

YANKEE DOODLING:
an Account of
Various Incidents
in
Several Military Reenactments
of the
200th Anniversary
of the
War of American Independence

Dedicated to Ron MacInnis,
who encouraged the publication
of these journals,
and also to the many men and women,
both named and anonymous,
without whose talents, energies, and commitments
none of what follows would have been possible



The author updating the journal
during a break
on the Great Carry,
30 September 1975

A Journal of
Arnold's Expedition to Quebec - 75
as Kept by
John F. Denis
of the
Company of Captain Oliver Hanchett
of the
Division of Major Return Jonathan Meigs

Foreword

In the following pages I have transcribed the contents of the journal which I kept from 20 September to 4 October 1975 while participating in the bicentennial reenactment of Colonel Benedict Arnold's march to liberate Quebec. Each day's record was written within twenty-four hours of the events described. Certain pages were composed at sea in the cockpit of a twenty-eight foot ketch; others were written in a cold, wet tent by the beam of a flashlight. On several days it required very nearly every moment of my free time to update these records. A single paragraph may contain several observations recorded at widely separated moments, and so the style of my writing is seldom smooth.

I have decided to transcribe the manuscript as accurately as possible. To attempt to polish the form of this journal, whether by reorganizing structure or even by correcting spelling errors, would alter its authenticity as a first-hand record of impressions of a participant in these significant events.

I have edited in the following manner: Punctuation has been added only in situations where its absence from the manuscript leads to confusion of the reader. Where words have been altered because of unacceptable misspellings or glaring errors of fact, the changes will be found within brackets. I have footnoted certain passages which I judge to require clarification or for which information became available after completion of the manuscript. A final note on the editing of this journal: In the rush to complete the manuscript I jotted down all manner of observation without consideration of suitability for later publication. Thus at a few points in this transcription I have employed discretion and have deleted, although not altered, certain passages.

It should be kept in mind by the reader that I was a mere corporal. As in any army, the enlisted man is furthest from the most accurate sources of information. What filters down to him is generally hearsay and often no more than rumor. I have tried to indicate the difference between that which I actually witnessed and that which I merely heard. And even in matters of which I was a witness, it must be admitted that my perceptions may have been faulty.

Finally I should also identify members of my family who were on hand at the beginning and end of the expedition and whose names appear in this journal. Shin and Dottie are Mr. and Mrs. John F. Moran of Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, my uncle and aunt, who helped me to keep a photographic record of my adventures. Judy is my wife. I am grateful for the patience she has shown toward my activities with AEQ-75.

Saturday, 20 September 1975

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I arose at 6:30 AM, having slept fitfully due to my cold. I weighed my baggage and found that I shall be carrying something greater than 50 lbs., not including my military gear.

After a cold breakfast, I scrubbed the light coat of rust from my musket barrel and enjoyed my last hot shower for some time to come. I began dressing at 7:30, and Judy and I were en route to Lexington by 7:45. By 8:15 we had linked up with Shin + Dottie and headed to Cambridge.

We had some trouble finding the "Graves Co." parking lot (our staging area) because it is the Grace Co. parking lot. Verbal orders leave much to be desired. By 8:35 I was with Oliver Hanchett's Co.

The weather is solidly overcast, though bright, 68°, with some patchy ground fog now burning off.

The various units were called into parade order at 9:35. We then stood in the street, exchanging stories, making new introductions, and passing my flask around. At no later than 10:02 we stepped off, Hanchett Co. being in seventh position in line of march, followed by Capt. Henry Dearborn's Co. Dearborn is still accompanied by his dog, this time a skittish young Irish Setter.

We marched out along Alewife Brook Parkway to Mass. Ave. There were no more than two stops along the avenue, one required by the passage of a freight train. It was quite a spectacle: the eighteenth century marching south on Mass. Ave., contending with blistered feet and aching backs, while the twentieth century crawled north, honking, gaping, and occasionally cursing its luck to be caught by a parade.

Several companies had marched to Cambridge from Prospect Hill, Somerville, as had their predecessors. These units awaited us at an intersection just before Porter Square and then joined our line of march to Cambridge Common. I was somewhat surprised at the small number of spectators, many of whom had just stepped out of barrooms to investigate the noise.

We arrived at the common just one hour after stepping off. We swung around to the south side of the common, taking our position on a baseball diamond and facing north. Ranks tended to break down as we awaited the arrival of other units.

Shortly after 11:15 the speeches began, not following the programme's order — as is customary. The best speech was that of "George Washington", for it was brief and to the point. It is a disappointment that so many high-ranking officers fail to procure wigs, let alone allow their hair to grow. Benedict Arnold is the worst offender.

The speeches took an hour; Gen. Washington reviewed us so quickly that we had no time to salute him; and we then marched once around the park. Rev. Dana MacLean Greeley was to give a final benediction. He began before the last of the troops had finished their round, and so his words were lost.

At length, around 12:20, we were dismissed, most to go to a nearby church and receive a lunch of tunafish on a bulky roll. Shin, Dottie, Judy and I, followed by Terry Crean and his wife, headed out to Stoneham and had lunch at cousin Cathi Sullivan's.

Under Cathi's direction we drove up Rte. 1 and cut across to Ipswich. By mistake we almost joined those units assigned to camp in Ipswich. The three companies of Maj. Meigs's division gathered at White Farms Dairy at the Rowley-Ipswich line on Rte. 1A. 1

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The parade stepped off promptly at 3:30, Scott's Co. first, then Hanchett's, and finally Dearborn's. The crowds were small but polite. After the Rowley Training Field we swung off to the left on the way to Gov. Dummer Academy. I am told that this was the original line of march.

I believe we covered at least 6 miles, and much of that without an audience. As we tramped along on this very humid afternoon, we discovered that no one appeared to know where we were headed. Discipline began to break a little after the 4th mile, and the captain soon ordered us to carry our arms as was most comfortable and the drummers to rest. Dearborn's men were soon singing popular army marching tunes and making mutinous jokes against their captain. After crossing Rte. 1, we passed into woods and then onto a dirt track no more than 2 ft. wide, which led us over a hill. As we grumbled, wondering if we were yet in Canada, word was passed back that we were on the original trail. Up ahead we heard a few shots, and then two of Dearborn's men rushed by us out on the left flank. Over the crest of the hill we discovered a reception committee of local "Indians", most of them boys, with a few muskets. They accompanied us to the academy where we reformed from single file into columns of three. Having marched us once around a small yard, Maj. Meigs called us to order and informed us [that] 200 years ago almost to the hour (now 5:15) the Meigs Division finished cutting the road over which we had just passed. At this significant news the grumbling abated somewhat. We then boarded 3 school busses — standing room only — and went back to Rowley Training Field.

On the field we were again lined by threes facing the reviewing stand. Captain [Ron] Davis called us to "shoulder firelocks" and then forgot us, much to our discomfort. The situation was rectified in no more than 3 minutes. Speeches were mercifully curtailed, and we were then treated to an equestrian display, which we could not see from our location.

Thirst was the biggest problem at this point, and Shin handed me a Fanta orange from behind the line while the captain wasn't watching. One young member of Scott's Co., no older than 17, was helped from the field by two men. I have no word as to his situation.²

By 6 PM we were dismissed. Not a drink was to be had. The line of troops awaiting the ham + bean supper stretched across the field at least 100 yards. Most of the afternoon events that had been scheduled were now cancelled because of our delay in starting. Darkness was coming on, and not a tent had been pitched. Considering the severity of my cold and the soaked nature of my clothes, I decided to return to Acton and sweat the sickness out rather than risk pneumonia. And so at 6:15 or thereabouts I headed for my home — at least the second casualty of AEQ-75.

Notes

- 1: Only two companies, Hanchett and Dearborn, were from Meigs's Division. The third company, Scott, was from Morgan's Division. Major Meigs and his staff were with us at Rowley.
- 2: This was Jim Ferguson of Conway, N.H., Meigs's Division ensign.

Sunday, 21 September 1975

When I awoke at 7:15 AM, my sore throat was gone, and I felt fit enough to face the expedition. After the preliminaries of breakfast and Mass, Shin, Dottie, Cathi, Judy and I drove to Rowley, where Meigs's Division was to have camped. Except for some litter and a few tattered booths Rowley Training Field was empty, and so we continued up Rte. 1A to Newburyport.

By following the main road we soon passed the common in Newbury where a few tents of one unit still stood. In Newburyport we saw plenty of action around the common, where Col. Sanders, of no particular unit, was feeding the multitude. Display of my AEG-75 membership card got me a free lunch: 2 pieces of chicken, roll, cole slaw, potato salad, and Dr. Pepper — a "ninety-nine-center" plus.

Because I had arrived at noon, things were a bit hectic. Drums began to beat assembly while I was still eating, but fortunately I was not the only tardy soldier. Before anything else I had to arrange for my baggage to get to the dock — there was simply too much to carry in the parade. A tip from a comrade-in-arms sent me to the "Carling (Brewery) Command Vehicle", or whatever. The driver told me he would carry my gear, but because of size limitations I should tell no one else. Shin took care of the transfer of equipment, while I rushed to my company.

Captain Davis was calling us to order and was most displeased when all Concord Minute Men fell out to have Jason Korell take our picture. I was still struggling to sling my "harness" on when we began to march. This was a brief jaunt to the front of the town office building where all companies present lined up for review. We had started this bit on schedule at 12:30, but now were somehow held up. If there were speeches, I was too far down the line to hear them. At one point, as I stood there drifting along with my thoughts, Carl DeSuze snapped his camera in my face. I may be famous yet.¹

Soon Col. Arnold, Gen. Washington, and some others reviewed us and received our salutes. The parade began like a typical AVA film show — start, stop, start, stop, and all within the first 150 yards.² There was a high, thin overcast, but the sun had been shining through since mid-morning and the temperature registered at 75°. I perspired considerably en route to the harbor. Again the crowds were not large, but they seemed to enjoy us. I would judge the route to have been no longer than $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

As soon as all companies had been stood at ease on the dock, those 40 who would sail were called to fall out for instructions. While more speeches were read to the crowd and the other infantry, we new "marines" were told to gather all gear immediately. Shin got mine in no time flat, and so I was ready when names and boat assignments were read off. To my surprise I had been reassigned from Sultana to Vayu, rumor claiming that the Sultana had sunk en route. Once again all participants had to sign little, pink "release from liability" cards.

With 35 lbs. of kit in a sea-bag on my right shoulder and 10 lbs. of tent and sleeping bag under my left arm and musket on my back, I struggled through the crowds and quickly got onto the loading ramp. Two cabin cruisers stood by to transfer troops to their

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"ships". In the confusion that followed, we decided simply to board as the opportunity arose, rather than ship by ship. Five of us got on the first shuttle, and the other four men boarded the Truant, a ship run by sea scouts.

I boarded the Vayu, a 28-foot ketch out of Newburyport, owned by John and Jean Peabody. I was surprised at the small size, but I quickly settled in. All my gear went in the forward bunks, and because of the heat I removed my rifle shirt and took my camera back to the cockpit. Shortly we were joined by George Brooks of Morgan's and Jack Dwyer of Dearborn's, a last minute replacement. Our crew had been completed between 1:45 and 1:55.

The harbor was quite colorful with many non-fleet boats along for the ride. A neighbor anchored near the Vayu began playing his bagpipes.³ There was fife and drum music from the pier, and down

the shore a ways a field piece was being fired at 3-4 minute intervals.

By 2:40 the fleet was getting under way, Vayu being one of the last to go. We were happy to discover [that] Jack Dwyer is a veteran sailor, and his talents were soon put to use. Before long we began to cheat with our engine, for Capt. Peabody had been asked to lead the fleet from the harbor. We never did take the lead.

By 2:55 — with just 5 minutes to spare — we crossed the bar of the harbor. Here the waves ran a good five feet. We spotted a fin cutting the water off our bow and soon discovered a sunfish perhaps 3 feet across. At this point our escorts began to drop off.

Ever since our boarding the fleet an overcast had set in. Around 3:15 the south wind opened up enough sky for the sun to shine. The sun was still out at 3:25 when rain began to spit, so we pulled out our ponchos and other weather gear. The situation was cordial, but conversation was limited.

Even without the engine we made about 4.5-5 knots and eventually overtook better than half the fleet. At 6:15 we stood opposite the Isle of Shoals. A magenta sunset was not totally obliterated. At this point mal-de-mer hit George — it followed him throughout.

The passengers took turns at the tiller, and at dusk I started my stint. By now it was cold enough for me to have put my coat and scarf on in place of the poncho — there was no more rain.

After about an hour and a half I gave over to George. With darkness we followed the lights of one or two sailboats. A full moon broke through around 9 PM and by 9:30 the wind had blown away all clouds. Under the moonlight the swell makes the ocean seem to pulse and so be alive. The peacefulness of sailing without engines is amazing. The foam along the bows sounds like carbonated water.

By 9:15 I was back in charge of the tiller. We passed Boon Ledge and heard its "whistle", a mournful, bovine sound. A little after 10 the fog set in. During this "first watch" Jack and Jean took bunks below, George stretched out along the port bench in the cockpit, and the captain and I stood by for duty. While I guided the boat by the star Vega — our binnacle had no light — the captain whipped up a supper of meatloaf sandwiches and macaroni + cheese. Only he and I ate that night.

By 11 PM we had sailed out of the fog and continued our course at 50°. At 12:15 the watch changed and I went below. I am told

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that everyone suffered some effect of sea-sickness except me.

Notes

- 1: Carl DeSuze is a "disc jockey" and much more for WBZ radio in Boston. He often lectures on his travel experiences. He was one of the few media people to take interest in AEQ, following our daily progress and reading selections from Kenneth Roberts's Arundel.
- 2: "AVA" stands for audio-visual aids, a group of high school students generally noted for their lack of skill in operating media equipment.
- 3: I believe that this was Donald Duncan, skipper of the Dorothy.