

A Journal of
The Hubbardton Campaign
as Kept by
John F. Denis
of the
Company of Captain Oliver Hanchett
Friday, 8 July 1977

My alarm went off at 6:40 and I looked out to see a full overcast. While I was dressing I noticed a light rain falling, but within a few minutes it had ended. It was to be hoped that the weather front which was bringing this mist had already passed through Vermont. Judy eventually arose and prepared three corned beef and pumpernickel sandwiches and then went back to sleep.

At 8:20 Peter Murray arrived and came in to lend a hand with my gear which, aside from the usual weapons and slings, included a pillow case with one change of smallclothes and a rolled sleeping bag with poncho and rifle shirt. For this weekend I wore my bonnet and left my westkit off.

By 8:30 everything had been stowed away in Peter's Alfa Romeo and we were off for Rte 2. Peter made pretty good use of his CB in keeping track of the state police, and so he was able to maintain a fine — and illegal — rate of speed. We cut north on Rte 140 and at Keene headed west toward Bellow's Falls; we crossed into Vermont on Rte 91 below this town and then cut west for Rutland. All this while it rained steadily, but traffic was pretty light.

Rutland traffic and detours slowed us a bit, but we made it onto Rte 4 and soon were on the road to Hubbardton. Rather than go straight to the battlefield, Peter turned off on a side dirt road to the house of some old friends of his. As we turned onto this road, we spotted a fawn and doe not fifty yards away in a field. These friends of Peter's, the Cornwells, own 1500 acres of land on and around a mountain called Grandpa's Nob. It is a rather isolated place with no neighbors in view. The house itself has picture windows on two sides which look out across the mountain and valleys. It took us only three hours to get here.

When we arrived Peter introduced me to Cathy and Beth Cornwell. We talked for a while — particularly about teaching — and then the girls had to leave for Rutland. At this point Peter and I went on to the battlefield to get some information, for we still did not know just where our camp was to be placed. At the battlefield headquarters we found that, except for one fellow from the Royal Artillery, we were the first arrivals. We signed the register and then went to inspect our future home.

The camping area was a stubbled hayfield stretching about 300 yards north of the h.q. Since the field lies a good $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet below the level of the road, we had to search for an entrance safe for the car — the driveway was at the very end of the field. The field being wet and the rain still falling we returned to town (Castleton Corners) to get a few supplies for the evening. We then returned to the Cornwell house, where we decided to run through the Von Steuben manual — the Budweiser made the work that much easier and in half an hour we felt pretty confident. Our supper

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was a pair of grinders from the general store.

Eventually the girls returned and so did some of their other friends. When a certain amount of visiting had been done, Peter noticed that the rain had stopped and we agreed to set out for the campsite. Had the weather remained rotten we could have stayed at the house.

About 6:30 or so we found Joe and Winnie Rose already on the campground. Their tent and Peter's were the same model, so we followed their set of instructions. It was quite a performance. No sooner did matters seem to be under control than Peter managed to fall into the tent and bend two of the aluminum poles. The damage was minor and soon repaired; however, no matter what we tried the tent sagged. Despite its weak looks the tent stood throughout the weekend. We then helped Joe and Winnie, and their tent worked just fine.

Very quickly Peter found some old friends from AEQ. Mel Fuller drove in, and once he had found his company we had a fine chat. There was no further rain and the sky was lightening up a bit. I walked along to look over the battlefield. From the road the field slopes upward to the west along its full length, the grade increasing gradually as you go. The battlefield and the campground were rather badly rutted in spots, though most of the battlefield was not so bad. Along the crest, just beyond sight from the road, a low stone wall ran north-south, and at the highest point is a one story slate house which used to be the visitors' center. From the stone wall the hill falls away sharply and after fifty or sixty yards is covered by dense underbrush. A road runs along the valley below but is mostly obscured by the foliage. The whole area is surrounded by mountains.

Along the modern road, between the campground and the park h.q., there is a small frame building next to which the local boy scouts had set up a huge kitchen tent. Here you could buy hot dogs, hamburgs, and soft drinks. For my supper I chose a couple of hamburgs which I wisely requested as well done. Peter Murray's was more like medium raw. The fare was not bad but the price of 75¢ seemed a bit steep. A bag of ice cost twice as much as in town — a clear case of war profiteering.

As darkness fell the mist continued to roll down from between the mountains. Around 10 PM the rest of the 4th Middlesex began to arrive at the campsite. Joe Rose had a battery-operated lantern which helped a bit, but the car headlights helped most those who were now pitching tents. There had been a playing of "Taps" at 9 PM to signal silence, but it had no effect on any part of the camp. There was much joking in our area.

Around midnight I turned in. It had become rather cool so I decided to sleep inside the sleeping bag. I removed only my neckerchief and shoes. The noise outside continued for some time, but once I found a comfortable position on the rough ground I dozed off.

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At 5:35 AM there was enough light and noise to wake me up, and as it was time to visit one of the white sentry boxes I was quickly up. The air was damp but was warming as the sun rose and burned off the mist. The boy scouts were offering eggs (any style) and toast for six bits, but I decided against it.

Palmer True had scheduled a drill session for 8:00, and it started only about five minutes late. The first thing accomplished was the establishment of positions for everyone. The company was divided into two squads of eight men each. The squads stood side by side in two lines forming an 8-man front. The first several minutes of drill were then spent in wheeling from line of march into line of battle and back again by squads. Perhaps we worked a little too long and passed our peak, for one of our last tries was a fiasco.

Then Sgt. Leo * reluctantly moved to the front to take us through the new Von Steuben manual. Peter and I had little trouble, but Palmer soon got cute and began snapping out unexpected orders. It was like a game of "Simon Says" and several men were caught from time to time. Jokes and commands came non-stop, and Palmer showed his usual patience. I can't think of any other captain who could put up with this crew.

When we came to drilling the firing procedure there was great debate. The manual requires a very awkward position when the musket has been loaded, and Palmer wished to carry on with it. Eventually the problem became so obvious that Palmer gave in and we "poised" the loaded muskets.

Once an hour had passed, we were dismissed. It was getting hot and I had decided not to wear my vest. Joe and I then went up to the H.Q. to see about souvenirs. There were first day cachets for the battle and bronze or pewter medallions. The bronze being cheaper I went for that.

By the time we had finished this, the busses for Ft. Anne, N.Y. (five of them) — which had arrived toward the end of our drill — were just about filled. The 4th Middlesex was probably the only outfit not aboard at this time. The men were scattered along the road and some thought we would have to take our own cars. Joe rushed back to camp to leave the cachets. It was 10:20 and long past departure time when Joe and Peter drove up. The busses still waited, and Peter was impatient, so I joined him in his car and we set out for Ft. Anne. Less than a mile down the road we passed three N.G. trucks on their way to complete the convoy.

It was great to ride with the top down and Peter set speed records in getting there. Once in Ft. Anne he slowed a bit, for he had been ticketed there the year before after the Battle of Valcour Island. We circled the town all the way up to battlefield and then drove back down when we heard of the parade that would take us back that way.

The hike from the parking lot wasn't too bad and we soon fell in with two light infantry from the Welch Fusiliers. In talking to them we found that we had traded shots with these two from time to time over the past few years. Their disdain for Vinny Keogh is as great as anyone's.** A school bus carrying several redcoats stopped to pick us up and we rode the last few hundred yards up the hill. We also stopped to pick up Sam Hall (of the 2nd New Hampshire) and his wife.

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On the hilltop we found all of the other troops already arrived. Off to one side the various redcoat units took turns going through their paces. When the British moved off down onto the field below the road, the spectators soon followed. The hill sloped downward moderately and unevenly, but except for some saplings and brush at the top to the right, there was a clear view of the whole area. Once all the others had moved out, the Yankees finally started down, the Continental units in the lead.

We marched to the right side of the field. The Continentals first fell out and formed line of battle by wheeling left. We militia units passed behind this line and then wheeled left so as to form the right of the line. A ranger officer commanded our wing. It was now 12:15 PM.

It was quite hot — around 85° — and we had a bit of a wait. From where we stood we could not at first see anything of the enemy. The spectators covered the left flank of the field, which was the high ground. Finally the Union Flag and a yellow regimental standard appeared above a crest to our front. It took the enemy some minutes to deploy and during this period a girl in one of the militia companies collapsed. She was moved to the rear of the lines where it appeared that she was in no serious difficulty.

Around 12:40 the British line opened fire from the crest of a very low hill in front of us. With this the Continentals advanced in a single extended line. As more redcoats moved up, the Continentals withdrew and the militia was ordered forward. It was not too difficult to advance over this field and our lines were steady. As we had drilled, the front line knelt as locks were cocked. It was essential that spacing between men be maintained at all times for safety in firing. Once we had fired, the front rank stood and we all came to loading position. When Palmer could see that all guns had been cleared, he ordered reloading.

Several times we advanced and then withdrew according to the directions of the field officers. Once we even kept pace with the moves of the Continentals. With the humidity the burnt powder quickly greased up the flints and frizzens, which had to be wiped off every three shots or so. Casualties went down from time to time, usually as their muskets began to misfire, but Palmer sometimes asked for volunteers. When one redcoat in a group of ten fell before our sixteen shot volley, we cheered. It's most unusual to see any of those fellows go down. At one point we withdrew from the advance of just six men, but orders are orders.

There was but one problem in the battle. During one of our early advances Bob McLean inadvertently double-loaded. On the next discharge the blast temporarily deafened Bruce in the front rank. He was no worse off than Bob Bocko had been under similar circumstances at Quebec, and his hearing returned quickly.

By 1:25 the Battle of Ft. Anne was over with no one holding the field. It was an interesting exercise, but it had been a bit too organized. The redcoats led from the field, and we followed them up the hill. A British Consul was said to be present, but if so he kept his silence. The short speech by a local official began before the last of the troops had reached his stand. Then we marched off toward town in the same order as before. It was 2½ miles and the

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heat soon had men falling out by the roadside, especially redcoats and Continentals. Palmer wisely got us to troop step in short order, so we made it easily.

In the center of town a chicken barbeque had been prepared. It was a long wait in line, and all the tables had been set up in the sunlight. Chicken, cole slaw, baked potato, roll, watermelon, and soda. The food tasted great, but the heat had taken most appetites away. Seconds on the soda were most welcome, and it was the first time I have ever enjoyed watermelon. Our special reward was a small decaled drinking glass.

* * *

(I interpose at this point a major element of our regimental lore which does not appear in my journal because I was not an eyewitness. Nevertheless, the episode should never be forgotten. At a bar in the center of Fort Ann, NY, a number of Sudbury men had sought refuge from the heat. Another pitcher of beer had just been placed on the table when Bob MacLean (a.k.a. "Cap Huff") came through the door to announce that the bus was about to leave for Hubbardton. An objection was raised to the effect that the beer had yet to be finished. So Cap Huff saw his duty, picked up the pitcher, and drained it in one long pull. At that his men followed him out to the bus. More than a year later patrons at that bar still spoke in awe of this feat.)

* * *

Peter had skipped the meal in order to rush back to camp for a date, so I had to find a ride elsewhere. Joe and Winnie were getting a ride in the van of _____ so I joined them. We left Ft. Anne close to 3 PM.

Back at camp I began to work on my diary and spent most of the afternoon at it. About 5:00 a wind came up and appeared to threaten bad weather, so I battened the tent. Peter had last been seen zip-ping past with a young lady some time before. At 5:30 I joined _____, Rosie, Gordon Savatsky, and Joe and Winnie for a ride into Castleton for supper at the college. Supper cost \$3.00 and was a fine roast beef dinner with seconds. During supper our table began telling jokes and this carried on all the way back through camp that night.

The clouds still threatened as I once again toured the battlefield. The wind kept up and forced men to dig pits for the campfires, the fuel for which had been donated. It grew cold enough after dark for me to wear my rifle shirt.

The rangers next to us spent the night rolling cartridges. In our camp a couple of men who had missed AEQ objected to any further reference to those good times, but that was not possible. I learned that one Sudbury man named Bacon had lost his teaching job for playing hooky on AEQ. It seems he was interviewed in Canada, and AP published it in the States. I also learned that Joe Kolb is preparing to help recreate Hannibal's crossing of the Alps.

About 11:30 I crawled into my bag, but the noise outside kept me

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up until Peter's return an hour later. When I stepped out across the road to get rid of the last beer I had drunk, the wind had died and the stars were perfectly clear. It was cold.

Notes

- *: It will become obvious to the reader that as of this weekend I had yet to be introduced to many of my new comrades-in-arms from Sudbury. My confusion with names is in retrospect somewhat amusing.
- ** : Vincent J-R Keogh tended to lay it on rather thick while in uniform and could irritate reenactors — particularly those of the redcoat persuasion — while "playing the role." Still none can deny his commitment to our hobby or the exceptionally fine job he did in creating and fostering "His Majesty's Tenth Regiment of Foot."

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Around 3:45 AM, as scheduled, the British began to muster. They would have several tasks before the morning battle, and so their early rising. We were to have had an extra hour of rest, but our tent was right next to the camp of Roger's Rangers and these allies of the day before had now been assigned to play the part of Hessian jägers. Their noise awakened us and the cold air moved us to dress quickly. Joe and Winnie were awakened in turn by our noise.

The sun was far from rising, but the rising crescent moon and stars provided fair light. I walked up to the mess tent, which was already open for business, and ordered scrambled eggs and toast — they were quite good. About this time a line of school busses drove off with our enemies.

The 4th Middlesex began to gather around 5:30 and we were still standing on our own little drill ground when the sun rose over the mountain tops. Palmer went over the battle plans, but these were rather sketchy. Detailed orders would be given by field officers as matters developed during the battle.

We were one of the last units to depart the camp. Spectators, perhaps 3,000 even at 6:30 AM, formed along the east side of the field and watched as Continental units drilled before them. We marched straight up to the ridge and then formed behind the stone wall. There was as yet no sign of activity on the valley trail far to our right. We later learned that the British were held up in their four-mile woodland hike by a wheelless 2-pounder which they had to carry.

Palmer then led us along the wall to the far left of our army. The ridge ends about fifty yards from the slate house by sloping down into the valley on our left flank. We were moved back down the slope from the wall and then wheeled so as to face south and guard the left flank. Several other militia companies including Dearborn's and the Essex Regt. formed in this area. And then we waited.

There was no sign of the enemy, and some men began to drift from their positions. On our right the Continentals moved back down in order to continue drilling for the crowd. I walked around for a bit and took pictures during this period. The Essex Regt. was eventually sent off down into the valley before us and disappeared beyond the trees. They were the farthest left and the most advanced of our units.

Around 7:20 we were once again brought to attention and shifted so as to form a reasonably straight front with Dearborn off to our left and the Green Mountain Boys to our right. Soon we could hear firing off from where Essex had gone — there was a lot of it. Then directly to our front we heard shots from an advanced skirmish line, which was out of sight beyond the steep curve of the slope. In time they came into view, being pushed back by a couple of dozen redcoats — the 64th, I think.

Behind us were two or three field officers (including Tom Nolan, who had played Washington for AEQ). Once the skirmishers had cleared off to our right, we were allowed to commence firing by volley. Today, due to the extent of ground to be covered, we were formed as a single line.

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There was nothing remarkable about the firing. We followed the drill fairly well, though a couple of guys had too much trouble loading for us to fire quickly. As usual Palmer lost his voice after half a dozen commands. As it had been at Ft. Anne, this started as a genteel exercise — when one side advanced, the other withdrew. And so we went back and forth several times. I seem to recall seeing the Essex falling back well below us to our left about this time, being pursued by grenadiers. With the fall of our left we too fell back 20-30 yards. Peter and I were marched straight at a tree this time — had we been Hessians we would have had to go through it. I believe that it was just before this withdrawal that a squad of light infantry advanced at us with bayonets charged. Palmer barely got out his orders in time, for those red-coats were no more than five yards behind us when we faced about. It was curious to hear those field officers casually discussing possible manoeuvres all this while.

One final time we advanced, though not so far as our first position, and then the Continentals to our right were pushed from the wall and down the slope. It was difficult for officers to maintain formations, for in effect our lines formed a chevron which was being forced into a smaller and smaller area at the northeast corner of the field. Companies began to overlap, and as lines crumbled and officers called for general retreat we were freed to fire at will, as we had at Quebec. Now the battle began to look authentic. Casualties piled up. (Leo later complained of being stripped of his equipment as he lay there — his own son took his musket from him). To our front an officer went down (Col. Ebenezer Francis?) and then the grenadier who moved to bayonet him was shot. Eventually the survivors were forced into the last corner of the field between a hedge and a rail fence. Here the battle was brought to a quick end.

When I checked my watch, it read 8:25 — a very fast hour. I had used 19 cartridges. On our walk back to camp for beer I heard much talk of how this compared favorably with Quebec.

Back in the camp the first order of business was the cleaning of muskets. The barrels weren't too important, but the locks had to be rubbed clean or we'd have more misfires. Fortunately moisture had not collected in those fouled barrels the night before, as we had feared.

Our cartridges were running low, so Peter got out his measuring kit and pre-rolled papers. In about 15 minutes we had prepared nearly 50 rounds for the afternoon rematch. In the meantime had fried eggs and bacon on his campstove, and we all partook.

Several of us now headed up toward the park H.Q. in order to view the battlefield diorama — it's always nice to have some idea of what you're supposed to be doing. The fellow in charge at the desk took us into the back room and started a tape recording. Before us was the battlefield on a small table. Once the lights went out colored lights on the table, coordinated with the tape, indicated the troop movements. Even with this display the actions seemed quite complicated. At any rate it appeared that we were a part of Seth Warner's division.

Just as we were leaving the room the guide told us in a hushed

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voice that a two-star general had just landed by helicopter. I guess we were expected to salute. There's nothing more superfluous to our activities than the presence of modern brass — except that of politicians.

Back at the camp the enemy once again boarded busses, but this time they would not make the long forest hike. The audience was gathering over by the field, although it was still a bit early, and Palmer led us out to drill some of the finer points of wheeling. We marched to the west end of the campgrounds and then moved left onto sloping, open ground which led to the ridge. This field was badly rutted beneath its matted grass, and it was quite difficult keeping one's footing let alone the lines. For a good twenty minutes we marched up and down and around the slope in the hot sun, modifying our actions until Palmer was satisfied.

At the end of this session we sat in the shade of the trees and bushes which lined the stone wall between the camp- and battlefields. In time the Continentals began to file up to cross over to the battleground, but Palmer held us since he had received no orders. Shortly Peter came running down from above to call Joe and me up to the ridge. The British would be seen far down in the valley clearing. From just beyond the wall they could be seen — American militia were skirmishing around a farmhouse and I began taking pictures.

When it dawned on us that the 4th Middlesex must soon be called up for this battle which had already opened, we hurried back to the trees and found our company gone. The three of us hurried back along the ridge to the left of the lines. Along the way we stopped to see below us the guidon of Dearborn Co. as the skirmishers fell back to the south.

Just in time we took our places in the line in the same position as for the morning battle. Soon Jack Dwyer and the Dearborn crowd passed by us to take up their places on our left. All of the moves were the same as this morning's. No sooner had we fired our second rounds than field officers began to call for casualties. I had intended to fall a bit farther down the field, but after our fourth volley I fell high on the hill — Peter was critical of my performance. Once down on the grass I slipped off my cartridge box for someone to take, lay on my musket, and got the camera from my haversack.

At my distance from the crowd there was no problem in moving a little bit, but I was a little concerned at how the redcoats would respond to my being not quite "dead." I got fine shots of the thin red line as it stopped a few yards before me, but I did not much care for their level firing over my head. As they advanced I ducked my head, and their black lieutenant stepped over me. One of them made a show of trying to wrest off my shoes, but there was no further plundering. The line of firing never again passed my way.

For several minutes further the armies marched and counter-marched in my vicinity and I could see little. Once the Continentals fell back from the ridge, then the action began to move back toward that northeast corner of the field. I was pretty much alone now and out of sight of the spectators, so I packed up my camera, put on my bonnet, took my musket and ran up to the ridge

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to the slate house. There I found several cameramen and a fine view of the whole field. Unfortunately I was out of film by now.

Even now the battle was by no means one-sided. The 11th Massachusetts made a sudden bayonet advance against a British line which was unprepared to respond. As the lines met they halted and then stood there uncertain of what to do next. To my far right — near the place I had just left — a new, and inauthentic element arrived. About twenty members of the 10th Massachusetts light infantry suddenly moved in from the trees, firing into the rear of the British lines. The redcoats were surprised and angry, shouting for "Ross" to cut it out. Finally the grenadiers made a bayonet charge and the 10th withdrew, but one tardy character fired point blank into a grenadier. This stopped the charge, but was a stupid move. The 10th's activity ended when one British volley knocked them all down.

As the fighting moved back, some hand-to-hand combat appeared. One limping grenadier had to use his bayonet as a buckskinned character rose with clubbed rifle to threaten him. About a half dozen yards from each other they circled about until both agreed to go down at once. Back to my right I saw a redcoat drummer find a "live" member of the 10th and go after him with his dirk. His caution probably resulted from fear of damage to the drum he still carried. On another part of the field a half dozen rangers worked over a downed officer with tomahawks.

In all I guess some 30-40% of those on the field were now strewn about as casualties. It looked quite realistic. At the very end a mutinous plot was carried out by the lieutenant and men of the 4th Middlesex. At the firing of a certain British volley all men went down, leaving Palmer in command of nothing.

At this point I continued along the ridge and off the battlefield to walk down through the camp and rejoin my company. All units were regrouping at that final quarter of the field. We then marched off behind the British to form up along the east side of the field. Here we waited for a time and then received the thanks of some official. Finally we were given certificates of gratitude from the Republic of Vermont.

At the dismissal we hiked back to camp. Because we had struck our tent around 11:30 AM, Peter and I were just about ready to roll. After a few goodbyes we set out at 3:00 PM with the top down. By 7:00 we were in Lexington.