

Transcription

A Loyalist's Account: Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill

From *The London Chronicle* – September 9, 1775

Though the following Letter gives a narrative of the two late engagements near Boston, yet as it contains some particulars not mentioned in any former relation of those events, we have thought proper to lay it before our Readers.

Letter from a Merchant in Boston, to a Friend in Scotland.

Containing a true and genuine Account of the proceedings of the King's Troops and the Provincials, since the 18th of April, to June 24th, giving a detail of the killed and wounded on both sides.

Boston, June 24.

Dear brother,

I Received yours, by Capt. Porterfield, and I am exceeding (sp) glad to hear of your welfare. The last time I wrote, I gave you some account of the deplorable state of this province: no doubt you will expect that I should give you a very particular state of matters here since that time.

To paint the scenes of distraction, violence, mobs, riots, and insurrections that have taken place throughout this country for the last twelve months is altogether beyond my ability; how much less then shall I be able to describe the horrors of war, that have reigned here since the 19th of April. The people have been arming themselves, learning the military exercise, and forming magazines for war during the course of last year, and have always been publishing to the world, that they would fight and die for their liberties (as they express themselves): but few people believed they would fight, notwithstanding of their declarations, and I believe the General himself never thought they would carry it so far.

But on the 18th of April, the General having previous information that they had formed their grand magazine at a place called Concord, about twenty miles from Boston, dispatched 500 troops with the greatest secrecy, at ten o'clock at night, to go and destroy that magazine.

The troops no sooner got over the ferry, which was about one mile over, than alarms were spread throughout the country, by firing of cannon, ringing of bells, and post riders; all this was planned before that time. – The troops proceeded on their march, and when daylight appeared, they saw numbers of armed men traveling towards them from all quarters. In a short time after this, they found

about 100 of them on a green by the wayside: the commanding officer ordered them to dismiss; they accordingly began to retire; and after going to a small distance in a straggling manner, and getting behind some fences, some of them turned about and fired, which wounded several men, upon which the troops fired on the others as they ran, and killed eight, and proceeded on their march, which was four miles further. After arriving, they sent three companies two miles beyond the place, to defend a bridge, that the rebels might not come upon them from that quarter, while they were executing their orders at this place, a large body came upon the three companies, and obliged them to return to the main body, with some loss of men. By this time the magazine was destroyed, which proved to be very inconsiderable.

They instantly proceeded on their march for Boston, but as soon as they got out of town, they received a heavy fire from all quarters, but never could see above six people together at a time, for they hid themselves behind rocks, trees, fences, bushes, and in every house, barn, stable, &c.

An Aid de Camp arrived in town from the commander of the party, to let the General know that an alarm was spread through the country: on receiving this advice, four regiments and two field pieces, were immediately ordered to march under the command of Lord Percy, to reinforce the other troops. They accordingly marched at nine o'clock, and arrived at the place of battle at two, which was 16 miles from Boston, and found the others in a most miserable situation, hemmed in on all sides, and their ammunition almost spent, with numbers killed and wounded. This party then refreshed themselves, while the fresh troops began upon them with cannon and small arms. In a short time they began their march home, and fought their way through innumerable multitudes, hid in the manner before said, during the course of 16 miles. When the troops arrived, their ammunition was all gone, and all the men in the most fatigued condition imaginable, having received no kind of sustenance during the day. Two carts with provisions were sent off some time after the reinforcement, guarded by 24 men, some of whom were killed, and the rest taken prisoners, and never got up to the troops.

A list of the killed and wounded has never been published here, but by the best account, about 70 were killed, and about 200 wounded, and 30 missing. How many of the rebels were killed and wounded is impossible to say: they published a list, but this and all other publications respecting their cause, are the most gross falsehoods; their leaders always take care to suppress the truth.

But, dear brother, it is impossible to describe the surprise, amazement, and consternation that prevailed in town that day, word was brought every half hour that the troops would be all cut off; and almost every inhabitant was wishing and praying that it might be so; and it was expected that the whole country would rise and make an attempt to enter the town, which was not very strongly fortified at that time, and but few troops to defend it; and it was likewise supposed the inhabitants within, who all had arms in their possession, would rise and attempt to kill the soldiers and the few friends to good government that were in it.

However, the night passed away, and no attempt was made from without, nor insurrection within. This place is surrounded with water all but one neck of land: the passage this way was stopped next day, and all boats forbid to go; so that no person was suffered to go out, and fortifications were begun and carried on with the greatest expedition day and night till they were made, and now are exceeding (sp) strong for defence (sp). The rebels to the amount of 20,000 assembled in a few days, and stopped all the passages and communications from the country to Boston, by this intending to starve us.

The inhabitants in general became very uneasy for fear of the famine, and applied to the General to permit them to go out with all their effects: the answer was, if they would deliver up all the arms and ammunition that were in their possession, they might go with their furniture, but no merchandize (sp) nor provisions would be suffered to go. To this they agreed, and I suppose there is not one in 15 but what is now gone. Notwithstanding we have no supplies from the country, we are far from being in a state of famine; we live all on salt meat, except a few fish that comes in the harbour now and then, and the prices are not so much raised as might be expected. The army have some hay, cattle, and other articles from Quebec and Nova Scotia, which are the only governments that are not joined in the rebellion.

From the 19th of April to the 17th of June, nothing very material has happened. On the 12th of June, the General issued a proclamation, offering his Majesty's most gracious pardon to all who would lay down arms and return to their duty, except two of the ring-leaders; and likewise establishing the martial law in this province while this unnatural rebellion subsists; but no regard was paid to this.

On the 17th instant at daylight, it was observed by some of the ships of war, that the rebels had thrown up an entrenchment on a hill on the other side of the river, about one mile from this town: the alarm about this new movement of theirs was general; for from this, if they were suffered to go on, they could beat down or burn the town. At nine o'clock, a battery on an eminence in this town directly opposite to their works, began to play upon them, but found they could not dislodge them.

The rebels fired a few shot into this town, and then desisted, for their shot did no execution: 1800 of the rest of the troops were immediately ordered to embark on board of boats, and go and engage them, under the command of General Howe. About 3 o'clock they landed on the other side about half a mile from the rebels, under cover of 5 or 6 ships of war, who kept a continual fire on the ground betwixt the place of landing and the enemy, who chose to lie close in their breast works all this time. As soon as the troops had got themselves in order, they began to advance, canonading (sp) all the way till they came within gun-shot. Charles Town on the foot of the hill, consisting of about 200 houses, was set on fire by the fort on this side at the instant the engagement began, whose flames raged in the most rapid manner, being chiefly of wood: sure I am, nothing ever has or can be more dreadfully terrible, than what was to be seen and heard at this time! The most incessant discharge of guns that ever was heard with mortal ears, continued for three quarters of an hour, and then the troops forced their trenches, and the rebels fled.

The place where the battle was fought, is a peninsula of a mile long and a half broad, and the troops drove them over the Neck and kept the island. All this was seen from this town.

A very small part of the enemies entrenchments was seen on this side, it being only thought to be the work of a night, but their chief breast works were on the other side of the hill; it was found to be the strongest post that was ever occupied by any set of men, and the prisoners that were taken say they were 9000 strong, and had a good artillery; five cannons were taken. The spirit and bravery that the British troops exhibited on this occasion, I suppose is not to be surpassed in any history. But oh! The melancholy sight of killed and wounded that was seen on that day! In four hours after their landing not less than 500 wounded were relanded here, and 140 were left dead on the field, amongst which was a large proportion of brave officers, viz. 36 killed, and 44 wounded; 300 of the rebels were

killed, and 36 wounded left on the field, but they carried off great numbers of their wounded in their retreat. To the great satisfaction of all good men, Dr. Warren was slain, who was one of their first and greatest leaders.

Early next morning I went over and saw the field of battle, before any of the dead were buried, which was the first thing of the sort that ever I saw, and I pray God I may never have the opportunity of seeing the like again. The rebels are employed since that day, fortifying all the hills and passes within four miles, to prevent the troops from advancing into the country. We hourly expect the troops to make a movement against them, but they are too few number, not less than 20,000 being equal to the task. I cannot help mentioning one thing, which serves to shew (sp) the hellish disposition of the accursed rebels, by parcels of ammunition that were left on the field; their balls were all found to be poisoned.

Thus, brother, I have endeavoured (sp) to give you a short account of the desperate state of matters here since my last, and shall sum up the whole with one single observation, viz. the delusion that reigns here is as universal and as deeply rooted as ever was found among the race of mankind, and of all other rebellions that ever subsisted in the world, it is the most unprovoked. I am, &c.