

CHAPTER VI

COUSIN HENRY ATTACKS THE HIGHLANDS

GEORGE CLINTON FORTIFIES THE HUDSON

HE BECOMES A CONTINENTAL BRIGADIER GENERAL

PUTNAM COMES TO NEW YORK

BURGOYNE, SCHUYLER AND GATES

ALARMS IN SOUTHERN NEW YORK

SIR HENRY CLINTON DECIDES TO MOVE NORTHWARD

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SIR HENRY ATTACKS FROM THE REAR

THE GALLANT DEFENSE

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THE SPY OF THE SILVER BULLET

KINGSTON BURNED

WHO WAS TO BLAME?

THE British attack on the Hudson Valley that Clinton had long been preparing for, came in 1777. With the shifting of the center of conflict to New Jersey and Pennsylvania at the close of 1776, the operations in New York assumed for the time a relatively minor importance. Yet frequent assignments from the committee of safety or the Convention and eloquent appeals from Washington, who was never too busy to watch every phase of the preparations in New York, kept Clinton occupied. He was placed with General Scott and William Duer on a committee for planning a secret expedition into Westchester County;¹ he was instructed to raise a thousand men in the four river counties, and he was admonished by Washington to bring these

¹ *Calendar of Historical Manuscripts Relating to the Revolution*, I, 578.

recruits into the service at the earliest possible moment² and to arrange in addition for the recruiting of companies for the Continental forces³—recruiting that Clinton did not relish and in all probability never entirely completed.⁴

The obstruction of the Hudson, however, which the Convention had entrusted to him, continued to take a major portion of his time and was undoubtedly the project in which he was most interested during the early months of 1777. Yet the works at Polopel's Island were, as events proved, of very little value. It must be admitted that Clinton was largely responsible for pouring too much of the state's scant resources and man power into the works at Constitution Island which was too low a position to be effectively fortified, and into the fortification of Polopel's Island which was several miles above the Highlands. The Highlands were the first line of defense and the state should have completed one or two strong positions there, including the present West Point, before it allowed Clinton to fortify Polopel's Island.

Late in March 1777 the enemy were again active in the lower Hudson Valley. Clinton hurried to Fort Montgomery on the twenty-fourth the moment he heard of General McDougall's retreat from Peekskill and a day later the Convention at Kingston, expecting the enemy to attack the Highland forts, empowered him as the ranking brigadier general to call out the militia of Dutchess, Ulster, Orange and Westchester, or any part of them, at his own discretion or at Washington's order.⁵ Five days later Clinton held a council of war with his officers at Mrs. Falls' house in Little Britain and there it was decided to call out one-third of the Ulster and Orange militia to reinforce the posts at Fort Montgomery and Sydman's Bridge.⁶ The British did not, however, press their advantage. The real attack on the defenses of the Highlands was to come later in the year.

George Clinton's friends, including Washington himself, had meanwhile been recommending him for a Continental appointment. The

² Letter of January 19, 1777; A. Elwood Corning, *Washington at Temple Hill* (Newburgh, N.Y., 1932), 42.

³ Washington, *Writings*, VII, 33.

⁴ *Public Papers*, I, 662, 666.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 679, 682.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 687. He also ordered men raised in Dutchess County, *ibid.*, 695.

Continental Congress finally, on March 25, 1777, "elected" him Continental commandant of the posts in the Highlands with the title of brigadier general, a rank that he kept until after the close of the war. He wrote modestly to Washington, who had sent him his warm congratulations, that because of the precarious state of his health and his want of military knowledge he would have preferred a more retired life than that of the army, but he added, "as early in the present contest I laid it down as a maxim not to refuse my best, though poor services, to my country in any way they should think proper to employ me, I cannot refuse the honor done me in the present appointment."⁷

Although the Continental appointment brought with it no great change in Clinton's work, it did bring additional responsibility and he found less time than before for pressing the Polopel's Island project and for the always irksome business of recruiting militia. With the transfer of his brother James from Fort Montgomery, George found himself obliged to stay constantly at that place, neglecting some of his other tasks. Consequently on May 9 he asked the Convention to accept his resignation as brigadier general of militia. But the Convention, which could find no one to replace him, begged him to postpone his resignation. This decision, Pierre Van Cortlandt told Clinton, was influenced by "the high Sense they entertained of your Abilities to serve your Country in this important Hour" and "the Confidence reposed in your Zeal and abilities by the Militia in General."⁸ Clinton, who may well have been flattered by the Convention's insistence, did not press the point. There was indeed no other state or Continental officer to whom both Washington and the New York Convention were so willing to entrust the vitally important defenses of the Hudson.

A few days later Washington ordered Major General Israel Putnam to leave Princeton and take command on the east shore of the Hudson at Peekskill,⁹ and during the months that followed it was Putnam whom Clinton recognized as his immediate superior. Neither Heath nor McDougall had been conspicuously successful with the Peekskill

⁷ Corning, *Washington at Temple Hill*, 44; *Journals of Continental Congress*, March 25, 1777; R. E. Prime, *George Clinton: An Address* (New York, 1902), 25.

⁸ *Public Papers*, I, 808, 836-37.

⁹ Washington, *Writings*, VIII, 51.

command, and Putnam was to be even less so. A brave, somewhat elderly gentleman, he was, it is said, unfit to command a battalion. He frequently misjudged the entire military situation in New York, and his nervousness as to his own position together with his unwillingness to accept Clinton's warnings were in October to help materially in bringing about the most serious military disaster of the year in New York. Washington himself was still the superior to whom Clinton turned with most confidence.

At the same time that Washington transferred Putnam to Peekskill he ordered Major General Nathanael Greene to visit the posts in the Highlands, especially Fort Montgomery, and make recommendations for their defense. The conference that Greene called in New York a few days later with Brigadier Generals Knox, McDougall, Wayne and George Clinton, concluded that if the obstructions on the river could be made effective, four or five thousand men could defend the passes. For this purpose they proposed to support the chain that, thanks largely to Clinton's efforts, had recently been placed across the river just below Fort Montgomery, with one or two cables and a boom. Two Continental ships and two "Row-Gallies" were to be placed just above the obstructions to rake the enemy ships with their fire. The consulting generals had confidence that these feeble measures would do much to keep open "the Communication between the Eastern and Western States [which] is so essential to the Continent . . ." ¹⁰

With the appearance of General Burgoyne in northern New York early in June and St. Leger's invasion of the Mohawk Valley, the center of interest shifted to the northward. It was clear that the King intended to split the new union of American states by conquering the Hudson Valley from the north. When the harassed Schuyler called for reinforcements for the campaign against Burgoyne, Clinton responded promptly and generously. Although Washington asked him for only 500 militia, enough to release the Continentals in the Highlands, he ordered 1500 to join Schuyler at Albany, requested General Herkimer to provide 500 more, and called out 800 to serve in the lower counties, 2800 in all. ¹¹ Clearly he realized the seriousness of the situa-

¹⁰ The report is in the Library of Congress. Washington, *Writings*, VIII, 51-2, note; Corning, *op. cit.*, 12; *Public Papers*, I, 675.

¹¹ *Public Papers*, II, 142, 146, 167, 195.

tion. He informed the council of safety that, if they should approve, he was ready to go to Albany to take charge of the militia. Meanwhile, as he had become governor of the state, he postponed the meeting of the new legislature until the first of September. ¹² Both Schuyler and the Albany committee wanted him to go north to reassure the threatened areas and as the council of safety had no objection, he was at Albany on the nineteenth.

Much to Clinton's regret Philip Schuyler was no longer in command at Albany. After months of sectional bitterness and controversy in the Continental Congress, of letters from Schuyler that Congress thought insulting, of criticism of his gloomy despondency and want of confidence in his troops, ¹³ the Congress had decided to replace him with Horatio Gates early in August. Perhaps the loss of Ticonderoga was the final straw that doomed the New Yorker. At any rate Clinton thought his removal without justification. James Duane wrote him from Philadelphia late in August that the New York delegation in Congress agreed with Clinton "that General Schuyler is sacrificed to unworthy Suspicion and unprovoked malace; and our State left to struggle almost alone under a powerful Invasion . . ." ¹⁴

Whether or not Clinton approved of the appointment, it was necessary for him to cooperate constantly with General Gates who, as Continental commander of the Northern Department, was authorized to make requisitions on the State of New York. And it was due largely to Governor Clinton's generous cooperation in reinforcing Gates at a critical time that Burgoyne was defeated at Saratoga. Clinton stayed about a week in and near Albany, rejoicing in the news of St. Leger's retreat from Fort Schuyler and of the Battle of Bennington, receiving appeals and petitions for aid from the aroused northern counties, threatening contumacious militia, and arranging for necessary troop movements. By August 31 he was back at Kingston ready to meet his first legislature.

When Governor Clinton, usually so wary of possible enemy troop movements, harangued the legislature on September 10, he assured it

¹² *Ibid.*, 184, 230.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 200; Flick, ed., *History of the State of New York*, III, 302-03; Samuel Adams to Roger Sherman, August 11, 1777. Meshech Weare Papers, Force Transcripts, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ Letter of August 25 (typed copy), Library of Congress.

that the Highlands were "in so respectable a state of defense, as to promise us security against any attack in that quarter. This, together with the several obstructions in Hudson's River, has probably induced General Howe to alter his original plan . . ." ¹⁵ Once more Clinton showed too much confidence in his cherished obstructions.

Late in July the indecisive Howe had sailed southward from New York leaving Sir Henry Clinton with a small force in the state's metropolis. Believing that, so long as Howe was absent, no very determined assault on the Hudson Valley would be made, George Clinton left Fort Montgomery under the command of his brother and went to Kingston to assume the duties of the governorship. Sir Henry had only about 4000 men and until he received the reinforcements that he expected from England, or until Howe returned to New York, if he should, there was little or no danger of an assault on the Highlands. Sir Henry was, however, an excellent soldier, perhaps the best of the British commanders of the American Revolution, and he would bear watching. He was, incidentally, the son of George Clinton, the provincial governor, and therefore a distant cousin of the American Clintons who stood between him and Burgoyne.

Even with Howe away, George Clinton found it next to impossible to settle down to affairs of state. Only a week after the British fleet had left New York, Washington heard that it had turned eastward again from the capes of the Delaware and, suspecting that this promised a sudden attack on the Hudson Valley, he sent urgent appeals to Putnam, Sullivan, and McDougall to reinforce the garrison at Peekskill, and urged Clinton to call out the militia and, if possible, go himself at once to the important position at Fort Montgomery. ¹⁶ Governor Clinton received the startling news on August 5. He at once called out virtually all of the remaining militia, prorogued the legislature because of the emergency, and himself hurried to the Highlands ¹⁷—only to learn some hours later that Howe apparently had no intention of returning to New York.

During the late summer of 1777 everything conspired toward re-

¹⁵ C. Z. Lincoln, *Messages from the Governors*, Vol. II, 8.

¹⁶ Washington, *Writings*, IX, 1-6.

¹⁷ *Public Papers*, II, 180-86.

ducing the American forces in lower New York: the expiration of periods of enlistment, the reinforcement of Schuyler and Gates in the north, and, finally, the despatching of a major share of Putnam's Continentals from the Peekskill region to reinforce both Washington and Gates in mid-September. Only a few hundred militia and Continentals were left to defend the all-important Highlands. Washington on September 14 was still urging Putnam to send him more men—men who, according to the plan, were later to be replaced in part by 2000 Connecticut militia. ¹⁸ With Burgoyne threatening in the north and Sir Henry Clinton stirring now and then in the south, the situation was critical. Governor Clinton at once ordered six regiments to Peekskill to reinforce Putnam, three to McDougall at Ramapo over the New Jersey line, and two to Fort Montgomery. This was all of the militia south of Poughkeepsie. ¹⁹

There had, however, been many cries of "Wolf!" during the preceding months, and as the militia were impatient to be back at their farms to sow their wheat and to harvest the late crops, the easy-going Putnam released several hundred of them. This left only about a thousand Continentals and four hundred militia to defend the Highlands, and General Clinton was somewhat irked by Putnam's untimely generosity. ²⁰ On September 18 it was necessary for the governor to order more militia regiments northward to join Gates. When Putnam appealed to him nine days later for still more militia, he could only suggest, perhaps none too tactfully, new regulations to compel the militia "to their Duty & keep them in the Field."

On the twenty-eighth of September ²¹ the bewildered Putnam heard that Sir Henry Clinton had received the long-expected reinforcements from England—three thousand added to Sir Henry's four thousand at New York. An attack on the Hudson Valley was now almost a certainty. George Clinton ordered seven of his colonels to send half of each of their regiments to Putnam at Peekskill and three others to

¹⁸ Letter of September 14. Washington, *Writings*, IX, 218.

¹⁹ *Public Papers*, II, 323.

²⁰ Clinton's letter to Washington, Little Britain, October 9, 1777, in Library of Congress; Hoffman Nickerson, *The Turning Point of the Revolution* (Boston, 1928), 337; Hall, *General S. H. Parsons*, 116.

²¹ *Public Papers*, II, 348.

send half regiments to reënforce Fort Montgomery where General James Clinton was in command. These were the same regiments that the benevolent Putnam had allowed to return to their crops.

On the day that Clinton issued these orders, the twenty-ninth, his cousin Sir Henry received a note from the stranded Burgoyne appealing to him to create a diversion by attacking Fort Montgomery.²² Now that Sir Henry had his reënforcements a diversion was clearly in order, and he set sail up the Hudson with 3000 men on October 3. The next day, which was Friday, an artillery officer just arrived at Fort Montgomery from Peekskill gave James Clinton the startling information that the enemy had come up the valley as far as Tarrytown. General James, expecting that Putnam would of course send him warning of the British advance or have the alarm guns fired, "waited some time," and then despatched a letter to his brother at New Windsor. George Clinton received the letter at seven o'clock on Saturday evening, at once replied to his brother advising him to call out the Orange militia, and two hours later wrote the legislature that he intended to go southward himself the next morning. He did not change his plans although he was inclined to believe, after reading a letter from Putnam which probably arrived in the early hours of the morning, that the British attack was aimed at Westchester County and not at the Highlands.²³

On his way to Fort Montgomery on Sunday he heard the guns down the valley calling the scattered militiamen to their stations. According to his own account he found Fort Montgomery garrisoned by only about 500 men.²⁴ Probably the two forts together, Montgomery and Clinton, had a combined garrison of a meager 600, for only a few score of the reënforcements he had recently ordered out had arrived. And of his small force he sent sixty men that night at Putnam's order "to repair to the top of Anthonies Nose" directly across the river above Fort Independence. Men were coming in from the farms, but it was clear that it had been much easier for Putnam to release the militia

²² Nickerson, *op. cit.*, 343.

²³ *Public Papers*, II, 360-62.

²⁴ Clinton's statement submitted to the court of inquiry early in 1778 explains fully the action taken by him on his arrival. New York Historical Association, *Quarterly Journal*, April 1931, 167-71.

to return to their crops than for Clinton to get them back to their posts.

Unfortunately the Hudson divided the American forces. When Sir Henry Clinton arrived at Tarrytown on October 4 Putnam fully expected an attack on his position at Peekskill which was only fifteen miles up the river.²⁵ On Sunday the fifth when the British seized and made an early camp at the very indifferently fortified Verplanck's Point, only three to four miles below Peekskill, Putnam had even less inclination to send reënforcements to Clinton at the forts. On the other hand, as we have seen, he ordered sixty of Clinton's men to Anthony's Nose on the Peekskill side of the river. He himself had only 1200 Continentals and 300 militia to defend Peekskill and its valuable supplies.²⁶ Sir Henry Clinton's highly successful strategy kept the divided Americans ignorant until the last moment of the point where his attack was to be made, and so prevented any union of their forces.

George Clinton himself took command of Fort Montgomery which stood with its unfinished works on the north side of Popolopen's Kill, more than a hundred feet above the Hudson. He placed his brother in command of Fort Clinton which stood on somewhat higher ground just south of the Kill, a stronger position if adequately manned. The two forts overlooked the chain which had been stretched from the promontory of Anthony's Nose to the Hudson's western shore²⁷—the chain in which contemporaries had such confidence. Both forts were intended primarily to resist attack from the river side.

The British attack came on Monday the sixth. About nine that morning Major Logan, a trusted officer whom Clinton had sent out the night before to reconnoitre, returned to Fort Montgomery to report his belief that the enemy had landed at King's Ferry almost opposite Verplanck's Point on the western shore of the Hudson only about four miles as the crow flies below Fort Clinton. The morning was foggy, however, and he could not say for certain. Clinton then sent out Lieutenant Jackson with twenty-eight men on the Haverstraw road. This detachment was only too fortunate in locating the enemy

²⁵ Nickerson, *op. cit.*, 344-45.

²⁶ Hall, *Parsons*, 117.

²⁷ See the map of the Highlands opposite page 66.

at ten o'clock near Doodletown between Bear Mountain, and its twin, the Dunderberg. To support Jackson Clinton risked weakening his garrison by one hundred Continentals and militia under Colonel Bruyn and Lieutenant Colonel James McClaughry, Clinton's brother-in-law. But the reënforcement only delayed the enemy's progress by some sharp skirmishing before it joined Jackson in a retreat to Fort Clinton.²⁸

Whether or not he had as yet received the letter of warning that the bewildered Putnam wrote him early on Monday, it must have been clear to Clinton by noon that the long-expected British attack on the Highlands and the obstructions in the river was under way and that he must face it with his few hundred men. He immediately asked Putnam for reënforcements but the appeal never reached its destination. The British did not, however, have 5000 men as Clinton suspected.²⁹ Very early on the foggy morning of the sixth Sir Henry Clinton had left Verplanck's Point with 2000 of his 3000 men. Landing near Stony Point, just north of Haverstraw Bay, they had been guided northward across rough, almost mountainous country, by Brom Springster, a Loyalist who belonged in the region. Five miles of laborious marching brought them by eight in the morning to the "Timp," a formidable passage, several hundred feet above the river and the forts, which might have been effectively defended by even a small force of Americans—but was not.³⁰ At that time George Clinton had not even received Major Logan's report that the British had crossed the river.

Arriving in the valley between Bear Mountain on the north and the Dunderberg on the south, Sir Henry Clinton divided his forces for a simultaneous assault on the two forts. He himself took Generals Vaughan and Tryon with a majority of the troops for the shorter and more direct attack on Fort Clinton, while Lieutenant Colonel Campbell with 900 men, including some Loyalists under Colonel Beverly Robinson and German chasseurs, were to circle Bear Mountain for an attack on the west and more vulnerable side of Fort Montgomery.³¹

²⁸ George Clinton reported the events of October 6 to the Council and to Washington in letters of October 7 and 9 printed in *Public Papers*, II, 380 and 389.

²⁹ *Public Papers*, II, 381.

³⁰ Hoffman Nickerson's *Turning Point of the Revolution*, p. 346, blames Clinton's negligence for the failure to guard the "Timp."

³¹ Nickerson, *op. cit.*, 347-51, contains an excellent account of the attack on the forts.

Believing that Putnam would send reënforcements across the river above the chain and under its protection, Governor Clinton tried to delay the British assault until they could arrive. He not only sent out the Bruyn-McClaughry party, but he also posted his one field piece and over a hundred men at the "Hell Hole" about a mile west of the fort on the road that Colonel Campbell would arrive by. This was undoubtedly good strategy. The force at the "Hell Hole" resisted manfully when Campbell's advanced guard arrived, giving the British a taste of grapeshot and musket balls and spiking the field piece before making the inevitable retreat to the fort. Only Captain Fenno, who was in immediate charge of the field piece, fell into Campbell's hands.

It was over two hours later, nearly five, before the British were ready for the assault on the two forts. Just before commencing the final action Lieutenant Colonel Campbell himself came with a flag to demand the surrender of the fort and George Clinton sent Lieutenant Colonel Livingston to receive him. Livingston, under orders from Clinton, informed Campbell that he had no authority to treat and unless Campbell wished to give himself up he might better continue the attack on the fort since it would be defended to the last.

After these impressive preliminaries Campbell attacked, the German troops in the center, the British on the right, and Robinson's Tories on the left. The struggle was short but bloody, for the British used their bayonets and the fighting was at short range. If, as is probable, the British casualties were over three hundred, Clinton's little garrison, greatly outnumbered as it was, gave an excellent account of itself. Colonel Campbell himself was killed together with a number of his officers.

Fort Montgomery was first occupied at about half-past six, and the stronger works at Fort Clinton fell to the British shortly afterwards. The garrisons were of course completely routed. Many escaped in the dark, but a number were killed by fire or by bayonet and over 250, including Colonel McClaughry and the governor's aide, Stephen Lush, were taken by the British.³² James Clinton received a bad bayonet wound in the thigh and although his brother thought for a time that he had been captured, his knowledge of the country enabled him to escape down

³² *Public Papers*, II, 623.

the steep sides of Popolopen's Kill and home to Little Britain. Governor Clinton himself narrowly escaped capture by a precarious descent of the precipitous hillside to the Hudson where he was persuaded to enter an already overladen boat that escaped in the darkness to the eastern shore.⁸³ Sir Henry Clinton very nearly had the pleasure of escorting his cousin the governor back to New York City a prisoner.

There is no doubt but that the defense of Fort Montgomery was spirited and courageous. In spite of its disastrous but inevitable outcome, it enhanced the military reputation of virtually every man in the heroic little garrison, including that of its commander. General Parsons of Connecticut, like other contemporaries who commented on the engagement, had only admiration for "the courage and bravery displayed by the troops (principally militia from New York) who defended the Post . . . No terms would be accepted," he went on in his letter to Governor Trumbull written on October 7 from Danbury, "but with fortitude seldom found, they undauntedly stood the shock, determined to defend the Fort or sell their lives as dear as possible. The Fort was finally taken, merely for want of men to man the lines, and not for want of spirit in the men. But about five hundred was afforded to man the Post and outworks . . ." ⁸⁴ Four days later John Palsgrave Wylls wrote to his father from Little Britain: "You must have heard by this time, the favourable news from the Northern & Southern Armies, as well as the loss of Fort Montgomery—if ever place was well defended, that was—by a handful of men—& with little Loss—Of near four hundred men, scarce a third is missing—it was carried by storm after repeated attacks; with the loss of numbers & some principal Officers, both British & Hessians—The Post might easily have been held, had our Generals thought of an attack upon that place—but unluckily they did not know of it soon enough for a reënforcement to reach the Fort—" ⁸⁵ "The noble defense of Fort Montgomery," declared General Gates, "will, to the latest posterity, adorn the name of Clinton." ⁸⁶

⁸³ Nickerson, *op. cit.*, 351; Corning, *Washington at Temple Hill*, 50; Leake, *John Lamb*, 176-77; *Public Papers*, II, 382.

⁸⁴ Hall, *Samuel H. Parsons*, 118.

⁸⁵ George Dudley Seymour, *Captain Nathan Hale and Major John Palsgrave Wylls* (New Haven, 1933), 189.

⁸⁶ Leake, *Lamb*, 179.

Washington himself added his commendation when he wrote George Clinton from near Philadelphia: "It is to be regretted that so brave a resistance did not meet with a suitable reward. You have however, the satisfaction of knowing that everything was done that could possibly be, by a handful against a far superior force. This I am convinced is the case." ⁸⁷ Clinton himself had declared to Washington that whatever blame might fall upon him for the loss of the forts, "the officers and men under me of the different corps behaved with the greatest spirit and bravery." ⁸⁸ The defense was a gallant one and it seems to have raised, rather than depressed the morale of the troops.

When George Clinton reached the further shore he may well have encountered the five hundred men of Putnam's who were ready to cross to his aid just as the forts fell into British hands. With such a reënforcement the outcome of the struggle might have been very different. Later that night he may have seen two sad bonfires on the river, the ship *Montgomery*, which got out of the control of her crew and was fired at Captain Hodge's own command to save her from the enemy, and the *Congress*, the other continental frigate, which seems to have had an equally clumsy crew, that went aground near Fort Constitution and had to be burned. ⁸⁹ Clinton was somewhat provoked that these defenders of the great chain should have given up so easily. The burning of Fort Constitution a few miles upstream opposite the future West Point, he did not condemn.

Governor Clinton at once joined Putnam at Continental Village where a council of war agreed that it was Sir Henry Clinton's purpose to join the threatened Burgoyne in the north—a view that subsequent events proved to be wrong—and that Putnam should retreat to the hills up the river near Fishkill while Clinton, with reënforcements from Putnam and from the Orange and Ulster militia, should rally his troops to protect the chevaux-de-frise in the river at Polopel's Island. If the chevaux-de-frise should provide as little hindrance to Sir Henry as the great chain was providing at that moment, then both Putnam and the governor were to give ground, defending the countryside, especially

⁸⁷ Washington, *Writings*, IX, 372.

⁸⁸ *Public Papers*, II, 395.

⁸⁹ *Public Papers*, II, 382, 394.

Kingston, and making Sir Henry's advance as difficult as possible.⁴⁰ During the days that followed this convincing plan was only indifferently carried out.

Part of the stores were removed from Fort Constitution and the fort destroyed by its own defenders. Clinton himself returned to New Windsor and established his headquarters at the home of his widowed cousin, Mrs. Falls, on the Goshen road in Little Britain.⁴¹ Here he waited for his reënforcements to arrive. "We are at present on the West Side of the River, under the command of Governor Clinton—," wrote one of his New England soldiers. "Never had a man a more absolute Ascendancy over people, than he has over the Inhabitants of this part of the Country—They are now gathered round their *Chief*—a stout hardy race—armed with good, long Musquets—in high Spirits—exulting in their behavior at Fort Montgomery & wishing for another opportunity—In short they do not appear like Dutchmen; but have the manners of N. England, from whence I believe they sprang—Their Governor deservedly has their Esteem—few men are his Superiors—"⁴² Clearly George Clinton was an inspiring leader of men.

On October 9 while Clinton was at Mrs. Falls', his men captured David Taylor, the famous spy of the silver bullet. Taylor had been sent by Sir Henry Clinton with a message of encouragement to General Burgoyne, a message that was enclosed in a little capsule of silver, the size of a bullet, that could be opened by unscrewing it in the middle. When taken before the governor Taylor cautiously swallowed the bullet. Clinton later reported to the Council of Safety that he had "mistrusted this to be [the] case from information [he had] received, and administered him a very strong emetic, calculated to operate either way. This had the desired effect; . . ." Yet Taylor managed to conceal it a second time, but "brought it forth" again when the governor promised to hang him instantly and cut him open to search for it.⁴³

⁴⁰ *Public Papers*, II, 388.

⁴¹ Corning, *Washington at Temple Hill*, 35-36. The Falls house, which was of wood except for the north wall, was destroyed by fire in 1914. It was an inn in 1777.

⁴² Seymour, *Captain Nathan Hale and Major John Palsgrave*, 189-90.

⁴³ *Public Papers*, II, 398, 403, 404, 413-414; James P. Baxter, ed., *The British Invasion from the North* (Albany, 1887), 33-35; Corning, *Washington at Temple Hill*, 51-53. Taylor was tried by court martial October 14 and hanged October 18.

Another more fortunate messenger succeeded in delivering the message to Burgoyne. The message did not, however, promise that Sir Henry would come to Albany and Burgoyne's aid, and there is little to indicate that Sir Henry had any intention of pushing his advantage to the extent of attacking Gates from Albany.

In spite of the enthusiasm of his men and his bold appeals for aid, all was not going well with Clinton. The chevaux-de-frise at Polopel's Island was broken by Sir James Wallace's "musquito fleet" which was able to sail up the river without opposition. Clinton complained that he had no suitable shot with which to plague the enemy shipping. And more serious still, the promised reënforcements did not arrive. The night of the fall of the Highland forts Putnam had promised him 3000 men as soon as the New England militia should arrive; yet over two weeks later, on October 21, Putnam had sent him less than 400.⁴⁴ He had also appealed to the Council of Safety, to Gates, and to the state of New Jersey; but he still had only about 1000 men in his entire force.

Meanwhile, on the sixteenth of October, the day before the tremendous victory at Saratoga, the governor's little army had failed entirely to prevent the sacking and burning of Kingston by the main body of Sir Henry Clinton's forces under General Vaughan. On the evening of the fifteenth, while the British were landing at the little town of Esopus about six miles below Kingston, which they burned, Governor Clinton was hurrying down from Albany⁴⁵ and his militia were pushing up from New Windsor in the hope of saving Kingston. His troops probably camped that night at Shawangunk while the governor hastened on, reached Kingston that night or the next morning and reported to Gates at noon that there was little hope of saving the town.⁴⁶ Neither his own little army nor the six hundred New Jersey militia that General Dickinson had promised him, would come in time. Vaughan arrived in the late afternoon, burned the entire town, plundered the countryside, and reëmbarked his troops within three hours.⁴⁷ The sacking of Kingston was one of the most brutal, indefensible actions of the entire war.

⁴⁴ Clinton's letter of October 24 to Gates printed in Schoonmaker, *Kingston*, 317.

⁴⁵ Clinton wrote Washington from Albany, October 15; Washington, *Writings*, IX, 393.

⁴⁶ *Public Papers*, II, 444; *Olde Ulster*, X, 303-04.

⁴⁷ Schoonmaker, *Kingston*, 301, 318; *Public Papers*, II, 457-59.

After the fall of Kingston Governor Clinton went to Hurley to guard the supplies that had been saved from the British, and Vaughan continued his plundering of the countryside until, after receiving the news of Burgoyne's surrender, he fell back down the river to rejoin Sir Henry Clinton. Sir Henry's "diversion" in the Hudson Valley, successful as it had been in every detail, had failed to save Burgoyne, and late in October, after demolishing the works in the Highlands, he retired to New York City.⁴⁸ Simultaneously the troops at Hurley were ordered back to headquarters at New Windsor where the governor arrived on the twenty-seventh. It was some time before his Cousin Henry was to trouble the governor again; but twelve years later, in April 1789, Clinton was to write to George Clinton to entreat him to interest himself in saving his estates in America.⁴⁹

Both Putnam and Clinton have been blamed for the loss of the forts in the Highlands; Clinton because he had not fortified the passes in the hills behind the forts, especially at the "Timp," and because he had not sent out more scouts to warn him of the enemy's moves; and Putnam because he allowed himself to be outmaneuvered by the British and because he did not reënforce Clinton in time to save the forts. So convinced were the people of New York that Putnam was incompetent that exactly five months after the burning of Kingston, Washington found it wise to remove him from the command on the Hudson and put McDougall in his place.⁵⁰ Perhaps it was the death of Mrs. Putnam that rendered "Old Put" especially ineffective at that time.

Meanwhile, on November 28, the Continental Congress directed Washington to make an inquiry "into the loss of Forts Montgomery and Clinton, in the State of New York . . . and into the conduct of the principal officers commanding these forts." The following February Washington named a court of three to conduct the investigation: Alexander McDougall president, Brigadier General Huntington and Colonel Edward Wigglesworth.⁵¹ Although the court finished its inquiry on April 4, Governor Clinton received no official notice of its findings until

⁴⁸ *Public Papers*, II, 490.

⁴⁹ Letter of April 24, 1789. Copy in the Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁵⁰ Hall, *Parsons*, 167.

⁵¹ *Journals of the Continental Congress*; New York Historical Association, *Quarterly Journal*, April 1931, 165-66.

September when, in response to his request, the president of Congress sent him "an Act of Congress of the 21st," with an apology for having neglected him. "The Act of the 21st," President Laurens pointed out, "signifies the entire approbation by Congress of your Excellency's conduct as Commander of the Forts on Hudson's River which I repeat with great pleasure in obedience to the order of Congress . . ." ⁵² Certainly Clinton had come off much better than Putnam.

It is, as a matter of fact, unfair to try to assess the blame for the fall of the Highland forts in October 1777. Once Sir Henry Clinton had received his reënforcements from England the defenses of the Hudson were at his mercy. The American forces were not only greatly inferior in numbers but they were inevitably divided by the river and, what was often more serious, by the more or less coördinate authorities of state and nation. Clinton was not supreme on his side of the Hudson yet he could not depend upon Putnam for effective direction. This division in the American command was one of Sir Henry Clinton's greatest advantages. A unified command under a general officer far more skilful than Putnam might have made Sir Henry's progress up the Hudson much less of a triumph than it was, but even unity of command could only have delayed the British. The American forces were numerically inferior to the British and because of the great urgency of reënforcing both Washington's main army and Gates' northern army, the forces on the Hudson could not be materially increased. The Highlands and Kingston were sacrificed, and properly sacrificed, so that Washington might not fall prey to Howe and Gates might take Burgoyne. For these necessities Putnam and Clinton were in no way to blame.

⁵² *Public Papers*, IV, 14, 99.