

A Journal of  
The Battle of Long Island — Brooklyn  
as Kept by  
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of the  
Company of Captain Oliver Hanchett

Saturday, 28 August 1976

By 1:15 AM I had finished my packing for the trip to Brooklyn. This time I travel light with one small laundry bag of clothing changes and my old pup tent in a small nylon bag borrowed from Peter Murray. Joe Rose has offered me the use of a spare sleeping bag. I have my usual weapons. I will wear my Concord small clothes save for the weskit as it has been rather hot lately. My poncho will be my groundcloth, and the rifl shirt will be my blanket.

About 1:50 I started the drive to Hanscom Field where I was to get a ride from Frank and Marge Records. It had stopped raining already but there was quite a display of heat lightning which continued until near dawn.

We packed all our gear into Frank's Vega wagon and were under way at 3 AM, exactly as planned. We followed Rte 128 and then turned onto Rte 95. Shortly before the Connecticut line I took over driving and continued for a little over an hour until shortly beyond Saybrook. I then dozed until we pulled into a Howard Johnson cafeteria where we spent 10 minutes over Danish, sausages, and orange juice.

As we approached Brooklyn I tried to help navigate by use of a 10 year old map. Some of the route numbers have changed in the meantime. Still we managed to get into the rough vicinity of Prospect Park before the map failed us completely. A few questions at a gas station then got us the final 10 blocks to the park.

All of the driveway entrances to the park were blocked to car traffic, so we circled the entire park once with no success. Once back at the main gateway we spied a sentry who waved us on in. Carefully Frank picked his way through the joggers and cyclists and soon we parked near the campsite. Down the hill from the Senior Citizens Center, which functioned as a sort of H.Q. building, we found Hanchett Co. encamped. This was about 8:30.

At the campsite we saw the campers of Ron Davis and of Bob Bocko and his friends drawn into a kind of square along with the camper of the 5th Light Infantry and the cannons of Capt. Samuel Lockwood. There was some question that our location might soon be moved, so we hesitated to pitch our tents for a while. On a picnic table at the south end of our square Bob Bocko and two of his friends, George and Frank, who had temporarily joined Hanchett Co. were working with Sarah Chayes and Joe Rose to roll cartridges for the afternoon's battle. The powder was from a 2-pound can bought by Dan McLaughlin from Peter Murray. Sarah had got a package of white lined composition paper, and this made very tough cartridges. 80 grain charges were poured from a brass musket flask.

Soon Barbara Davis called us into her camper for a breakfast of

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fried eggs and bacon. It seemed that the breakfast promised us by Brooklyn had not arrived. Since I had already "broken fast" earlier, I had no scruples about taking a root beer with this meal.

After eating I crawled into the back of Bob Bocko's camper to change into my uniform. I then went about setting up my tent by the field pieces while Frank and Marge set up to my right and directly opposite the tent used by Joe and Winnie Rose. The sun was shining through a misty sky and it took little effort to work up a sweat.

Shortly after the tents were up the drums beat for our 11 AM assembly. Hanchett Co., ten of us in all, formed a column of twos and then struck off across the roadway and onto the rising ground to the east where the rest of the army was drawing up. At first we marched into a gap next to some riflemen. Then Ernie Tschanz, late of Capt. Hendricks's Co., AEQ, informed us that militia units were to line up farther down to the left. As often happens with us, Ron Davis then explained the manoeuvre he wished us to try as we changed location. It worked fine, and soon we were standing with Capt. Hutchinson's Co. of about 30 men to our right and 4 U.S. Marines to our left.

This assembly had been called to allow officers from the Brigade of the American Revolution, which was in charge of technical aspects of this celebration, to examine our equipment. First one officer came along to check authenticity of our gear. No modern style glasses were to be worn and no cameras to be carried on slings. Then two more officers came down the line to see to our safety regulations. Here I was in trouble. After taking care to leave my ramrod at home, I had forgotten to bring my frizzen stall and flash guard. The officers noted this and told me that if I could not find this gear by 1 PM assembly, I would be taking home a clean musket. I would also have to leave my unsheathed tomahawk in my tent. Not even officers could draw their swords today. We were also checked for improper cartridges, warned not to draw ramrods, ordered to fire at no less than a 36° angle, and banned from drinking from now until after the battle.

At dismissal we returned to our camp to await the drum call "Roast Beef" signalling the arrival of lunch. George, who also lacked a flash guard, searched through the camp but found none for sale. Dan McLaughlin gave us each a leather frizzen stall. George then tried working a piece of tin can into a guard but soon gave up on it as being too flimsy for safety. Just as we despaired of firing a shot Frank Records came up. Walking across a stretch of park he had noticed a clamp which had fallen off a bicycle. Cut in half it would roughly resemble a pair of flash guards with even the screw holes provided. Ron gave us his blessing, and then George and I set to work to make our own guards. A little work with a rattail file got the screw holes open enough to fix the metal onto the lock. Then it was a matter of bending its curve with pliers and filing some spots to clear the pan cover. Our handiwork passed inspection.

There had been no lunch call, so I walked up by the H.Q. tent of the Brigade to see what was available. Soon a car pulled up and

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bag upon bag of McDonald's burgers and fries was handed out. I found a place in line, waited patiently, and then was told that only Brigade members could eat. Turning away I found a nearby snack bar where I got a couple of cans of soda for Dan McL. and myself. Back at camp Ron gave me half a burger and a handful of fries which he had got somehow.

It was about quarter to two when the 1 PM assembly was called. Dan was still assembling his musket when we fell in and then he took more time to fix a quick baloney sandwich before we could march off to the line. This time we came to our assigned spot with no difficulty.

All music was massed and beat a slow French troop as we all marched off to the right in a column of fours. To the south we went 50 yards, to east briefly, and then to the north and out onto Flatbush Avenue until we had reached the northern portion of Prospect Park where the battle would take place. Here there was a lengthy halt while the officials tried to clear tourists off the battlefield. All troops fell out to sit along the banks. A group of Hessians began singing a German ditty a short way off, and Hutchinson's Co. then decided to drown them out with Yankee Doodle.

After about 15 minutes we reformed and began to march down onto the fields. The steep grassy slopes caused some difficulties for those wearing leather-heel shoes. Halfway across the field the column marched right and after a bit countermarched and so on until we had formed into two separate columns on the northwest corner of the battlefield. Here there were some speeches and then the whole of both armies was inspected by units by the Brooklyn celebrations committee. After this a recently formed Brooklyn militia marched out before us and promptly turned in a variety of directions at the order "right face." Remembering similar mistakes in our earlier days, none of the units joined in the crowd's laughter.

At last we marched off and around to the south along a roadway through a depression among some trees. Here all troops fell out for awhile, the regulars neatly stacking their arms. Just as men began to rush toward a fountain a ways off, the commanding officer shouted to unit commanders to hold back their troops and send only a few to fill all canteens. Joe and Sarah went off to see to this matter.

As we sat waiting and listening to lecturers over distant loudspeakers, we could hear occasional volleys in the same area. Certain regular and continental line companies had earlier marched off to give a demonstration to the spectators. Soon George came down the path with a very tall box in his hands. It was full of trays of coke and ice from McDonald's. A van had driven up and given George this box to distribute. With the heat on the field it was not long before a mob formed. I think all the ice was chewed after the coke was gone. Soon Sarah and Joe returned with our canteens and received cokes that we had held for them.

Not long after this we were called into line once again. American troops marched north and British east. Ron had already explained to us our role as "levees" in the battle. On the field our column marched west, then wheeled right and faced about. The m.c. then

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requested us to withdraw another 75 feet to find our proper position. Our double line faced about and then advanced. We were guided on a red Liberty flag to our left. As some officers moved to the head of their companies and so guided on that flag while others joined their front lines and so guided, the lines soon broke by companies in several places. When we halted and finally faced about, Hanchett Co. front line, in which I was, stood well advanced from the rest of the army. Line officers now moved out in front of our lines to shout commands and direct our movements.

In front of us skirmishers with rifles advanced to pick away at a handful of Hessians who were moving toward us. I don't think there were more than seven of the enemy coming against about 150 of us. Our front rank knelt down having already loaded. We were then given the order to fire at will. It was hard to remember not to aim at those brass miters, but the line officers kept a close watch on our muskets.

With our first shots I noticed that my left wrist was catching a blast from Joe Rose's pan in spite of his guard, so I moved a bit forward. I also discovered that I was doing myself damage. My improvised flash guard was vertical and so did not fit in against the bottom of the pan. Flying powder then hit the guard some going up and the rest going down onto my right hand. It was not a serious problem.

I also found that the composition paper of the cartridges was quite tough and required a strong pull of the teeth to open. My agate "flint" was beginning to show its age, and I had to adjust it on several occasions. In this humidity the burnt powder soon became greasy and coated the flint, which had to be wiped clean.

After about a half dozen rounds we noticed that the British coming in from the east were rolling up the left of our line. Instead of withdrawing immediately, Hanchett Co. formed its double line to face the redcoats and then fired a careful volley. At this Ron ordered us to withdraw slowly. As we backed to the west we collided with another unit and so adjusted to move north until we were in line with a pair of field pieces.

Now several uniformed companies of the Brigade advanced to the south to take the parts of Smallwood's Marylands and Haslet's Delawares under Gen. Stirling. We continued to fire off to our left against the redcoats, who had now stalled. Occasionally we fired a volley, but chiefly it was independent fire to use up our powder. One problem that I have never had before was the heat of the barrel. From rapid firing and the added heat of the sun it was impossible to grasp the barrel or even shoulder arms. I also had to help Dan adjust his flint from time to time. I don't think I've ever felt dirtier between grease, powder, and sweat.

When our fire slackened a line officer had us reload for a volley and then had us hold off as the loudspeaker called a ceasefire. Now the dead rose. Andrew Davis came back to us and got three huzzas for his five deaths. We were also rejoined by a kid from New Hampshire who carried a toy gun and had been allowed to tag along with us in the second line on condition he quickly fall dead. All during the battle a gang of locals about 10 yards behind us carried on with their volleyball game.

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We now marched back to our original position of review and wheeled right to face the crowd in two long ranks. From right to left we fired a joy-shoot, being advised to pull our triggers as the lock to our right moved. It went rather well until my piece missed fire as did the one to my left. We then changed ranks and the joy-shoot was repeated from left to right. Finally "God Save the King" and "The Star Spangled Banner" were played followed by a single massed volley.

We then wheeled left and departed for camp at a quickstep. Back on the rise above the Brigade tents we were dismissed to await the supper call. As usual the redcoats took much longer to fall out.

At our tents I removed my gear and then walked up to the Senior Citizen Center to scrub off my hands as best I could. In time chow call came and up on the ridge we got Col. Sanders's 99 centers, just as at Newburyport last year.

Dan McLaughlin then came by to present us each with a ten dollar bill from Brooklyn and a first day cancellation envelope. Dan planned to take everyone to Coney Island for the evening, but I'm not big on amusement parks so I volunteered to stay as guard. Bob, George, Frank, and Sarah also voted to stay. About 8 PM everyone else got into Ron's camper and moved out, leaving some beer in a cooler for us.

The evening was pleasantly cool. We talked to some 84th Highlanders from Ottawa who were camped next to us. They had just been invited to the Battle of Princeton. Across the roadway from us Lockwood's artillerists drank, blew a bugle, and fired muskets through the evening. Sarah rolled all her paper for cartridges. The rest of us talked shop, smoked clay pipes and drank some beer. The sky became a pink fog after sunset.

About midnight I rolled out a borrowed sleeping bag, lay on it, and pulled my rifle shirt over me.

Sunday, 29 August 1976

I woke up around 8 AM and quickly changed into my civvies. Most others were still in the sack. Up at the officers' tent by the Brigade there were Danish and coffee to be had. Back by the tents Sarah and I played some fife duets. In a little a piper began playing out on the field. Sarah then began polishing the brass on my Brown Bess.

Once Frank had opened his wagon I shifted my gear there and then struck my tent. For once it did not rain. In fact the sky cleared rather nicely. By mid morning camp was broken.

Around 11 AM Dan came by to lead us to his place on 45th Street for brunch. There were to be some ceremonies later in the day, but they would not involve the army directly. Bob Bocko and his friends decided to join the Brigade for some early afternoon drills.

At Dan's his wife and sisters prepared a fine brunch of scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, rolls, doughnuts, etc. After the visit Dan was going to lead everyone over to the Statue of Liberty. This side-trip would have cost a couple of hours, so Frank, Marge, and I decided to head straight home.

The trip went well and I was home by 10:30 PM.