

17 April 1984

Washington rode along the half circle of American defenses looking out at Charleston and Bunker Hill, at Boston Neck, and Dorchester. After taking stock of his men, weapons and gun powder on hand, he could get down to the task of developing secure fortification, accurate intelligence and good organization. As he wrote Richard Henry Lee, because the British had command of the waterways, they were able to proceed "to any point of attack without our having an hour's previous notice of it, whereas we are obliged to be guarded at all points and know not where to look for them." The British commander of the sea held Washington in this position throughout the war. He saw it as his opportunity to intercept the supply of the British in Boston from the surrounding country, confining the British, hungry and helpless, in Boston. He directed that pressworks be built or old fortifications strengthened wherever it appeared that the British could break out of Boston to make a landing. He saw as his next task establishing discipline, order and organization among his men and training, clothing and equipping them. Next, he called for "returns" on the strength of the army. He had been told that from 18,000-20,000 men were on the lines. To his great frustration, it took eight days to get the returns. The story they told was that he had only about 16,500 enlisting men and noncommissioned officers with only 13,743 foot soldiers fit for duty and 585 artillerymen.

At his first council of war, it was estimated that the total British strength was 11,500 and determined that the American force should be approximately twice that. Meanwhile, the army must continue the siege and offer the stoutest resistance in the event the British should try to break out. Washington continued to worry that command of the waters would enable the British to concentrate a superior force and deliver a surprise attack at

any point of the American lines. Scarcely had the council concluded when Washington sent a note to the President of Congress calling for more troops to be enlisted from other colonies and sent to Massachusetts.

Washington divided the army into three grand divisions. With Artemas Ward commanding the right, Israel Putnam the central, and Charles Lee the left, with John Sullivan and Nathaneal Greene commanding the brigades under him. By August, Washington's forces were virtually out of powder, creating the prospect that if the British should march out of Boston the Americans would not be able to answer. An appeal was sent to the Congress and to the Governors of the neighboring states.

Washington pondered why the British did not march out to take advantage of his situation. Was he waiting for winter, did he intend to use his sea power to transfer the war to New York where the waterway of the Hudson could enable him to establish contact with the British in Canada. To answer these questions, he set out to establish a rudimentary intelligence system. Chelsea to the north of Boston Harbor, was a good lookout point from which to observe the movements of British ships. Besides the results of direct observation through a glass focused on the enemy, fact and rumor was gathered in Cambridge and Roxbury from Boston residents passing through the lines. People the British authorized to leave the town in order to reduce the need for food there added additional information. False reports were spread of large inward shipments of powder and great stocks. Propaganda was sent out to entice Bostonians to leave the city and cross over into the American lines where the food was said to be better. During the fall, with only a couple of months until enlistments expired on December 7th, Washington with growing impatience moved away from the idea that he could win by confining the British to Boston.

Having stopped all deliveries to Boston by land, he decided to arm some coastal vessels to cut off the supplies coming into Boston by sea. He would help Schuyler's invasion of Canada. Finally, he would deliver some kind of an attack on Boston itself.

Next, the story of Washington's navy.

Then, the mounting of Arnold's march to Canada.

Finally, on the 8th of September, Washington wrote his Major Generals and his Brigadiers asking them to consider the advance of a formal council of war--the idea of a dual attack on Boston up the neck from Roxbury and by boats from other parts of the front. When the council met on September 11, the general view was that Boston Neck was too narrow and the approaches by water too much exposed to give them a decent chance for success. The British positions were too strong. This view was compounded by optimism that word would come from Britain offering some form of conciliation. The minutes of the meeting said, "After duly weighing the above proposition for an attack on Boston considering the state of the enemy's lines and the expectation of soon receiving some important advice from England, it was unanimously agreed that it was not expedient to make the attempt, at present at least." Washington later wrote the Congress, "I cannot say that I have wholly laid it aside."

Next, the letter which Nathaneal Greene wrote Washington which led to the exposure of Dr. Church as a British spy. The visit of a three-man committee--Franklin, Lynch of South Carolina, and Harrison of Virginia--to Washington in Boston on October 15 may suggest that an attack on Boston be considered. Washington called his second council on October 18. Greene thought an offensive

might be successful if 10,000 American soldiers could be landed in Boston, but not otherwise. Sullivan thought the winter might bring a more favorable opportunity. In the final analysis, all eight generals thought that a general assault on Boston would be too great a risk.

A week later, a council of war considered bombarding the city after the harbor of Boston froze so that the war ships could not maneuver the issue was referred to the Congress in Philadelphia.

Next, report from Arnold.

Next, reenlistments and reorganization of the commands.