

History of the Jersey Brigade

by John U. Rees, Second New Jersey Regimental Historian

October 9, 1775 - The 2nd NJ Battalion is authorized as part of the first establishment of the Continental Army. Originally New Jersey's contribution for 1776 was to be two battalions, but this was raised to three.

December 1775 to February 1776 - The battalion was mustered and organized at Burlington and Trenton to consist of eight companies from Gloucester, Hunterdon, Burlington, Salem, and Sussex counties. The men served under Colonel William "Scotch Willie" Maxwell for an enlistment of one year.

March to May 1776 - Assigned to the Canadian Department, the regiment belatedly took part in the investment of Quebec. The leading contingent arrived at the city on March 25. The siege of Quebec ended on May 5.

June 8, 1776 - After enduring the retreat from Quebec, the regiment took part in the ill-executed action at Trois Riviers, Canada.

July to November 1776 - Took part in the retreat from Canada to Crown Point and then to Fort Ticonderoga, NY. The unit formed part of the garrison there until November 13 when they returned to New Jersey.

November to December 1776 - Ordered to reinforce Washington's army, the battalion marched to Morristown, NJ where they arrived about December 3 and were disbanded when one-year enlistments expired. Many of the men reenlist in the second establishment of the regiment for three year enlistments.

January to April 1777 - The newly formed regiment headquartered in Burlington and then Princeton until April 5, is ordered to join the main army under General Washington.

May 22, 1777 - Maxwell's Jersey Brigade and Conway's Pennsylvania Brigade are ordered to form a division under Lord (General William Alexander) Stirling.

May to June, 1777 - The regiment was stationed in the area between Middlebrook (modern-day Metuchen) and Short Hills, keeping watch on, and occasionally skirmishing with, the enemy.

June 26, 1777 - Stirling's Division was attacked at Short Hills by General William Howe's British and Hessian troops. After a sharp fight, the Americans successfully retire to Middlebrook and rejoined the main Army under Washington

July to August 1777 - A period of marching and countermarching ensued after the action at Short Hills. General Howe's forces sailed on board the British fleet on July 24, their destination unknown. Unable to decide their objective, General Washington determined to cover all possibilities while waiting for news of the fleet. Stirling's Division moved from Middlebrook across the Hudson to Peekskill, NY and then back south again into PA. At their camp at "The Cross Roads", in Bucks County, news was finally received that the British were in the Chesapeake.

September 11, 1777 - Shreve's Regiment, along with the rest of the Jersey Brigade, took part in the Battle of Brandywine. Forced to move from their positions on the right of the army, along the creek, Stirling's Division marched to a hill near Birminham Meeting House to counter a British flank attack. The three Continental divisions on the hill caught the full force of Howe's assault, which included the British Guards and light infantry. After an action of about 45 minutes, the defenders were forced to give way. With the army's right flank defeated, the battle was lost and the Americans retreated to Chester, PA. During the

fighting on Birmingham hill, Colonel Israel Shreve was wounded in the thigh and did not return to duty until November.

September to October, 1777 - The army undertook a series of marches and maneuvers designed to cover both the magazine at Reading Furnace and the capital at Philadelphia. In spite of their efforts, the city fell to the British.

October 4, 1777 - At the battle of Germantown, Washington's army assaulted the British encamped outside of Philadelphia. Maxwell's Brigade formed part of the reserve and as such attacked the Chew House in which members of the British 40th Regiment had barricaded themselves as the Continentals swept through town. After a series of futile assaults, the Jersey troops were forced to give up the attempt when the battle was lost and the Americans retreated.

November to December 11, 1777 - On November 2, the 2nd New Jersey Regiment arrived at Whitemarsh, PA with the rest of the Army. They remained here for six weeks.

December 19, 1777 to March 1778 - Shreve's Regiment entered winter quarters at Valley Forge and stayed there until ordered, on March 19, 1778, to take post in Haddonfield, NJ.

March 26 to May 31, 1778 - On detached duty and in cooperation with the Jersey Militia, the 2nd NJ gathered forage and supplies, and skirmished with the British and Loyalist for two months. At the end of May, the rest of Maxwell's Brigade joined them at Mt. Holly.

June 1778 - The reunited Jersey Brigade kept watch on the British in Philadelphia in anticipation of their evacuation.

June 28, 1778 - Maxwell's Brigade formed a part of Gen. Charles Lee's advance force in the opening phases of the Battle of Monmouth. Hampered by confused orders and heavy pressure from the British, Lee's troops retreated in disorder until they were met by the main army under Washington. The 2nd NJ covers the retreat of Lee's forces and fall back as reserves for the rest of the engagement.

June to December 1778 - The Jersey Brigade is stationed in and around Elizabethtown, NJ to cover the area and counter any British moves from New York through the summer and autumn

December 16, 1778 to May 29, 1779 - The unit was ordered into winter quarters at or near Newark, New Jersey, where they remained until spring. At the end of May they marched to Easton, Pennsylvania, to join the expedition against the Iroquois, forming under Major General John Sullivan.

June 18 to October 1779 - During this period the 2nd Regiment took part in Sullivan's campaign to destroy the power of the Indian allies of the British. They marched through Pennsylvania and into western New York, burning villages and laying waste to crops. On 24 August General Sullivan's army left Tioga, Pennsylvania, leaving behind Colonel Israel Shreve and a mixed detachment to garrison a small work called Fort Sullivan. The remainder of the regiment marched north with the rest of the army. On August 29th a force of Iroquois and Loyalist troops attempted an ambush at Newtown, New York, but were defeated and driven from the field. Maxwell's Brigade was in the reserve during this action. The army returned to Easton on October 15th.

December 1779 to April 1780 - On the 17th of December the brigade arrived at Eyre's Forge on the Hardscrabble Road, located between Jockey Hollow, Basking Ridge, and Vealtown (present-day Bernardsville). The Jersey regiments made this site their winter quarters, remaining there until April or May of 1780.

June 7, 1780 - The 2nd New Jersey took part in the Battle of Connecticut Farms, New Jersey. Colonel

Shreve wrote that this "Action was the warmest that has Ever Happened since the war with Our Brigade."

June 8 to June 22, 1780 - The brigade kept watch on British forces encamped behind their fortifications at Elizabeth Town.

June 23, 1780 - Shreve's Regiment again saw action in the Battle of Springfield which resulted in the retreat of the British army back to Elizabeth Town. At midnight on the 23rd the enemy troops crossed back to Staten Island.

June to November 1780 - During this period the Jersey Brigade was situated at several posts to protect the New Jersey side of the Hudson from enemy incursions. In October they moved to West Point and entered barracks in anticipation of remaining there for the winter. The brigade also lost their long-time commander, William Maxwell having resigned from service.

November 1780 to January 1781 - Contrary to expectations the Jersey troops were ordered to take up winter quarters in and around Pompton, New Jersey. With the new year another change in command took place, with Israel Shreve resigning as colonel of the 2nd New Jersey and Colonel Elias Dayton assuming the post.

January 20 to January 27, 1781 - The men of the Jersey Brigade at Pompton mutinied to redress their grievances in emulation of the Pennsylvania troops. The uprising was suppressed quickly with the execution of two of its leaders. In February, after the Pennsylvania Line mutiny, the New Jersey soldiers moved into the old Pennsylvania huts at Mount Kemble (Jockey Hollow).

February 1781 - Two light companies and three battalion companies from the New Jersey line along with the light troops from New England were selected to form a detachment under the Marquis de Lafayette to serve in Virginia. In addition to other skirmishes during the spring and summer, these men saw action on June 26, 1781 at Spencer's Ordinary, near Williamsburg. They were reunited with the rest of the Jersey Brigade at Williamsburg in late September of 1781.

February to June 1781 - During the first six months of the year the two New Jersey regiments kept a large proportion of troops on detached duty, including one company on duty at Wyoming, Pennsylvania. Besides commanding the 2nd Regiment, Colonel Dayton had charge of the brigade, keeping his headquarters at Chatham, New Jersey. On 30 June Dayton was ordered to concentrate the whole brigade at Morristown, excepting the troops at Wyoming.

June to August 1781 - On June 30 the brigade was ordered to march towards Kingsbridge. They were then redirected towards Dobb's Ferry and remained in the vicinity of that place until August. On July 21 the brigade was ordered to send a detachment of troops to Fort Lee and on the 28th 150 New Jersey soldiers escorted General Washington as he reconnoitered the British positions at New York from the Palisades at Fort Lee.

August 29, 1781 - The Continental army left Springfield, New Jersey, bound for Virginia in an effort to trap British forces under Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown.

September 2, 1781 - The American forces passed through Philadelphia on their way south; the following day the French army under General Rochambeau marched through the city.

September 5, 1781 - On this day the French and British fleets battled for control of the Chesapeake Bay. With the defeat of the British fleet the escape of Cornwallis' troops by sea was blocked.

September 23, 1781 - The first contingent of New Jersey troops under General Washington landed near Williamsburg, at which place they joined the force under Lafayette.

September 29, 1781 - The siege of Lord Cornwallis' forces at Yorktown was begun.

October 14, 1781 - On this date, at night, the Jersey Light Infantry under Lt. Colonel Francis Barber took part in the assault and capture of Redoubt Number 10. This was one of two important strongpoints taken, Redoubt Number 9 being captured by French troops.

October 19, 1781 - The capitulation of the British and German forces at Yorktown took place, the enemy troops surrendering their arms to the French and American armies.

December 1781 to August 1782 - The New Jersey regiments for their winter cantonment "take Post somewhere in the Vicinity of Morristown." The troops may have been housed once more in the old Pennsylvania Line huts at Mount Kemble.

August to October 1782 - Through the first half of the year the Jersey regiments spent most of the time in small detachments doing duty as guards and picquets. On August 29 they left their huts and marched north to join the main army on the other side of the Hudson at Verplanks Point, crossing at King's Ferry. Leaving Verplanks in October and travelling north, they marched from "Murderer's Creek" on the 29th a distance of "about five miles to our ground for hutting and encamped."

October 1782 to Spring 1783 - On the 30th of October General Washington wrote from Newburgh, New York, that the regiments of "New Jersey, are hutting in the Neighborhood of this place" it being "of Importance to the Health, care and comfort of the Troops, as well as economical on many Accounts, that they should be early put into Quarters for the Winter." This, the last cantonment for the army, was located at New Windsor, New York.

This last winter was relatively uneventful. Ebenezer Elmer, surgeon's mate and then surgeon to the 2nd New Jersey Regiment from 1777 to 1783, recorded the end of the war in his diary. On April 19 "The cessation of hostilities was announced in camp just eight years from the commencement thereof." And finally "Our brigade received our furloughs, and we all decamped" on June 6, 1783.

The war was finally, and successfully, over.