

from their neighbors. Bullets, so a fire was lighted in the and lead was hurriedly red into bullet moulds. By everything was ready. The t large longboats that had Fenner's Wharf. The oar were carefully muffled and set out. Captain Whipple mand.

went through the darkness around Field's Point and so the "Gaspee" lay. They ap- close to the schooner before k discovered their presence. g out and brought the Com- sleepy crew to the deck. xchange of demands and t the boats began the attack. e fired injuring one or two ' crew, and in a few minutes o-hand fight was underway. on got the upper hand, made Commander and crew, and rted them over to the War- ere they were put into the g assistants.

s done the boats returned to spee" lay and she was set the Providence men rested nd watched the flames as m one end of the deck to p through the sails and rig- their boats were shaken r of an explosion. A mass l and rigging was shot high oner and fell back into the at splash. Bits of burning wn through the air, even the longboats lay.

in the "Gaspee" had ex- her to bits. Nothing was e floating wreckage and a l. The night's work was "Gaspee" was destroyed. e longboats were rowed men who were in them returned, each to his own

thing is that the authorities unish these men for burn- never were able to find out Almost everyone in town n, but no one would tell. nton offered a reward of

\$500 for any information as to who they were. The King of England offered \$5,000 reward for the leader of the expedition and \$2,500 for the arrest of any of the men who

had been with him, but no one could be bribed or frightened into betraying the patriots who had delivered their Colony from the hated "Gaspee."

## NEWS FROM LEXINGTON

**T**HE regular weekly issue of the Providence Gazette and Country Journal published on April 22, 1775, carried no screaming headlines such as "War Clouds Threaten," or "Enemy Invades Massachusetts," although Page Three of that quaint pioneer sheet did include a very matter-of-fact item to the effect that advice had been received from Boston on the previous Wednesday evening that a detachment of the King's troops had fired upon and killed a number of inhabitants of Lexington, about twelve miles north of Boston, and, as a result, "an engagement had happened." When this alarming news had been transmitted to the people of Providence on Wednesday, a great mass meeting was held and attended by prominent citizens, many enthusiastic patriots, and the officers of the several local independent military companies and of the militia. Following the meeting, two "expresses," or messengers, were dispatched for Lexington to obtain authentic accounts of what had transpired there, while other messengers were sent to different parts of the Colony and to Connecticut. The messengers that went to Lexington returned on Friday, the day before the publication of the news article, enabling the local paper to print a brief outline of the gallant stand of the patriots on April 19, 1775 — the engagement that marked the beginning of the end of British rule over the Colonies.

General Gage, learning that the people were gathering military stores at Concord, sent about eight hundred men, under Colonel Smith and Major Pitcairn, to destroy them. The patriots of Boston, however, were on the alert, and hurried out messengers to alarm the country. When the British reached Lexington, they found a small company of minutemen, as they were called, gathered on the

village green. Riding up to them, Pitcairn shouted, "Disperse, you rebels; lay down your arms!" They hesitated. A skirmish ensued, in which several Americans — the first martyrs of the Revolution — were killed. The British pushed on and destroyed the stores, but they were driven away in alarm when they observed the size and determination of the American militia. The enemy's retreat was none too soon, for every man, every boy large enough to hold a rifle, hurried to avenge the death of the fallen heroes who had refused to disperse. From behind trees, fences, buildings, and rocks, in front, flank and rear, so effective a fire was poured upon the enemy that none of the British would have reached the city alive if reinforcements had not been sent out from Boston. As it was, nearly three hundred were lost.

When the full details of the Battle of Lexington had trickled into Providence, the town must have been tense with excitement. Open warfare with Great Britain had long been accepted as a certainty in Rhode Island but such news as this must have caused many heated discussions on the street corners and in the taverns, and, very likely, fears were expressed in many quarters that the enemy might next strike in this Colony where the King's rule had been none too popular for some little time. Furthermore, Rhode Island lost no time in its war preparations. First, the General Assembly ordered an "Army of Observation" to be raised without any delay, and the militia companies were instructed to begin a regular schedule of drilling. This Army of Observation was raised in the name of the British King, and it appeared that the intention was not hostile to English interests. In polite language, it was raised for the purpose of repelling any

"insult or violence that may be offered to the inhabitants," but the promptness in which this emergency force was put in the field, and the zeal which the patriots displayed in rallying to arms must have troubled His Majesty somewhat and caused him to surmise that Rhode Island's military preparations might have had a far different meaning from what appeared on the surface.

Evidently, Nathanael Greene heard the tidings of the fight at Lexington late in the evening of April 19, after the report had passed on, from farm house to farm house, from town to town, until it reached the Greene homestead in Coventry. He mounted his horse instantly and rode to the alarm-post of the Kentish Guards at Greenwich, stopping at the home of a friend named Madison to borrow a few dollars in hard money. The Guards set out by dawn with Varnum in command. It was in the early hours of the morning that they marched, at a fast pace, through Providence. John Howland reported that, "I viewed the company as they marched up the street and observed Nathanael Greene, with his musket on his shoulder, in the ranks, as a private. I distinguished Mr. Greene, whom I had frequently seen, by the motion of his shoulder in the march, as one of his legs was shorter than the other." As the Guards were about to cross into Massachusetts near Pawtucket, Governor Wanton intercepted the march with orders delivered by messenger for the guardsmen to turn back. The Tory Governor's orders were obeyed by all except four who continued in the direction of Boston—one of these was Nathanael Greene and two of the others were his brothers.

This Rhode Island Governor who plainly showed the direction of his sympathies was suspended for having in various ways "manifested his intentions to defeat the good people of these colonies in their present glorious struggle to transmit inviolate to posterity those sacred rights they have received from their ancestors." A Committee of Safety was appointed which, with the two highest military officers, was to superintend the paying and furnishing the troops and direct their movements when called away

from the Colony. The number of men for the new Army of Observation was fixed at fifteen hundred. They were to be formed into one brigade, under the command of a brigadier general, and the brigade divided into three regiments, each one of which was to be commanded by one colonel, one lieutenant-colonel and one major. Each regiment was to consist of eight companies, one of them to be a train of artillery and have the use of the Colony's field pieces. On May 8, 1775, Henry Ward, Secretary of the Colony and authorized to act in the place of the disqualified Governor Wanton, signed and sealed the commission that made Nathanael Greene, Rhode Island's greatest soldier of all times, a brigadier general in command of the Colony's little army that was soon to distinguish itself in the field.

It is a pity that the muster rolls of those companies of Rhode Islanders who rallied to defend the liberties of the nation in the making, were destroyed or have never been found. Records of the soldiers who were fired by the same spirit that sent Lexington and Concord folks and their neighbors in headlong pursuit after the retreating Britishers are few; the State archives are bare, and what few muster and pay rolls remain are scattered and in private hands. The names of all the commissioned officers are in the Colonial Records, but the official State papers contain no lists of the non-commissioned officers and privates. Some of this valuable information has been uncovered from other sources but the bulk of the documents that contain the patriots' names and ranks have never been brought to light.

A letter to Mrs. Greene written by the Brigadier General from Providence before he departed for the front clearly discloses the determination of a typical Rhode Island patriot who stood ready to defend common rights and repel "bold invaders of the sons of freedom." This communication penned on June 2, 1775, is quoted in part, "I am determined to defend my rights, and maintain my freedom, or sell my life in the attempt; and I hope the righteous God that rules the world will bless the armies of America, and receive the spirits of those whose lot it is to fall in action into the paradise of God, into whose

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The number of men for observation was fixed at . . . They were to be formed under the command of a . . . and the brigade divided into . . . units, each one of which . . . commanded by one colonel, . . . one colonel and one major. . . . s to consist of eight com- . . . mands to be a train of . . . the use of the Colony's . . . ay 8, 1775, Henry Ward, . . . Colony and authorized . . . ce of the disqualified . . . , signed and sealed the . . . made Nathanael Greene, . . . greatest soldier of all . . . general in command of . . . army that was soon to . . . in the field.

the muster rolls of those . . . le Islanders who rallied . . . ties of the nation in the . . . troyed or have never . . . rds of the soldiers who . . . same spirit that sent . . . ncord folks and their . . . long pursuit after the . . . rs are few; the State . . . and what few muster . . . in are scattered and in . . . e names of all the com- . . . are in the Colonial . . . official State papers . . . the non-commissioned . . . es. Some of this valu- . . . as been uncovered from . . . the bulk of the docu- . . . the patriots' names and . . . been brought to light.

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protection I commend you and myself; and am, with truest regard, your loving husband, N. Greene." Greene found the Rhode Island troops encamped at Jamaica Plain, poorly disciplined and in need of complete reorganization. Through intelligent management and great personal influence he soon restored a high order of military discipline and this was strictly maintained thereafter.

At home, every precaution was taken to protect the Colony in case of invasion. Fortifications were thrown along the shores and upon high ground overlooking the waters of Narragansett Bay. Rhode Islanders inaugurated and enthusiastically supported the movement that finally ended in the building of the first American Naval fleet; the famous Beacon Pole alarm device was erected on Prospect Hill

in Providence; soldiers were recruited for active service, and every man in the Colony, of age and physically fit, was required to hold himself in readiness for any duty that his country might require of him. The torch was applied when determined Rhode Islanders burned the hated "Gaspee," the fires of war were fanned into flames the day after Paul Revere rode through the Massachusetts countryside with his startling message; the long-anticipated conflagration broke forth on June 17th, when a stubborn force of little-trained farmer soldiers entrenched themselves on Bunker Hill and fought to the end for freedom. The blow had been struck; the time for diplomacy had passed; a nation of liberty-loving men and women plunged into a bitter struggle that could end only in victory.

## THE CALL TO ARMS

**T**HERE is nothing more inspiring for loyal, patriotic Rhode Islanders than a parade of the several military organizations which today compose the Rhode Island Militia. These Commands, authorized by State charter, never fail to bring forth genuine enthusiasm and heavy applause whenever they pass in review to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," with their officers and troopers arrayed in colorful uniforms and brilliant trappings which have long been discarded for the sombre but practical olive-drabs and grays. There is something romantic and adventuresome about cockades, epaulettes, shoulder straps, ruffles, gold braid and shiny boots, even though they were more appropriate for parading and strutting about in the presence of impressionable young ladies than they were for actual combat service in the field.

These picturesquely uniformed bodies retain the high-sounding titles that must have thrilled the early patriots, especially the young men, and associated their activities with deeds of daring and adventure-filled exploits. Such titles as the "Newport Artillery, Kentish Guards, United Train of Artillery, Bristol Train

of Artillery, First Light Infantry," and the comparatively new "Varnum Continentals" have survived since the first of these, the Newport Artillery, was founded in 1741. At the time when the Colonies faced war with England, the active military force in Rhode Island, in addition to some of those already mentioned, consisted of such groups as the Kingstown Reds, North Providence Rangers, Scituate Hunters, Providence Rangers, Pawtuxet Rangers, and the Providence Grenadiers. In spite of the fact that these companies were recruited from inexperienced youngsters they were well equipped and strictly disciplined and the Colony had a feeling of safety as long as the drilling, parading and mustering continued in its midst. The officers were elected at stated times by the companies themselves, their choice was communicated to the General Assembly for approval and then the Governor did the formal commissioning. These officers were, for the most part, prominent citizens who had had military experience in the field or on the training grounds, but practically all of the soldiers were raw recruits.

Although the intent was serious enough,