dying. She had aimed at another human being with the intent to kill and perhaps she had.

She had been in battle and she had not cowered. She had seen and heard and smelled the horrors of war. It was over and she was not trembling from the trauma of it. She knew that she would sleep and that nightmares would not haunt her. Could she face the prospect of doing it again? Deborah rolled over and drew her musket closer. The cause was just, the need was great, the will was strong. The answer was "Yes!"

THE SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT

Ensign Jacob Town, whose home town is variously given as Charlemont, Charlton and Oxford, at this time was an officer in Captain Webb's company. According to a descriptive list, he was 5'10" tall. He was promoted to lieutenant in May 1782 and served until November of 1783.¹² If the skirmish had taken place in June of 1782, not 1781, Deborah would have referred to Jacob as Lieutenant Town. This is one of several indicators in Mann's text that Deborah was indeed in the army in 1781.

Colonel Ebenezer Sprout (or Sproat, as Mann spells it) was born in 1752 in Middleborough (modern spelling Middleboro), where his

father was proprietor of the popular Sprout tavern. He was 6'4" tall, served for the entire duration of the Revolution, and was in many of the major battles. After the war he became one of the leaders of the movement to settle the territory which later became the state of Ohio. The Indians, who respected his bravery and fairness, nicknamed him "Big Buckeye." He died in Marietta in 1805 at the age of 53.

While assessing the casualties from the June 26 encounter, Mann represents Deborah as saying, "I well recollect three of the slain, with whom I was intimately acquainted - John Beeby, James Battles and Noble Sperin." This statement is puzzling because records show that none of these men was killed. All three did belong to her company, so it seems that Deborah, even if she did not remember their names accurately, should have known their fate. The correct names are Solomon Beebe, James Battles and John Sperin.

In June of 1818 Solomon Beebe, aged 63 and a resident of Salisbury, Addison County, Vermont, applied for a pension. He states that he first enlisted in Ludlow on April 9, 1776, and served for nine months and 14 days. In April of 1777 he reenlisted in the company commanded by Captain George Webb in Colonel William Shepard's regiment and served in that corps until the end of the war. He was in the battles of Danbury, White Plains and Yorktown "and at many other skirmishes which might be superfluous [sic] to mention."¹³

James Battles, who was from the town of Lancaster but who was credited to the town of Leominster, enlisted in May of 1775 and again in 1777. In early 1780 he is on a descriptive list of soldiers and his statistics are given as "age, 20 years; stature, 5 ft. 6 in.; complexion, dark; hair, dark." There was also a John

Battles in Captain Webb's Company. He was from the same town and had a military career similar to James's.¹⁴

In October of 1778 both men had been sentenced to be killed by a firing squad after being found guilty of deserting from the army the winter before. General Washington knew that examples must be set and that rules must be obeyed, but it greatly distressed him to have to order the death of any of his men. "It gives the Commander in chief inexpressible pain to find himself under the disagreeable Necessity of executing the military Laws with vigour against these Offenders - His feelings as a Man would prompt him to spare these Transgressors when his duty as an Officer compels him to punish."

The execution was to take place on the common near the gallows and the day and the time had been set, the coffins made and the graves dug. Perhaps General Washington felt that James and John had suffered enough and had learned their lesson and that, as their officers had pleaded, had deserted because they had not been paid any bounty or wages, had been "naked and distressed," plus young and ignorant of the consequences. Less than three hours before they were to be shot, General Washington granted them a pardon.¹⁵

James may have escaped the firing squad and Colonel DeLancey's troops, but his luck ran out at Yorktown. On the muster roll for February through November of 1781, he is reported sick at Virginia.¹⁶ The muster roll for December 1781 states, "reported died Dec. 1, 1781."¹⁷ If Deborah knew James Battles as a fellow soldier in Captain Webb's company, it would have had to have been before his death and is another indication that she joined the army in 1781.

John Sperin is cited in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*

under Sperin, Sperring, and Sperren. He was paid a bounty by the town of Beverly for enlisting on April 7, 1781, for three years or the duration of the war.¹⁸ At this time, Isaac Nobles was a wagoner for Captain Webb's company.¹⁹ It is possible that the two names got combined to produce Noble Sperin.

In the manuscript, Deborah says that after returning to quarters "myself with some others came near losing our lives by drinking cold water." This seems to have been a danger. A footnote by George Grieve, an early translator of Chastellux, notes that every summer in Philadelphia when it is very hot numerous people "drop down dead upon the spot" from drinking cold water.²⁰ The *Pennsylvania Gazette* from July 30, 1783, reported that several people had died from the excessive heat. "Others lost their lives by imprudently drinking cold water..." In New York City, Isaac Ward wrote in his journal on July 11, 1834, that the weather had been so warm "that there has been several sudden Deaths by drinking cold water."²¹

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1781 STARTS

After taking care of the wounded and assigning some men to relieve others at their stations in the Neutral Ground, Deborah's company was ordered to make a quick march north to Peekskill. When they arrived they found that the entire army had crossed the Hudson from West Point and was encamped there.

The soldiers wondered what this massive movement of troops meant. The conjecture that ran up and down the lines was that they were to lay siege to New York City, the British stronghold. Whatever it was that General Washington had in mind, it was clear that the campaign of 1781 had begun and that Private

Robert Shurtlieff was going to be very much a part of it. ■
To be continued.

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ENDNOTES:

¹The original manuscripts written by Herman Mann and his son are owned by The Dedham (Mass.) Historical Society. Bob Hanson, former president, was very helpful with the initial phase of the research for this article.

²Barbara Lambert Merrick, "The Secret Life of Jonathan Sampson," *The Mayflower Quarterly* (November 1982), 172.

³John Marshall Raymond, *Thomas Families of Plymouth County, Massachusetts* (No place: Thomas Family Publications, 1980), 15, 17.

⁴Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolution*. 17 vols. (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1896-1908), 14:164, 185. Except for the highly educated, phonetic spelling was commonly used in the 18th century. This can be confusing when applied to proper names. In *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, the name Shurtlieff is listed 23 different ways. Herman Mann's spelling is the one used here. For some reason, his son changed it to Shurtliffe. Deborah used different variations in different pension applications. In *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* she is listed under Shurtliff and Shurtlieff.

⁵George Grieve, an Englishman who spent the year 1782 traveling in this country, comments: "Throughout America, in private houses, as well as in the inns, several people are crowded together in the

same room; and in the latter it very commonly happens, that after you have been some time in bed, a stranger of any condition (for there is little distinction), comes into the room, pulls off his clothes, and places himself, without ceremony, between your sheets." Howard C. Rice, Jr., trans., *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781 and 1782 by the Marquis De Chastellux*. 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 2:603.

⁶The Van Wyck house is now a museum owned and occupied by the Fishkill Historical Society. In James Fenimore Cooper's 1821 novel, *The Spy*, it is depicted as the home of the Wharton family. Sources include: Willa Skinner, *Fishkill Town Historian*; Anne Van Wyck, *Descendants of Cornelius Barentse Van Wyck and Anna Polhemus* (New York: Tobias A. Wright, 1912), 87; Harold Donaldson Eberlein, *The Manors and Historic Homes of the Hudson Valley* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1924), 175-176.

⁷The Light Infantry Corps was created by General Washington in August 1777. It was so valuable that he placed a light company in every regiment. During a campaign, the companies were combined to create a separate corps.

⁸George F. Scheer, editor, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier by Joseph Plumb Martin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 68.

⁹Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New York*. 4 vols. (New Haven: S. Converse, 1821), 3:491-492. Timothy Dwight was from Connecticut and served from October of 1777 until January of 1779. He became well known as a preacher and writer of verse and was president of Yale from 1795 to 1817.

¹⁰Because General Washington was

seriously contemplating an attack on New York City, it was crucial for him to reconnoiter the enemy's outer defenses. This expedition makes more sense in 1781 than in 1782.

¹¹Scheer, ed. *Private Yankee Doodle*, 134.

¹²*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 15:911; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution, April 1775 to December 1783* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), 546.

¹³National Archives, Washington, D.C. Pension #S 38.531.

¹⁴*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 1:810, 814-816.

¹⁵National Archives Series M853, Roll 4, Jackson Orderly Book #6 written at headquarters, Providence, October 15, 1778, 40 and October 17, 41-45. General Washington's quote is on page 41.

¹⁶Muster Roll of Capt. George Webb's Company of Light Infantry From the 1st of February to the Last of November 1781, *Massachusetts State Archives; Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, under the name Battls, 1:816.

¹⁷*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 1:815; also Clarence Stewart Peterson, *Known Military Dead of the Revolutionary War* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), 21.

¹⁸*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 14:724.

¹⁹Muster Roll of Capt. George Webb's Company of Light Infantry From the 1st of February to the Last of November 1781, *Massachusetts State Archives*; Isaac is listed in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 11:484, 490, 499.

²⁰Rice, Jr., trans., *Travels in North America*, 1:334.

²¹Isaac Ward Journal, ms. at Westchester County Historical Society Library.