

A Journal of
The Penobscot Expedition, Phase II
as Kept by
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of the

Fourth Middlesex Regiment of Massachusetts Militia

Friday, 27 July 1979

In part because of the gasoline shortage I was carpooling with Bob and Audrey Childs on this trip to Castine, Maine. Although I had arrived just on time at 9 AM, with all the last minute packing of their trailer and business in downtown Cambridge, it was well past 11:00 when we set out on Rte 95 north. Along the way we dined on ham sandwiches, Pepsi, and doughnuts.

Of this lengthy drive there was but one noteworthy incident. We left the Maine Turnpike for a few minutes in Lewiston to refuel. Having easily returned to the pike we cruised along for close to half an hour before it struck me as unusual that the afternoon sun should be steadily to our right on a northbound road. We were nearly back to Portland before we could turn back. A kindly toll-taker allowed us a "U-ie" outside his booth and so saved us a few bucks in extra tolls.

Following Palmer True's suggestions, we departed from Rte 95 in Augusta and took Rte 3 toward the Penobscot region. Just beyond Belfast an impressive fog closed in, making it seem more like 8:30 PM than 5:30. In Bucksport we had to refuel once again, this time riding on empty. Here we spotted the familiar face of Joe Brown, and from the next shopping center we were hailed by Joe Rose.

Beyond Bucksport the route to Pen-Ex '79 was well marked down Rtes 175 and 166 to the Devereaux Farm. Crosby Milliman seemed to be in charge at the roadside registration table. He greeted Bob and me and, answering my question, said that the fog should burn off in the morning giving temperatures in the high 70's or low 80's as was the case this morning. There was a remarkable lack of efficiency among the ladies running registration, but eventually I had my meal ticket.

The Devereaux front yard has quite a slope upon which we saw many tents pitched. Fortunately the campers were to be settled in the relatively level back yard. It was about 6:30 when we pulled into a spot near Leo Zschau and several others of the IVth Middlesex. Obviously in so small an area it would be impossible to reserve suitable space for our whole company. Still we were able to set off enough area for Joe Rose and several others to join us. Once the camper had been leveled we hitched a hose to the faucet just across the driveway and — with pauses for others to fill pots and jugs — in time filled Bob's 20-gallon tank.

In view of the President's drive to conserve energy — it was stated as an afterthought — Leo brought his grill full of burning coals over to us so that Bob could barbecue chicken. When Bob had finished cooking we passed the grill along to the Roses. About 8:30 we sat inside the trailer to dine and to avoid the mosquitos. At 2 minutes to 9, as we dined, we heard the welcome arrival of the

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long-promised "sentry boxes." Bob and I washed dishes after the meal of chicken, salad, and peas.

There was a pleasant surprise as we found Dick Day, who had driven in from Colorado, and Peter Arnold, who has not been seen in uniform since April 19th 1978. So the IVth is hosting a small reunion of our old Hanchett Co.

Kids monitored the CB and helped bring in Peter and Stacey Murray, who arrived a little after 10 having started at 5:30. About 10:45 Palmer and Bruce True arrived. They received perhaps the last space in our campground. Other late arrivals were being directed to neighboring gravel pits.

Despite the mist the evening air was very comfortable — a fine break from the current humidity of Masstts. By the light of Coleman lanterns we read the late-arriving scenarios of tomorrow's battle. All troops appear to be involved in the amphibious assault. In fact I don't believe I've ever seen a more ambitious plan for a reenactment.

More of our militiamen strolled in from time to time, the wild crew of MacLean, Longworth, et al. coming along about 11:20. "Red Horse" (Bob Harrison) contacted us by CB about 11:45. When asked when he had first set out, he said it was a long story but he had left Marlborough on Thursday. It was figured he might arrive for the retreat activities in August.

The songfest began at 12:30 AM and did not end until over an hour later while the final camper was being crammed into our area. Some of our neighbors were displeased at all this. A fellow from the Vth Connecticut something-or-other talked of mortar fire for revielle — aimed in our direction. A little after 2 AM our camp turned in.

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Somebody tapped reveille at 5:15 AM and the men of the IVth were instantly semi-comatose. I had spent the night in the rear of Leo's van, a fairly comfortable place to sleep since it was certainly drier than my tent would have been. Of course the fog was as thick as the night before, allowing you to see only to the perimeter of the campground.

The morning's activities opened with a 15-minute wait in line for the sentry boxes — as crude a pair of one-holers as ever have been designed. Then some of the men showed up with our G.I. breakfast: cornflakes, an orange, and a raw egg. One man observed that these were probably the three meals for the day. Another claimed that the best thing about such a meal was that there was no line waiting for it. I didn't bother with any of it. Audrey boiled the eggs for a number of men.

Formation time was set for 7:00 and there was the last minute rush and delay. But there was no drilling, for as soon as the company's vans and cars were in the driveway we boarded and set out the last several miles to Castine. At the head of the caravan was Lockwood's Artillery — our neighbors in Brooklyn in '76 — with a long flatbed trailer complete with gun, caisson, and a baby buggy. The men were all over the flatbed with the captain standing. The whole thing looked like a float of Washington crossing the Delaware.

The town of Castine is quite pretty but the water remained covered with thick fog. A rumor was running that only two transports were available which could carry only 46 men instead of the whole expedition. Slowly the three divisions — York, Lincoln, Cumberland — formed in a parking lot at the foot of the dock. From time to time staff officers addressed us from atop a camper. From Crosby Milliman we learned that the fog had indeed prevented the arrival of 7 of our transports; however, overtime volunteers from the Maine Maritime Academy would come through with several small, power boats to carry as much of the army as possible. We were cautioned against such breeches of etiquette as pivoting on the decks in our "army shoes."

Sam Hall then addressed the troops advising us to synchronize watches at precisely 7:55 AM. Not surprisingly there was no vital reason to refer to a watch all the rest of this day.

Now Gen. Wadsworth (C. Milliman) required of each division commander the number of volunteers who would still wish to take part in the amphibious assault. Since several full companies, parts of others, and one divisional commander had not yet arrived, this inquiry was repeated on three separate occasions. By 8:30 the number of would-be marines was about 200, including 11 men of the IVth Middlesex.

The first to embark were the twenty or so Continental Marines — a sharp-looking outfit — under command of Tony "Cold-Steel" Walker, retired Colonel of U.S. Marines. They and a few hand-picked volunteers boarded the two-masted schooner Bowdoin, the largest sailing vessel (about 60-plus feet) in our fleet. Not wishing to be late into battle our little platoon hurried down the gangway as soon as the next boarding call went out. A total of 24 soldiers joined the four crewmen aboard the small fishing boat Grand Canyon, also belonging to the M.M.A. Equipped with radar this vessel led the way

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to the landing site. It was 8:40 as we moved out from the dock.

The only sure thing about our part in the coming battle was wet feet. Considerably more might be wet if this boat had to stand too far off shore. Most of us took similar precautions. I removed my shoes, tying them to the ends of a double length of boot-lace, and hung them around my neck. The stockings I stuffed into the toes of the shoes and then I put a foil-wrapped ten-pack of extra cartridges into each shoe in case my cartridge box fell into the sea. The sling of the cartridge box I wrapped around the musket lock so that I could easily raise both above water even up to my neck.

We cruised along to the west always in sight of the shore — perhaps 100 - 150 yards off — which was obscured by fog so as to be little more than a ragged blur. As we went, we passed a relic of 200 years ago which might well have been a ghost in this mist. A cutter with her lugsail set, five oars manned, and a swivel gun in the bows was pushing toward the scene of battle. We moved on, apparently alone. Without a personal compass it was impossible to tell the direction, but we must have turned north eventually. Castine Peninsula is shaped roughly like the head of a shovel suspended south from the mainland by its narrow neck. The original assault hit the shore cliffs along the west edge of the "shovel." We would land on the northwest corner of the "shovel," the bottom of Wadsworth Cove, where the widest possible beach front would hold the battle. Aside from private property considerations it would be a risky business to fight on the actual cliffs.

Our travels ended when we came upon a power launch towing four whaleboats, all from the M.M.A. These were obviously the landing boats, but instead of transferring to them we circled until the rest of the fleet could come up. The marines on Bowdoin would go in first, as was only their due.

With the fog constantly shifting, we were occasionally out of sight of shore. Sometimes we could see figures along the beach, which seemed to be redcoats. At precisely 9:39 by my synchronized timepiece the first cannon fire was heard. Three pieces were worked by the fleet: the cutter's swivel, and one deck gun and one swivel on the forecastle of Bowdoin. To us behind these vessels, the echoes off the cliffs were far louder than the shots themselves. The fog shifted again and we could see nothing of the first assault waves at the beach, so still we did not know what to expect.

The circling wait reminded me of accounts of similar situations by WW II veterans. In about 20 minutes the Grand Canyon pulled along the starboard (seaward) side of Bowdoin. All soldiers climbed aboard the ship in order to transfer into the whaleboats along the port side, apparently to add authenticity by keeping motor craft out of sight of the spectators. There was a delay while two whaleboats were returning from their last delivery, and during this time we could see nothing of the shore.

I had been one of four promoted to sergeant during the company drill of the previous Sunday. Peter Arnold pointed out that as the only non-com present I was in command of the company's landing party. He then gave me some tips on getting the men out of the boat over the bows rather than the sides and on having no one try to climb over while carrying a musket. I appreciated this sound advice.

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All this while the two guns forward maintained a slow but steady fire, and the crew kept the schooner steady. The first whaleboat to return pulled up along the stern quarter where the men of the IVth were waiting, so as soon as the lines were secure we began to move down. One man would go down the rope ladder without his musket. He would then be handed his own musket and those of the next two men to go over. When everyone but me was aboard the coxswain informed me that ten passengers and a crew of five was mandatory limit. I pointed out that our platoon ought to go in as a unit. The coxswain okayed it and I jammed in between Peter Arnold and some stranger who had been assigned to the IVth for the day. Four of the soldiers along the gunwales took up oars and we started ashore at 10:10

The water was perfectly calm and in moments we were out of sight of both the schooner and the shore. The guns now fired behind us. Our first sign of the action ashore was a great, low cloud of stinking gunsmoke floating our way. The coxswain spoke up when the oars got out of sync., but he did not trouble to call stroke. At length I tried calling it and this seemed to help.

As we plunged blindly out of the thick fog the coxswain found that he had nearly delivered us into the center of the British forces. Throwing the tiller over sharply he saved us from the indignity of becoming P.O.W.'s before getting into the fight. Someone spoke of firing as we waded ashore, but moving around in a crowded boat is tricky enough without the danger of discharging a musket into your neighbor and I ordered no loading until ashore. We were delivered so far behind our lines anyway that the only targets were Americans.

The oars drove the boat hard up onto the rocks in the shallow water within ten yards of "dry" land. Even as the first man went over the bow an officer on the beach began urging us on lest we miss the battle. Obviously he had not walked this path in his bare feet. I was about the fourth man out. I handed my musket to the man just before me who waited while I clambered awkwardly over the gunwale, trying to keep my bayonet etc. from getting tangled. Once I had gained footing on those slippery rocks, I received my musket and then turned to take the weapon of the next man to come out. When he — Bob Childs as a matter of fact — was set, I handed him his Bess and then turned for the beach. This process of cooperation worked very well.

I picked my way carefully, yet I nearly fell down three times in those ten yards of calf deep water. I was so concerned with the rocks that I did not notice the water, which Bob later said was delightfully warm. Peter Murray, who had marched rather than sailed to the battlebeach and so watched us from the shore, later commented that every man who came off a boat seemed sure of falling down at least once, yet no one did.

On the beach, which was merely a 20-yard wide pile of wet rocks, seemed even worse for all the seaweed covering the half by the water's edge. As soon as I was far enough from the water, I set about getting on my shoes in order to save my feet. I fumbled with the double knots around the buckle tongues while that officer continued his shouting. With my stockings and spare cartridges in in pouch and my cartridge box around my neck, I hurried up to our line. Even with shoes you could not run across those rocks.

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The IVth seemed to be in the second double-battle line of the Lincoln County Division, which had three such double-lines. The beach could hold no more than 25 men across, and I could immediately see the one drawback to this portion of the reenactment: there were too many Americans for the space available, even with a large contingent fighting on the far side of the redcoats.

We late-arrivals from the sea formed on the far left (seaward) end of the second line of the IVth. As sergeant I was an "anchor-man." To our left was some small unit of about a dozen men.

Shortly after we were in line and had primed and loaded, our line was advanced toward the enemy who seemed mostly to be Highlanders. We fired two good volleys, on both of which I misfired. We withdrew and advanced again and again I misfired. As others loaded, I got a new flint from Bob and this proved to be the solution.

The movement back and forth was most awkward. Massed lines struggled to pass through each other, and the rocks and seaweed made it nearly impossible to dress ranks while in motion, though we tried it. Furthermore, there seemed to be lengthy delays between volleys even when firing lines were in position. Several times truces were held for parleys, and once the cutter sailed in from the fog to fire upon the officers. When a protest was launched, the sailors replied that an army truce was no concern of the navy's.

It has been a commonplace of safety rules that no blade shall be unsheathed in battle, yet there was a blue-coated staff officer hopping about the seaweed covered rocks with drawn sword that looked like a scimitar. He was as much a danger to himself as to others.

The landings continued through it all. Two I noticed. Late in the proceedings one whaleboat sent ashore a party of sailors including one fiftyish woman with a blunderbus. They seemed to be inclined toward the British. Two unarmed midshipmen from the M.M.A. wandered to the rear of one American unit and seemed embarrassed to have nothing to do. The final landing, at 10:58, delivered the Indian scouts who were to have gone in just after the marines.

The tide was rising now, gradually reducing the already limited space. Some officers boarded whaleboats to return to the schooner. The staff ensign — the French translator for AEQ — holding the red expedition flag stood up to his ankles in water. When it was suggested that he move, he responded that his general had ordered him to stand there and he was happy.

The beach curves around Wadsworth Cove — along the western edge of the "shovel's" neck — so it was possible to view some of the action at the far side of the battle area. A large party of militia advanced in vague order to be repulsed by the advance of a thin line of regulars.

The battle petered out. At one point we were ordered to fire our muskets straight upward rather than dump the loads or risk the mob of troops in front of us. As a conclusion the marines and then several other units fired salutes. On the plus side I overheard someone from another outfit compliment the IVth on its solid volleys.

At 11:22 our two firing lines faced right and then marched in double columns from the rocky to the sandy portion of the beach.

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We virtually trailed the rest of the army up to where the beach met the roadway. Here everyone halted and faced the road. As before nothing appeared to be happening and no information was coming along. I took the opportunity to sit on the running board of a fire engine and get my stockings back on. Just as I finished, the army began a march up the road through the handful of local viewers. Someone on a p.a. system was trying to raise three huzzas for various personalities to which no one responded. A few people — our dependents I suppose — applauded as the IVth was announced.

It was time for lunch and we were at the end of the line, so most of us crashed on a nearby lawn. With all of those people to feed, the organizers set up only one line. Several folks headed down the road to a hot dog stand. After a while I went over to the regular lunch line which had disappeared. Judy Kidder made sure that I got a sandwich with both bologna and cheese. There was also a glass of cherry "warm"-aid and a plum — I skipped the plum. We were later told that any leftovers from here would be "stored" for distribution in Phase III two weeks later.

At 12:25 several units began to fall in. We now heard of the tough luck of the IIIId Essex which was left on the dock without boat transportation this morning. To help make up for this the staff was rewriting the afternoon scenario to give the IIIId a lion's share of action.

Our division was last to fall in, and we marched a good mile uphill — quite steep in some places — then into a field and past the remains of the earthworks of Ft. George. We passed the fort and started downhill onto a paved road. In a rather nice section of town with two or three large houses and much wooded land we halted and fell out to rest by the side of the road.

The humidity was still bad but the sun was shining through and heating things up most uncomfortably. A neighbor opened his faucet to us and men were detailed to collect canteens and fill them. Officers took men's mugs to be filled as well. And so we settled to an hour's wait during which time I heard not a single shot from the fort, which was little more than a block away.

Sheer boredom. At one point a couple of cannon shots were heard, apparently not from the fort, but nothing further developed. Consideration was given to sending foragers out for cold beer, but no one knew where to find a store. Others thought we should simply march back to camp and be done with it. Joe Rose spoke of the Battle of Paulus Hook, which is coming up on 18 August in Jersey City. The IVth would not be going, but Joe felt a few of us could hook up with some unit. It seemed very unlikely that anyone would come back for Phase III. I was tempted.

Around 1:30 Palmer came along to prepare us for the long delayed action. In about 15 minutes we would be forming up for skirmishing activity. We formed at the head of the division heading downhill. Near the bottom of the hill we faced about to find ourselves now at the rear. It was only fair that the IIIId Essex should be in front. The division commander now explained that there was an overflow of redcoats from the fort, so these men would hold the top of this road against our advance. There was some question whether the IVth would even fire during this portion of the fight.

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A thin line of troops — some in red, some in blue, most in white — appeared on the crest. The IIIId moved up, sending out a few flankers. It was remarkable how spectators stayed in the line of the flankers' fire until the very last minute. For quite some time we were completely out of the action, chiefly because there was no room. The street was barely wide enough to hold our double line of battle. Finally we were ordered up the hill, near the top of which we had to wheel by sections into a double column in order to pass by the other troops. At the top stood two grenadiers, so Palmer kept our marching formation and had the front two men fire. When these two had finished, they fell back so that the next two could fire. Before I could get up to fire in the third pair, the grenadiers took off.

By now most of this small British force had headed off down the slope to our right through somebody's long side yard and hidden in a small thicket. Palmer marched and wheeled us behind the IIIId so that our double line of battle could face diagonally the enemy position. From here we began firing our volleys downhill.

Before too long yet another truce had broken out and another parley opened, although it was hard to tell at first since the redcoats' method of signifying a truce was to stand up and wave their own battle colors. During this breather a shot went off way down to our right, and a chubby British ensign began to complain. One voice from out of our ranks shouted: "Let's shoot the fat one!" "Which one?" inquired another. At this point Lt. Leo Zschau said he was not about to step in front of our lines. Someone claimed that the redcoats had run out of powder and were trying to get some from us. Absurd as this sounded it did look as though the returning British officers might just be distributing powder to their troops.

The shooting opened again, but after two or three volleys our division was ordered to fall back to the street. As we neared the roadway, the enemy came out from cover to give us a close, harassing fire. We did not respond immediately, but as soon as our marching column had reformed Palmer asked for a handful of skirmishers to pay the enemy back. Such being the best fighting possible, I dashed out with half a dozen or so others. Now, the redcoats were still in that open yard which was surrounded by thick high growth. Yet leading directly off our street and paralleling the yard was a well screened dirt track. Hopping down here we were able to flank the entire redcoat company and even to get behind it. From this point I cooked off some half dozen rounds, and I suspect that not a single shot was returned. When Palmer called us back my musket barrel was quite hot.

Lincoln Division pushed up the hill to within a block of the action at Fort George. When we halted, Palmer kept us in formation long enough to memorize our positions. Then we gathered 'round as he explained our upcoming role. We would cooperate with IIIId Essex. Because they were now down to seven cartridges per man, we would be called upon to do most of the firing. Palmer checked and found that each of us had better than twenty rounds left. We would advance in a column of fours and then wheel into double line of battle. When we had fired several rounds, we would march off and around to the back of the field to be replaced by the IIIId. Once they had finished

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we would exchange places by marching clockwise in a rectangular path. Thus the IIIId's participation would continue throughout the battle.

We fell out and got a little rest. Some of us went up to see the battle, which was amid another truce. American fieldpieces were being shifted around. A few hundred spectators covered the south-east earthwork and others lined the woods on the west of the small field in front of the fort. There was little enough to see, so I went back to a treebelt to rest some more.

At 2:55 we fell in once again in our original formation and moved up to the field, where the firing had resumed. Our position was to the left of the American lines.

The enemy disposition along this south face of the fort was as follows: on the southwest bastion stood Rogers' Rangers with one small cannon; on the south wall to the west of the gate was a Highland company; within the gate was a company of light infantry without coats, which leads me to suspect that they were Continentals; on the south wall to the east of the gate was a party of Royal Artillery with a small cannon. Any others I did not notice, but part of the battle was being waged along another wall which was well out of sight.

Once in line the IVth went its usual businesslike way in firing clean volleys. After two or three rounds we marched off as planned and were replaced by the IIIId. These two units look as good in action as any Continentals I have seen. Very shortly we were shifted back into line and took up the fight again. Another truce erupted while we were firing.

During this truce Fred Lawson of the 64th Foot, today serving with the Royal Artillery, began to line up his cannon on Leo, an "old friend." When the firing reopened we got to look straight down the cannon's mouth — some view! We marched around just one more time before settling in to finish the business. Now our casualties began to go down. When possible we advanced beyond them; otherwise they placed hats over faces and hands over ears.

Soon Fred Lawson could be seen complaining loudly about something. I eventually heard three explanations: first, that someone had fired pebbles from a pistol; second, that some American was down with a bad gash and needed help; third, that two militiamen had run up to his position and dragged him down the slope in order to "wound his dignity" (He reputedly had been insulting them all day). Not having spoken to Lawson I do not yet know the answer.

By 3:40 PM the shooting was all over. Toward the end the IVth Middlesex gave up 50% casualties and so reduced to one firing line. My musket barrel was uncomfortably hot so, as soon as Palmer had withdrawn us to the edge of the road, I began to dampen my handkerchief to cool it. Even water poured directly from the canteen onto the steel did nothing, so I used the wet cloth like a potholder to keep from burning my fingers. I had eleven cartridges left, and so I figure I must have fired around twenty-two in this action at the fort.

Our casualties limped convincingly back to us in good cheer. Off to our right an officer began to call for a medic, but it was unclear whether this was a necessity or an act.