

#168

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Robt. Kirkwood

The Picket Post

A Record of Patriotism



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THE PICKET POST

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THE PICKET POST

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And here,
In this place of Sacrifice,
In this vale of Humiliation,
In this valley of the Shadow
Of that Death out of which
The Life of America rose
Regenerate and Free.

—HENRY ARMITT BROWN
at Valley Forge, June 19, 1878

AT THE EDITOR'S POST

My predecessors gave to THE PICKET POST the terse description "A Record of Patriotism" and it is printed on the cover of the magazine and on this, its editorial page.

I like that description, but desire to add another phrase which will bring out a slightly larger function and purpose. I wish to call THE PICKET POST an application of patriotism as well as a record of patriotism.

Our historic records are fundamental and essential and we shall say well done to all who help us keep them with accuracy and clarity. At the same time, the larger historical values are obtained when, in addition to the recordings, present day usefulness is discovered and the way to apply that usefulness is perceived.

May we agree, friends and loyal readers of these pages, that every scrap of the vital patriotism that has grown up in this land of liberty is needed and should be applied to the life of our Country and our World today.

Mussolini was devastating when he called freedom a "putrid corpse". China, South America, Eastern and Central Europe are now threatening permanent devastation of the liberties we believed were firmly established for all time. Mussolini said people don't want liberty, they want security. Is that true? Are they now not saying, "Give me liberty or give me death", but rather, "Give me security at any price?"

In his arresting book "The Rediscovery of Man" Henry Link, noted clinical psychologist of our day, has a splendid chapter on Social Security versus personal security. He decries the rapidly accelerated trend toward all forms of social security whereby the government underwrites the wants of people from the cradle to the grave. With great emphasis, Dr. Link praises personal security by which he means the security won by a person, who through sustained effort, sacrifice and training, learns to, and is willing to, take care of himself from the cradle to the grave. Give us more apple sellers, if need be, even apple sellers, he says, rather than people standing in bread lines and living off the dole. Give us people who will always try, and always want to try, to maintain the dignity of their independence and conquer life rather than be conquered by it.

America is now called, by our political scientists, a service nation. It is a country whose government is rendering more and more services to the people just as Germany did at the close of the last century. The next step was state socialism, and the final one before complete tragedy arrived was totalitarian dictatorship. England is in the middle stage right now, and the question is being asked

ROBERT KIRKWOOD

by DR. JOHN A. MUNROE
University of Delaware

(EDITOR'S NOTE:- The material for this article was gathered from Christopher Ward, "The Delaware Continentals, 1776-1783" (Wilmington, 1941), from the "Delaware Gazette" (Wilmington), May 30, 1845, and from William D. Mackey, "White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church" (Wilmington, 1876).)

* * *

America is a land that was built by immigrants and by the sons of immigrants. Successive waves of humanity have through the centuries washed upon our shores, and each wave left a precious heritage upon our continent. To counties on the Delaware there came in the seventeenth century Swedes and Dutch, Englishmen and Africans, who turned our soil and found it fertile, harnessed our creeks to work their mills, poured forth their commerce upon our rivers.

Another century brought another immigrant group, the Scotch-Irish. Forty-five hundred of them arrived as early as 1729. New Castle was their principal place of entry, a port where ships could conveniently stop on their way to Philadelphia. Still later, Wilmington, with its protected harbor, became a popular landing place.

Bonnetless but wearing red and blue cloth cloaks, they were when they arrived. "All (were) well dressed," wrote a lady of Wilmington, "and, in a few days, went off to the west with means to provide a home. The lowest order were called redemptioners, and sold for three years to defray their passage. Many of those became respectable members of the community, and were never thrown upon its charity. Their training taught them the usages of the country, and they imbibed a spirit of independence to live by honest industry. We never heard of their going to almshouses."

Many of the Scotch-Irish did go west, to the frontiers of Pennsyl-

vania, beyond the German settlements, and from there some drifted down the great valley to the back country of Maryland and of Virginia and of the Carolinas. In such a fashion migrated the ancestors of Andrew Jackson and Andrew Johnson and John Caldwell Calhoun.

Others of them, however, stayed where they landed, finding there the opportunities that they sought of the new world, rejoicing in the new life that lay before them, like the unknown immigrant poet who sang:

"In Wilmington we landed;
for a tavern did enquire,
To toast our noble captain,
by all the crews' desire;
The natives they came crowding in,
our merry men to see,
To welcome us as Irishmen
just landed from the sea."

The welcome was not always as real as it seemed to this band. Some of that annoyance was expressed which often arises among a settled people when newcomers arrive among them. Yet the Scotch-Irish plowed their fields, plied their trades, and built their Presbyterian churches until some parts of New Castle County came to seem a New Ulster.

With them to their new lands, however, they brought a grievance from the old country. They recalled that their forefathers were Scotsmen who had migrated to Ireland with the encouragement of their king. But within a century after this early migration, the king, they felt, had turned against them. They had been tithed to support a church they did not attend, distant landlords had charged them high rents, regulations had crippled their linen industry, royal tariffs had made it difficult for them to market their cattle and their woolen goods.

When in the 1760's English trade and navigation laws and English

taxes seemed to bear heavily upon the American colonists, the Scotch-Irish were particularly resentful. Theirs was not the heritage of love and sympathy for the king that restrained many of their neighbors of English stock. The Scotch-Irish rose in wrathful rebellion, and in Delaware and its environs they were in the forefront of the Revolutionary movement. It was not strange, then, that from their ranks came one of our boldest Revolutionary soldiers—Robert Kirkwood.

Yet, with the passage of time, Robert Kirkwood and the men who fought under him have been nearly forgotten. In their own day, they were seldom mentioned except with high praise. "No regiment in the army surpassed the Delaware Regiment in soldiership," said a Virginian. "The Delaware Regiment was reckoned the most efficient in the Continental Army," testified a South Carolinian.

The late Christopher Ward, struck by the contrast between the former renown and the modern forgetfulness of the exploits of these Delaware troops, wrote a history of them, which he called *The Delaware Continentals*.

"Who," he asked, "has not heard of Mad Anthony Wayne of Pennsylvania, of Light Horse Harry Lee of Virginia, of Ethan Allen of Vermont, of Francis Marion of South Carolina?" But "who has heard of John Haslet or Robert Kirkwood or Allen McLane of Delaware?"

Slightly more than a century ago the *Sunday Times* of New York declared that Robert Kirkwood was "among the master-spirits of the Revolution," though "not elevated to a conspicuous rank, nor . . . decorated with historical distinction."

This forgotten hero, Robert Kirkwood, was born outside of Newark, Delaware, near the White Clay Creek Presbyterian Church, of which his father was an elder. His parents were obscure folk, and his early life is as obscure as they. We hear that

he attended the old Newark Academy, predecessor institution of the University of Delaware, and the effects of his education is observable in the neat penmanship of his surviving military journals and order-books, which are in the keeping of the Historical Society of Delaware in Wilmington.

After leaving the Academy, Kirkwood farmed in New Castle County, until January, 1776, when he joined, as a lieutenant, the first regiment raised in Delaware for the Continental service. His seasoning in battle was gained under Washington in the Long Island and New Jersey campaigns in 1778.

In 1777, Kirkwood was promoted to captain, and with this rank he served throughout the six remaining years of the war. Soon his regiment was sent to the southern states, where the bitterest fighting of these years was to be found. At Camden, South Carolina, one-third of the Delaware troops were lost, as casualties or captives, in an engagement in which a dying general, the brave Baron de Kalb, testified to "the gallant behavior of the Delaware troops."

At the Battle of Cowpens, a soldier spoke of "the brave Captain Kirkwood and his company, who that day did wonders." General Daniel Morgan, the famous commander of light infantry, joined in the praise of Kirkwood and his men. An historical biographer declared that "The little Delaware corps was the admiration of the Army and their leader, Kirkwood, the American Diomedes."

In describing the Battle of Guilford Court House, General Lee referred to "the brave Captain Kirkwood," and he wrote again of "the company of Delaware, under Kirkwood (to whom none could be superior)." At the Battle of Hobkirk's Hill, another historian mentions "the beautiful example . . . exhibited by Kirkwood." General Nathaniel Greene reported to Congress that "Captain Kirkwood, with the light infantry was posted in our front, and

when the enemy advanced, he was soon engaged with them, and both he and his men behaved with a great deal of bravery."

Still another writer asserted that throughout the southern campaign, "Kirkwood was the first in the British lines, and also in their works. Nine of the enemy's fortifications were taken, and in them Kirkwood was always the first to place a foot . . . His individual exertions obtained a peculiar renown for what remained of the Delaware regiment."

With such recognition of his merits, it may seem strange that no further promotions came to Kirkwood through these years. Two factors, however, prevented his promotion. Of the three officers of the Delaware regiment senior to Kirkwood in rank, one was home convalescing from a wound and the others had been captured by the British. The return of all of them to duty through recovery of the one and exchange of the two was constantly expected. Besides, the Delaware troops were but few in number and were not thought to need any commander of higher rank than captain. Only when he was finally discharged from the service at the end of the war was Kirkwood promoted, and then at last he was given the honorary rank of major.

The end of the Revolution did not mean an end of warfare for this courageous soldier. He moved from Delaware to the Ohio country to clear some land that had been given him for his services. Here he settled across the river from Wheeling, the only white man in an Indian country. While building himself a log cabin, he was attacked by prowling savages, but he received aid from across the river and drove off his assailants.

When General St. Clair, Governor of the Northwest Territory, planned a campaign to clear the Indians out of Ohio, Kirkwood heeded the call to the colors. But this campaign was to be his last. On November 4, 1792, St. Clair's troops were disastrously

defeated by the Miami Indians. In the battle Kirkwood was killed, "fighting with ardor, as was his wont, at the head of his detachment." "He was the oldest captain in the oldest regiment in the country" when he died thus in his thirty-third battle.

A fellow-officer in St. Clair's army left posterity a brief description of Kirkwood's last campaign. "Having heard many of the officers of the revolution," this soldier wrote, "who knew Kirkwood when he belonged to Smallwood's, afterwards Howard's, regiment speak of him in the most exalted terms, I became prepossessed in his favor long before I knew him; and I took pains to become acquainted with him." In "a little time we became fast friends; so much so that when not on duty we were generally together. I passed many nights with him on guard, and benefitted greatly from his experience, as a man of honor, a soldier, and a police officer. Captain Kirkwood had been sick for several days previous to the 4th of November, but was always ready for duty. At the dawn of day, that morning, after the advanced guard was attacked and driven in I saw him cheering his men, and by his example inspiring confidence in all who saw him. When he received the wound, I cannot say; I was some distance from him, and busily engaged in attending to my own duty. About eight o'clock, I received a severe wound in my right arm, just above the elbow. As it bled very much, and our surgeon was in the rear, I was advised to go and have it dressed. On my way to rejoin my company, I found my friend Kirkwood lying against the root of a tree, shot through the abdomen, and in great pain. After calling to the surgeon, and commending him to his care, I saw no more of him until the retreat was ordered. I then ran to him, and proposed having him carried off. He said, "No, I am dying; save yourself if you can, and leave me to my fate; but, as the last act

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DUPORTAIL MAP WAS EXCEEDINGLY ACCURATE POSITION SKETCH

by BRIGADIER GENERAL NORMAN RANDOLPH, U.S. Army Retired
Executive Secretary, Valley Forge Park Commission

EDITOR'S NOTE:—This map was issued as a supplement to "The Picket Post" of January, 1947.) * * *

At the turn of the century there came to light an original document—contemporary with the Winter Encampment of Washington's Army at Valley Forge—which already has been of considerable value to the Valley Forge Park Commission in its efforts to restore the site to its original condition. According to recent information it is destined to prove even more valuable in future restorations.

The document known as the Duportail Map is a pen-and-ink sketch of the layout of the encampment and its defensive works. The original is filed in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, but photostatic copies were furnished the Commission to assist it in carrying out its restorations.

Although quite detailed, the sketch lacked—among other things—a scale which lead to the belief that it was a rough sketch—not drawn to scale. However, it was found to represent terrain and military features quite accurately with relation to each other. In 1929 it lead directly to the discovery of the charred ruins of the old forge on Valley Creek which the British destroyed shortly before the encampment and which gave the name of Valley Forge to the locality.

During the hut restoration it was necessary to examine the map closely on the ground in an effort to locate as accurately as possible the original sites of company streets upon which to reconstruct replicas of the soldier huts. At that time the unusual accuracy of ground forms—indicated by hachures rather than by contours—was noted. This led to a comparison of distances between certain fixed

landmarks on the Duportail Map with corresponding distances on a modern map surveyed by instrument. It appeared that the Duportail Map might have been drawn to a scale of about 1 inch on the map to 775 feet on the ground but, in conference with an authority of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, this odd ration could not be explained. In view of the fact that Duportail and his two assistants at Valley Forge were French military engineers selected by the French government for assignment to the Continental Army, information was requested from Monsieur Ludovic Chancel, Consul General of France to the United States.

Information received from l'Institut Geographique through the Musee de l'Armee and the Consul General of France discloses that—in 1777-78 and prior to the institution of the metric system after the French Revolution—the scale used by French engineers in making maps was established by ratios between the old French units of measure in use at that time: the "ligne" (the 12th part of the French inch—or 0.0888 English inch); the French inch (12 ligne—or 1.0656 English inch) and the "toise" (6 French feet — 6.39447 English feet.)

On large scale maps, such as the Duportail Map, it was the practice to use the ratio of 1 French inch to 130 toises which gives the Relative Fraction of 1:9,360. This Relative Fraction translated to our units of measure is 1 inch on the map equals 780 feet. By using this scale in comparing distances on the Duportail Map with a modern, instrumental-surveyed map it was found that the average difference was only 5.15%.

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