



Stephen Hoyt

1746 – 1824

New Hampshire

Lt. Stephen Hoyt – Revolutionary soldier. Born in Hopkinton, New Hampshire on 23 Sep 1746 to Stephen Hoyt and Abigail Eastman. His father was a member of Rodger's Rangers who fought with the British in an expedition against Quebec in the French and Indian War (Seven Year War). Because the French had discovered their boats and hidden supplies, they were forced to split up and head south through the dense woods. Stephen Hoyt never made it home. Some remains, along with a snuffbox (containing his name), were found on an island in Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire.

Not much is known about his youth but he met and married Sarah Straw. They had their first of 14 children in Aug 1769. Like most men of these small towns, they joined the militia and practiced on a regular basis. As the tension rose in the early 1770's, the purpose for their commitment became more and more clear; they were destined to defend their rights. Each state developed its own Committee of Safety (or War Department). With it came a sophisticated communication system for its time.

When word spread of the British incursion at Lexington and Concord, each town sent their militia to the Boston area. On 23 April 1775, John Stark accepted the Colonelcy of the New Hampshire Militia, later known as the 1st New Hampshire Regiment. Lt. Stephen Hoyt was under Captain Hale's company of that regiment. Caleb Stark, against his father's wishes, gathered his things and headed off to Boston. Along the way, he met a man in a British fatigue uniform. As they travelled, he discovered that the man was Robert Rogers of Roger's Rangers, who had fought alongside his father and was also heading to the war.

The New Hampshire regiment was assigned the area around Medford. The militias from New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island had developed a ring of safety around Boston with

10,000 militia. Boston was located on two prominent peninsulas, that of Charlestown Neck and Dorchester Neck. Each contained a hill that could be used as a defensive or offensive position. General Howe, the British Commander, knew that he must take them to protect his fleet in the harbor.

There was an intricate spy system on both sides. Paul Revere's spies found out that the British would move soon to take Bunker Hill on the Charlestown peninsula, and advised General Artemas Ward, the commander of the colonial militia. He, in turn, asked each militia to send a regiment to defend Bunker Hill. Interestingly enough, each militia sent a colonel capable of doing the job. The problem was that General Ward put no one in overall command of the operation and he was suffering from kidney stones and unable to attend.

Colonel Stark was asked to lead his regiment of 1st New Hampshire militia from Medford into a defensive position on the Peninsula just a few miles away. Colonel William Putnam, at the recommendation of his capable engineer, set up his defenses on Breed's Hill which sat in front of Bunker Hill but closer to the guns of the British ships in the harbor. Stark, recognizing the weakness on Putnam's flank, decided to take his left flank and set up defenses along a fence line all the way to the water's edge.

The 1st New Hampshire was renowned for its marksmanship. They were made up of hunters who carved their existence out of the rugged wilderness. The 1st New Hampshire regiment was proud of its reputation as the most professional of all the militia units and Colonel Stark insisted on it. This is a description of this regiment as described by a Colonel Wyman, who fought at the redoubt on Breed's Hill.

"To a man, they wore small-clothes, coming down and fastening just below the knee, and long stockings with cowhide shoes ornamented by large buckles... The coats and waistcoats were loose and of huge dimensions, with colors as various as the bark of oak, sumach and other trees of our hills and swamps could make them, and their shirts were made of flax and, like every other part of their dress, were homespun. On their heads was worn a large round-top and wide brimmed hat. Their arms were as varied as their costumes."

Before they left Medford, they were each issued 15 rounds of ball ammunition and powder. Since few of their weapons were of the same caliber, they had to resize the balls. They sent an advanced group of two hundred men to help build the defenses during the night and the remainder of the regiment followed at a steady march.

General Howe's Royal Welsh Fusiliers landed on a sandy point without opposition and immediately set up a beach head. Stark had ordered his men to breakdown the fence and build a breastwork where he could set up 200 marksmen. They were set up in three ranks all the way

to the water's edge. Just before the British attacked, Stark took a stick about 80 yards in front of the line and planted it in the ground, then turned and said, "there, don't a man fire till the red-coats come up to that stick, if he does, I'll knock him down". The killed and wounded were all between the stick and their line proving the coolness of the marksman. The Welsh Fusiliers, the best the British had, put about 700 men against Stark's line. The next morning there were 83 left. Each of Stark's three lines took their turn at the front. The British made three unsuccessful attempts at Stark's line. The concept of "continuous fire" was one of Colonel Robert Roger's rules of ranging service and it worked well this day.

The militia could have outlasted the British onslaught except that they were running out of bullets and powder. There was no thought of a charge because very few of the militia had bayonets. When they were down to two bullets, they made an orderly retreat off the peninsula. They took most of their losses while exposed during the retreat. Stark's regiment lost a total of 93 killed and wounded. The British may have won the ground but they did at a tremendous cost. They lost over one fourth of their entire force.

The British were so weakened by this assault that they never attempted to capture Dorchester Heights. Powder and ball arrived too late to support the Battle of Bunker Hill (or Breed's Hill) but it did reinforce the depleted supplies of the militia. The British remained contained for the rest of the year until the Continentals could get cannons from Fort Ticonderoga up on Dorchester Heights and convinced the British to vacate Boston Harbor on 17 Mar 1776. Today, most Bostonians celebrate "St. Patrick's Day" on that day but the true patriots know it as "Evacuation Day". Sometime later, General Israel Putnam of the Connecticut Militia stated, "We have the full conviction that the time will come when the whole world will give honor of the Battle of Bunker Hill to the common soldiers of New Hampshire who more than any other men, fought it."

All was not roses for the state militia units. Pay was a problem. Wages for the men were so badly in arrears and Stark was pulled into an incident that ruffled the feathers of a lot of politicians. Men were in distress from the lack of funds and the paymasters had been ordered to pay the three New Hampshire regiments. It was close to the end of the year and the paymasters were behind. Men were outraged and a group of them with fife and drum forcibly marched the paymaster to Stark's headquarters. Stark demanded that they were paid. Exeter launched an inquiry and they were eventually paid. According to the Revolutionary War records in the State library in Concord, Lt. Stephen Ho(i)t had a length of service in this battle of three months and 16 days, commencing on 23 Apr 1775. He travelled 75 miles to the battle and was eventually paid 14 pounds, 1 schilling and 11 pence for his service in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

It is not the last time that Lt. Stephen Hoyt would be part of a back pay partition. On 19 May 1777, Lt. Stephen Hoyt was part of a group from Hopkinton that signed the following letter:

State of New Hampshire

To the Honorable Council and House of Representatives for this State “

we the Petitioners Humblee Shueth that we Being Soldiers in the Servic in Col Wimons Rgement in the year 1776 and in Cap William Stillson Company as we Have not Receivd any wages for the month of Novem Last Nither have we received any Back allowance for any of the Time we ware under the said Cap Stillson therefore we youre humble Petitioners Praye that the Honorable Court would Pay to Liu Stephen Hoyt the money which is oure Just Due for which favor we your Humble Petitioners are in duty Bound Shall ever Pray.”

Again, from Hopkinton, on 15 Dec 1777, Lt. Stephen Hoyt, personally, carried a sworn petition for which his pay for that period was 5 pounds, 8 schillings. The statement read:

“Roll for One Month’s Pay of Sundry Officers to soldiers belong to Cap William Stillson Company, Coll Isaac Wyman’s Reg who were in the Continental Service from July 26th to Dec 1st 1776 – and have not Receiv pay for the Month of November”.

He was not only defending his right to be paid, but that of others. Here is a request sent from Hopkinton on March 2, 1776 in which he petitions pay for the widow Mary Eastman.

“to the paymaster of New Hampshere Sir Please to pay Cap Stephen Heremen the wages and Coat money that is Due to M Collings Eastman and you will oblige me”.
Signed with Mary Eastman’s “X” and witnessed by Stephen Hoyt of Cap. Hales Compny.

We have no record of Lt. Stephen Hoyt participating with Col. Stark in the Battle of Trenton, at Christmas of 1776, when he commanded the 5th and 25th regiments of foot, but he was at Mount Independence across Lake Champlain from Fort Ticonderoga on the New York/New Hampshire (later Vermont) line. It seems that the commander of a militia recruited the officers who, in turn, recruited the men below them and promotions were on a sort of elective system. Here is a request for promotion to field grade signed by the officers stationed at Mount Independence, of which Lt. Stephen Hoyt is one.

Mount Independence November 20th 1776

To the Hon Counsel and house of Representatives for the State of New Hampshire
Gentlemen –

“We the Subscribers in the Continental service Having had frequent expereance of the Fidelity and good Conduct of Lieu Col Senter and Major Stephen Peabody in Col Isaac Wymans Reg in the Continental Service; Do Recommend them Both as Proper persons

for field officers in the 3rd Battalion Raised in the State of New hampshier or the next after ye 3d As they are men firmly attacht to the American Cause and of undaunted and firmness –Understand their duty as becomes good field officers We humbly pray they may be advanced Lt Col Senter to be Colo Major Peabody to be Lt Colo as many of the old officers would ingage under them as thay are men we Can depend upon for judgment and wisdom”.

Lt. Stephen Hoyt was a signer of this request.

It is not sure how long Lt. Stephen Hoyt was at Mt. Independence but while the Battle of Trenton and Princeton were going on, General John Burgoyne, unaware of the happening back in to colonies, was partitioning the King to back a spring offensive that he would lead from Quebec down Lake Champlain to Albany, hopefully to meet up with General Howe. After much delay and short of his planned supplies, Burgoyne set out on his expedition.

He advanced down to Crown Point, which was a wreck of a fort, just north of Fort Ticonderoga. He took his time planning the siege of Ticonderoga when; in fact, the fort was undermanned and instructed to put up minimal resistance. If Lt. Stephen Hoyt was; in fact, still at Fort Independence in May of 1777, this is what he may have experienced. This is from the diary of a soldier:

“May 21: 1777 arrived in Camp at Mt Independence all in good health in number 151 went into a Good Barrak had Good provisions & Harde Duty – Nothing worth menshing till the 26 Day when a Scout come in from the Split Rock [illegible] the British fleet [illegible] 27 at Nite Came in another Scout from Split Rock [illegible] som of the British fleet (viz) som Shiping and about 40 boats or batoes Heard the morning and evening Gun from New Cumberlin Head this Caused Expresses to Be Sent to all quarters orders to Be Given 28 Day for ye Cannon all to Be mounted abattese to Be laid & all hands on the work –

Tiontraoga May 29: 1777 – at a Councel of war this Day 3085 rank & file including sick carpenters Montroses & other Arteficers: same day a large number of Canon Heard from the Enemy Dpwn the Lake –

30 Day a Scout came in broat News that ye Enemy was gon Back finding out by the Inhabitence that our meleshe was Come in Grate Numbers

31 Counter orders Sent to Stop melesha on ye Grants & else-where June 1: 1777 Men began to be uneasy Being pretty well fortag Halling logs to make & Giting Stones to Sink the pears to make the bridge”

Gen. St. Clair was given command of the fort just before the British attack, so he could only do stop gap measures. On the night of the 4th and 5th of July, St. Clair evacuated the fort and headed south to meet up with Gen. Gage. One group was to cause a delaying action at Hubbardton but the aggressiveness of the British and the sluggishness of the militia created an all-out battle. After a battle in which they took their lick but gave it to the unsuspecting British, the colonials fled into the wood, every man for himself. They were to regroup much further south.

The reason that I believe that Lt. Stephen Hoyt was not at the Battle of Fort Ticonderoga in July was because Col. Stark had resigned his Commission in the Continental Army because he was passed over for Brigadier General and did this on March 23, 1777. Vermont did not exist as a state at this time. It was called the Grants and claimed by both New York and New Hampshire. New Hampshire was being pressured to defend its western property both from the British and the State of New York. They asked John Stark to pull together an army for that purpose. In the meantime, on June 8, 1777, the people of that area declared themselves a State and at first called it New Connecticut and then Vermont. They went to New Hampshire for military support and bowed to the demands of John Stark as their Brigadier General on Jul 18th. Using the pass-down form of recruiting, John Stark had 221 men by nightfall and 1492 officers and men by the 24th. That was 10% of the voting population of New Hampshire. By July 30th, the brigade was ready to march.

General Lincoln was commander of the New England Militia and ordered Stark to proceed to New York via Bennington. In the meantime, General Burgoyne had a contingent of German cavalry without horses. They were part of the mercenary army hired by the British. They convinced Gen. Burgoyne to allow them to forage the Grant lands to bring back food, loyalists and horses. The problem was that they could not speak English and the British could only converse with them in French. They stumbled on a storehouse of food and arms at Bennington and overcame the small group guarding it. What they didn't know was that the Continentals from Hubbardton had regrouped just north of Bennington and were not far away. To make matters worse, Gen. Stark was less than a day's march away heading in the same direction. The German contingents were separated by a day but elected to engage the Continentals, not knowing Stark was close. Stark arrived just in time to be part of the battle and the battle was theirs. They met up with the second part of the German contingent and destroyed or routed them. It was a bad day for Gentleman Johnnie.

I cannot be sure but I believe that Lt. Stephen Hoyt was at the Battle of Bennington, which occurred on Aug 16th, since 10% of the voting populace of New Hampshire was there and he was part of the 1st New Hampshire Militia. They went on to New York and were camped on the east side of the Hudson opposite Saratoga. Stark was not in a hurry to join with the

Continental because they had snubbed him for general. As far as he was concerned, he reported to the State of New Hampshire.

In a letter to Gen. Gates, Gen. Stark attested to the fact that his delay in proceeding across the Hudson was due to illness. He finally arrived on the 18th of September but since the 90-day enlistment of his troops was up, they did not plan to stay. Gates even tried to entice them with a \$10 bonus but they would not hear it. They had decided, in a war council, to go home at the end of their enlistment. Little did they know that Burgoyne would attack Saratoga the very next day. Burgoyne was in a press. He had planned for an expedition of six weeks and had been on the campaign trail for almost five months. He was still 30 miles from Albany with only thirty days of reduced supplies left and an opposing army between him and success.

Gen. Stark took his regiment back to New Hampshire and they all re-enlisted and resupplied. This time Lt. Stephen Hoyt was for sure with them but they did not head back to Saratoga directly. They headed for Fort Ticonderoga and by its capture cut Burgoyne's supply line for sure. They headed south and captured all the forts along the way ultimately blocking the retreat of Burgoyne north from Saratoga. It was now mid-October and the weather was turning cold and wet. Cornered on a hill just north of Saratoga and out of food, ideas and even tents, Gen. Burgoyne asked for terms of surrender to Gen. Gates. The actual surrender was on the 16th of October 1777 and Lt. Stephen Hoyt was there to witness the action. General John Burgoyne surrendered his army of 7000 men under the plan that they would be marched to Boston, never to return to the Americas again.

It was this surrender that changed the world for the United States. France would soon ally with them and Howe would move the war south and to its end, in Yorktown, in 1781. Lt. Stephen Hoyt left the militia late in 1777 after a musket exploded and damaged his hand. He continued to serve on the Board of Selectmen for Hopkinton and worked with the Committee on Safety recruiting soldiers for the War of Independence.

Lt. Stephen Hoyt would live for another 37 years serving his community in many capacities. He died on May 17, 1824 and is buried in the Bradford Center burial ground next to the old Congregational Church in Bradford, New Hampshire. His faithful wife Sarah Straw rests beside him and his grave is marked with the honor of a Revolutionary War Soldier.

[Compiled by Stuart G. Hoyt, Major, USAF (Ret.), 6th generation direct line descendant of Lt. Stephen Hoyt through his son Richard, who served in the 40th New York Infantry in the War of 1812.]