

A Journal of
The Monmouth Campaign
as Kept by
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of the
Fourth Middlesex Regiment of Massachusetts Militia

Friday, 23 June 1978

At 9:03 AM we departed the Lexington Mobil station in Peter Murray's "Brat." There was a short stop at Minute Man National Park to hitch up with Bruce Kidder and his family, and then we moved out down 128 to the Mass Pike. The sky was cloudless and the air was warm and breezy.

On the Pike we ran into the first of delays due to road construction, but it wasn't until Connecticut's Rte 86 that we were flat out stopped — a ten minute halt. Our beer ration called for yet other, yet briefer stops. We didn't bother with any other stops. Rte 84 led to 684 and then to the Garden State Parkway. Here a CB call warned of a 4 mile backup, so we moved off to catch the Jersey Pike. Foiled again, we got into a jam behind a jackknifed rig just two miles shy of the Jamesburg exit.

Finally we got onto Rte 522 East. At the gas station in Englishtown the thermometer read 82° at 3:35 PM. Within 10 minutes we were pulling into the Cobb House parking lot, even as Bruce Kidder (who had separated from us back in Connecticut) was arriving from the east. Not more than a minute later Jack and Colin Chisholm pulled in.

The Cobb House, presumably the H.Q. for this affair, was all but deserted. A boy who was there knew nothing of the camping arrangements. Less than a hundred yards west of the house a mowed field of several acres was obviously intended as a campground, for "sentry boxes" and "water buffalos" were already in place. But the IVth Middlesex had been assigned to camp with the fife and drum units, and we couldn't be sure where to pitch the tent. We tried going east toward Freehold but found nothing of importance and so returned to Cobb's. Back at Cobb's we found Paul Hansell and Al Greaves, who had avoided our dilemma by taking a motel room.

At the Cobb House campground we found one Royal Welch Fusilier who had arrived at 2:30 and was now awaiting his sergeant. We drove onto the field with the 4-wheel drive and scouted possible campsites. The field apparently had been planted with strawberries, because a few small samples remained. Again we could not be sure where to camp.

Back in the parking lot we found a member of the Royal Regt. of Artillery, who directed us to the State Park area off Rte 33. He claimed that all camping was to be set there. Off we went, taking a right off 522 and after two miles catching a right on 33. The park was about a thousand yards up on the right.

There was no charge for entry today. Off to the right we saw a couple of tents pitched, while at an intersection a sign bearing a Union Flag and an arrow pointed the redcoats to the left. Near a small brick outhouse complex we found a parked command vehicle.

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In one of the windows was a sign: "Less Pomp, More Circumstance — G. Woodbridge." David Earling, an officer from the Brigade of the American Revolution, was inside and answered our knock. He wore camouflage overalls, and a white T-shirt displayed George Washington flipping a bird with the legend, "Up Yours, King George." He knew nothing of our location, only that we did not belong inside the park. By process of elimination we figured that the Cobb's House lot was in fact our campground.

Before leaving the park we paid a brief visit to the visitors' center to check for publications. While I was selecting a couple of books and some prints, Peter was impressing the young lady behind the counter. Perhaps we shall have a visitor this evening.

We did not return directly to camp but went back to English-town for cold beer and ice. Once back at our campground we started setting up our tent between a number of small mulberry trees. This took but fifteen minutes. We waited awhile and after a few beers we set up Joe Rose's tent — we didn't do this as easily. In this time we met Don Shapley of the IVth and another fellow from Morristown, who camped near us. Strangely enough the only tourists we met were a couple from New Hampshire.

Peter and I now took off eastward to find a grocery store, and we did find an A&P on rte 9. Here we got eggs and margarine. Hurrying back to camp we set up the Coleman stove on the truck's tailgate. I fried a total of six hamburgers and enjoyed four of them. We even added onion and cheese. This was around 8 PM. I noticed that with increased consumption of beer, the rocking of the sentry box grew proportionately less noticeable.

As the sun set I attempted to keep my diary, and I was aided by the light from Don Shapley's lanterns. A few minutes past 9 the next wave of Middlesex men arrived and began to set up camp by the light of their headlights. I spent much of the evening in writing these notes.

There was further drinking of beer, and I dropped by to visit with Bob and Audrey Childs. While we compared notes on equipment, etc., Bob worked at getting his miniature tv set going. We couldn't catch any news at this late hour.

About 12:15 I began to try for sleep, but this was almost impossible between the noise of late arrivals and the need to dash for the sentry box every hour or so. Around 2:45 AM the noise from one area sounded familiar, and I moved on over to find Bob McLean and other friends drinking punch and making music. A worthwhile half hour was spent with this jolly crew, and when this party broke up the camp finally fell quiet.

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I was awakened at quarter to six but turned back in for an extra hour's rest — not sleep. Camp life here is very informal, so there was no attempt at reveille. The weather promised to be a repeat of yesterday's. Whipoorwills thrive around here.

Peter had already cooked his own breakfast and now he began mine: five sausages, two fried eggs, and a couple of pieces of bread. For drink I settled for water. Joe and Winnie Rose had arrived at 5 AM, so we left the stove and pans for them to use. Little else other than chatting with friends occurred for the next few hours.

At 9:30 the company fell in on the open field in two lines. There was a delay while the lieutenant arranged his sergeants along the lines so as to set off sections of four men each. Captain True then moved along the line checking safety fixtures on muskets. The drill began with brief run through the basics in the manual of arms. This exercise going passably well, we moved on to wheeling from line of march to line of battle and back, and then we tried wheeling the line of battle. It went pretty well despite the chuck holes dotting the field.

At last came our old nemesis, "the oblique." Despite all attempts by the officers, this never really worked well. Further drill in the afternoon was promised. A few more times around the field and we dismissed at 10:25.

There was a quick securing of the camp now, for we had to set out for the parade in Freehold by 10:35. With just a little delay our convoy set out, led by Bruce Kidder, who knew the way to the mustering area. The CB sets helped to take care of stragglers.

We mustered in a large parking lot in the general vicinity of the neighborhood race track. The parade was designed for music units and floats, so the muskets of the IVth Middlesex were to provide the largest color guard in the world to assist the Sudbury Fifes and Drums. We noted with interest that one of our colleague companies in this parade was the IInd Middlesex Militia of New Jersey.

After 11 we were called to form in parade order, many of us still finishing off our Good Humor bars. Peter Murray took one flag, Al Greaves another, while Paul Hansell and I handled muskets for the color guard. We stepped off promptly and moved down some shady side streets until we found our place in the line of march. Here we halted and fell out to sit on the tree belt, and a good thing we did so, for we waited the better part of an hour for things to move out.

As we waited, I went back to work on the journal. Later someone came along handing out souvenir facsimiles of a Jersey newspaper from July 1778. We all stood and our musicians doffed their hats as The Old Guard Fifes and Drums came by. I don't believe that I have seen them since the spring of 1976.

At about 12:18 the parade finally stepped off to wind its way through many side streets and the center of town. The sun was fairly well screened by haze much of the way. The crowds were large, polite, and enthusiastic. The first fifteen minutes of the parade held many delays, but after that the movement was generally steady.

There was to be no shooting, but toward the end some very loud

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firing — apparently by locals — could be heard. We came to a halt in the park near the Battle Monument at 1 PM precisely. Provisions had been made to feed musicians, but musketeers would have to fend for themselves. Therefore, Palmer led his musketeers the half mile or more back to the parking lot.

As on the way over, I caught a ride with Bob and Audrey, whom I directed to the A&P for groceries. A second stop for beer and we returned to camp. The afternoon was frittered away in pleasant conversation, especially on the topic of antique weapons. Several men had tried to find a direct route from camp to the battlefield, but they were turned back by a swamp and wire fencing. Others had been to the 18th century encampment, where they had collected some interesting free literature. Palmer was off with other unit commanders receiving final word on the morrow's choreography.

Palmer was to be back for some special ceremony at 4, so we stayed in camp. But when it came to 4:30 and he was not yet back, Bob, Audrey and I decided to drive over to the park H.Q. and catch the sights and sounds. On the way we stopped to photograph what is reputed to be Molly Pitcher's Well, along the side of the road.

At the park we had several stops on our agenda, but we thought first to go behind the visitors' center to seek the best vantage for photography. No sooner had we selected a likely spot than we met Palmer, who wished us to return to camp for a very important meeting. From his appearance we feared bad news, and we headed back straightaway.

Once back in camp Palmer summoned all persons fourteen years and older for a meeting at which new information would be explained. Here we learned of our location on the very right of the American line — position of honor — where we would be in the center of press coverage. Thus we also learned where to place our photographers. The safety rules were reviewed and also the morning drill schedule. Casualties would be heavy: five per cent on the first charge, five on the second, and twenty-five on the third. It was decided that we should march over a $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile trail rather than drive to the park.

At last we came to the ceremony. Dave Osborne was not with us this day due to a matter of matrimony, and his wife was not sympathetic enough to allow him to participate in tomorrow's battle. In this event Dave had sent funds for purchase of three bottles of very fine rum that we should drink his success. And so we did with photos taken to send along to Dave.

Now several cars returned to the park, which was on the point of closing down for the day. Most troops were in the supper lines, so we wandered freely through the camps as did the few other tourists. It was a photographer's delight. Along the way I once again met such old friends as George Brooks and Jack Dwyer. David "McCobb" Holmes was also about and speaking for next year's Penobscot Expedition.

Several suttlers had set up during the day, though by now only Avalon Forge remained open for a very brisk business. Here I found the brass tobacco case and burning lens which I had planned to buy. A manual of arms and a copy of Common Sense made for a tidy sum, which my emergency check covered.

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We spent more time in a fruitless search for a friend in Dearborn's Co. We did get a couple of glasses of iced tea from the bottom of a tub of official rations. As we left we met Dan and Bernadette McLaughlin, who had just arrived from Brooklyn. They were in with Jersey Light Infantry in Lee's Brigade. We gave them a ride back to our camp, but all of their old friends had gone off somewhere. So off they wandered, and we lost track of them.

Around sunset Peter, Joe and Winnie returned with a pizza from a nearby tavern — it was rather poor stuff. My supper had consisted of two cheese sandwiches, so even this pizza was welcome. In fact I hadn't eaten much this day. My lunch had been a single ham sandwich made by Audrey.

In the little remaining light I once again took up the journal, but eventually I had to borrow some more of Don Shapley's light. Major, his Shelty, is still confused by my beard. During this time a sing-along had grown up around Les Longworth's supper table. There being plenty of light in the vicinity, I went over to continue note-taking. From Irish and Scottish songs they moved along to American and calypso, as Les in his straw boater strummed a guitar. Eventually we got down to limericks, and some of our younger campers were then escorted back to their tents. There was heavy competition from fifers and drummers, but as the hours passed so did they.

At one point Bob McLean managed to break a lawn chair, and still later he almost managed to bring the whole tent roof down. As lanterns ran out of fuel, replacements were brought in. In time things quieted a bit, but the last of us did not quit until 1:15.

Back in the tent, once things had quieted in our camp, it was possible to hear the highland pipes from the British camp just the other side of the woods. There was also artillery, probably from Ft. Dix.

A note on our visit to the park: We toured the British camp, where we found officers and ladies dining at tables decked with canlabra. Most redcoats simply ignored us. A black fellow from the 64th snorted his contempt for the 10th and "Sir Vincent," who were staying in motels.

One comment heard directed a child from an exasperated redcoated parent: "Why don't you go play with the Americans?"

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I awoke to the sound of distant roosters at 5:45, but I rolled back into my sleeping bag until 7. It was cold — we could see our breath the night before. I was pleased to have an air mattress, and I used my weskit as a pillow. At 7 AM there was a very light mist on the campground. I was coughing from what felt like a chest cold, but that should burn off with the mist.

Peter started breakfast by frying up all of our bacon. He then fried eggs and melted cheese strips on them. The resulting Egg McMurrays were very good indeed.

We began breaking camp immediately after breakfast, and by 9 everything was packed.

Shortly Dan and Bernadette, having spent the night in our camp area, departed for Brooklyn. Dan forgot his musket and has hopes of getting back in time for the battle.

At 9:20 the drum beat "assembly" and we fell into two lines under arms. Palmer being off at a briefing, command of the company fell to Lt. Leo Zschau and Lt. Warren Coulter. We drilled the usual evolutions, skipping only the "obliques" as hopeless, until 10:10, when we broke for lunch. Assembly for battle was set for 11:00.

The interval was spent in various ways. All available bottles were cleared of labels and, as with canteens, filled with water. It was held, even by our grandest imbibers, that only a fool would carry alcohol with him on this hot day, for it would surely knock him down. Several men started a game of bocce ball, which I tried for the first time.

Before a second round of bocce could be tried, Palmer returned with more news from the final briefing. The great concern seemed to be for absolute authenticity on the field. Official photographers would have cameras with 10,000 mm lenses, which would pick up great detail, therefore no wrist watches were to be worn. Only wire-rimmed glasses could be worn. Men with horn-rims would simply have to follow those in front of them and hope for the best in a blurry world. Palmer assumed that the command had given up hope of banning our cameras from the field, so it was merely requested that we be very circumspect about using them.

Of course we went once again through safety regulations. Flash guards and frizzen stalls were checked. No ramrods were to be carried except by safety officers, who would have to insure empty barrels after the shooting. Safety officers — one for every eight musketeers — were to be designated by white handkerchiefs worn on the right sleeve. Since we were fighting in shirtsleeves, "bloody bandages" — theatrical props from an earlier battle — were substituted. All blades must be sheathed, although bayonets could be fixed during post-battle review of the troops. Finally, firing would be by volley only and with muskets elevated to forty degrees.

There were now ten minutes before battle assembly, and men rushed about to secure their equipment. Many of us made a last crucial dash for the sentry boxes, for this would be a long afternoon of uncertain opportunities.

At 11:00 sharp a drum beat assembly and Warren lined us up in a column of twos beside the camp. Since musicians would not be allowed on the battlefield, those with muskets brought them along.

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Fifers can sling their own muskets, but drummers can't, so several of us volunteered to carry drummers' guns. I came to regret my generosity later. although the musket I accepted was a toothpick compared to mine, my ten-pound Brown Bess had to be slung, and added to all my other gear, a loaded canteen and a haversack full of camera equipment, it became very uncomfortable.

For some reason there was a delay, but at 11:13 we stepped off, the left file moving out first to form the company into a single file for marching down the roadside. The lieutenants moved forward to block traffic, and we crossed the road to march east facing the traffic.

As yet the heat was no bother, but the extra musket was occasionally banging my Bess, and its steel butt plate managed to dent and scrape her stock several times during the day. I shall have to see about replacing the current finish. Another coat of stain and a lot of linseed oil, as Bob Childs is doing, seems a good bet.

We moved at a route step along Rte 522, and then recrossed the road to follow a dirt track under railway tracks and into the woods. All this time our music had played with barely a pause between tunes, and so they continued now. On this last leg of the march to the battlefield, we marched at a regular step in double file. Here and there along the path were tourists.

Coming out onto an open meadow atop a low hill, we halted briefly and pulled off the track to allow an ambulance to pass, presumably carrying the first victim of the heat, but certainly not the last. Our camp followers, well armed with cameras, trailed behind us, and it was thought that they might leave us here. But no, there was more trail to cover.

Down an easy slope we marched, noticing a snow fence running zig-zag off to our right to separate spectators from the battle. Here our followers stayed. We moved into a low, forested swamp and the path became damp instead of dusty. Where a stream crossed the path, a narrow wooden footbridge took us over, and very soon we began to climb "heartbreak Hill," a long steep grade leading up to the State Park visitors' center. It was on this hill that I began to feel something more than simple discomfort, but once at the top I figured that I could make it through the rest of the day.

Marching into the American camp, we passed by a small pond and moved into Nathanael Greene's brigade area. We drew up by the bank of the pond and then fell out while Palmer moved up to the command marquee to confer with other officers. In front of us the IIIrd Essex Militia drilled. They had been to our left at Hubbardton last July. It was about 11:45, and there were a very few cirrus clouds and a pleasant breeze.

Now the non-fighting musicians departed. George Neumann, our Brigadier, next called all of his "regiments" into marching order. He and his adjutant moved through our ranks for a safety inspection. They were especially making sure that all cartridges not in blocks were wrapped in foil packets of ten rounds each. I heard one of them lament that since they could find nothing wrong we were wasting their time. Seeing cartridges wrapped in pastel papers, the adjutant said to Joe Rose, "Very pretty." Later one speculated to the other that one of the foil packets might hide a baked potato.

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This over we marched up onto the park driveway and halted. After some time we were allowed to fall out and sit on the grass nearby. Across the pond we could watch the other brigades, composed chiefly of continentals, form and pass in review — a very impressive pageant.

Long after noon our brigade was called back to order, men standing shoulder to shoulder in columns of four. All brigade music was gathered to the rear, and it was difficult to hear our marching beat when passing by so many other drummers.

The Hessians whom we passed were singing, rather badly, German songs. The redcoats were not very impressed by the appearance of the militia — some things never change. One noted my second musket and commented on my preparation. Highlanders from Canada were there too; indeed it seemed we were passing in review before the entire enemy force.

At the edge of the hilltop behind the visitors' center we moved back down the trail to the swamp, forming into double file as we did. Tourists were still coming up the path and we got stuck crossing the thickly packed bridge. Once at the edge of the woods the column wheeled left into a cleared cornfield and then reformed the column of fours.

As we moved along the back of the field, one brigade formed a line to our left, another to our right. Twice we halted and then moved up; and by the time all maneuvering of columns was ended, the continentals lined the very back of the field and our brigade stood before them.

In this place the American army seemed totally isolated. At the edge of the field there was a thick growth of high weeds, which after a few yards gave way to woods along the stream mentioned above; and these woods then climbed up Comb's Hill to the British camp. In front of us the field inclined very gently for about eighty yards, but the ridge thus formed was high enough to block our view of any land beyond it. The field itself was very dusty with dry reddish soil and sparse growth of weeds and occasional corn plants stood in straggling rows. Here and there a dried out corn cob showed what the farmer had missed.

I have never seen a more impressive array of troops. Stirling's and Lee's continentals stood at least five men deep behind us, yet their line extended down so far that I could not see the end of it. Among the troops was the Old Guard, or Washington's Life Guard, with sixty-four musketmen plus officers and non-coms. Their uniforms were impeccable, even to their white wigs.

Soon one of our commanders came down the line and told us to break ranks and keep comfortable, so many of us moved up the ridge and sat down. Canteens came into use frequently, and we could not help but feel sorry for those continentals in wool coats. Sure enough, within about ten minutes a National Guard ambulance was charging into our midst to pick up a fellow who had gone down in the woods. One red coated Yankee drummer wore a handkerchief under his cocked hat as a makeshift havelock.

Palmer called us back down for another briefing and then let us go again. Several of us now moved toward the top of the ridge, and halfway there we could see the mob of spectators covering all open

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areas behind the snowfence. An officer of the IIIId Essex changed his mind about relieving himself on the far side of the ridge, although we pointed out that no one over there could possibly see him or what he was about.

At last our final summons came, and we formed up in our double line of battle, which order we had established that morning. Because of a slight change in plans for our brigade's approach to battle, our lines were now reversed, so Palmer ordered a nifty reverse. The left half of both lines faced about, and then the whole company pinwheeled, pivoting on the center. It worked perfectly.

Now at our previous briefing, casualties had been distributed. Each of us had taken a number at random. Three numbers were ordered to die after the first enemy assault. Numbers 6, 16, 26, and 36 were to fall at the second. At the third assault even more were to go down so that we might show 35% casualties. The IIIId Essex was also to take a beating. So that I might fall and take pictures, I traded my #9 with a number 8 who was to die. I figured if I writhed enough in my death throes, I might get shots all over the field, though Palmer felt I might merely invite an enemy bayonet.

We had been in this field since about 1:30. At 2:20 precisely the Pennsylvania and Virginia rifle battalions marched down to the left and, spreading into one open skirmishing order, advanced up and then disappeared beyond the slope. Their role was a repetition of Morgan's Division's on the Plains of Abraham in October of 1975. We could hear the scattered puffing of unrammed charges from beyond the ridge, but we could see nothing.

At 2:24 the Light Infantry Brigade, composed of several distinct companies, advanced up the same section of slope as the riflemen had. Among them was Dan McLaughlin, who must have set records in getting to and from Brooklyn. Their firing came in distinct volleys, again out of sight.

As each of these units moved up the slope into battle, those left behind cheered them on. One line company even gave out that staccato, barking cheer of football players preparing to go into a game.

Many unit flags were cased in the interest of authenticity, but those which were unfurled made a grand show in the breeze which was made for displaying colors. One regimental flag was composed of red and blue horizontal stripes. Another showed black and yellow vertical stripes, with a diagonal band reversing the order of the field. The Old Guard marched under a square blue flag with a circle of thirteen stars.

More continentals now went over the ridge, and artillery could be heard. We began to wonder if our brigade were to be forgotten as at Princeton. When Lord Stirling's brigade moved out, I checked my watch and saw that only fifteen minutes had passed since the riflemen had first moved out. Our drummers had long since stashed their instruments in the tall weeds, so I was armed with my own Bess only.

Finally our commanders came along to take us out to the action. Commands were to be given by our Brigadier, but they were difficult to hear on so long a front, so our "left face" was none too neat. Our division would hold the right of the line — a great honor for mere militia. We marched along the back of the field, almost to