



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. IV.

OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, APRIL 11, 1870.

No. 15.

THE REVOLT

OF THE

British American Colonies,
1764-84.

CHAPTER XLVII.

On the 10th October Major Cochrane arrived from New York with the following letter:

"New York, Sept. 30th, 1781.

"My Lord,—Your Lordship may be assured that I am doing everything to relieve you by a direct move, and I have reason to hope from the assurances given this day by Admiral Greaves that we may pass over the bar by the 12th October, if the winds permit and no unforeseen accident happens; this, however, is subject to disappointment, wherefore if I hear from you your wishes will, of course, direct me and I shall persist in my idea of a direct move even in the middle of November, should it be your Lordship's opinion that you can hold out so long; but if, when I hear from you, you tell me that you cannot, and I am without hopes of arriving in time to succour you by a direct move; I will immediately make an attempt upon Philadelphia by land, giving you notice, if possible, of my intention—if this should draw any part of Washington's force from you it may possibly give you an opportunity of doing some thing to save your army, of which however you can best judge from being upon the spot.

"I have the honor to be &c.,

"H. CL. 70X.

"Right Hon'ble Earl Cornwallis, &c."

"YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA,

"Oct. 11th, 1781, Twelve M.

"Sir,—Cochrane arrived yesterday; I have only to repeat what I said in my letter of the 3rd, that nothing but a direct move to York, which includes a successful river naval action, can save me. The enemy made their first parallel on the night of the 6th, at the distance of 600 yards, and have perfected it and constructed places of arms and batteries with great regularity and caution. On the evening of the 9th their batteries opened and have since continued firing without intermission with about 40 pieces of cannon, mostly heavy, and sixteen mortars, from eight to sixteen inches. We have lost about 70 men and many of our works are considerably damaged—with such works on disadvantageous ground against so powerful an attack we cannot hope to make a very long resistance.

"I have the honor to be &c.,

"CORNWALLIS.

"His Excellency Sir H. Clinton, K. B., &c."

"P.S.—Oct. 11th, five P.M.—Since my last letter was written we have lost thirty men."

"Oct. 12th; seven P.M.—Last night the enemy made their second parallel at the distance of 300 yards—we continue to lose men very fast."

At this juncture of affairs Tarleton, who in addition to his qualities as a dashing leader had a keen perception of the higher science of his profession, advised Lord Cornwallis to evacuate the untenable works at Yorktown and transport all his effective force to Gloucester, drive the blockading force under Brigadier General de Choisy from the village, and by abandoning all impediments except three or four pieces of light field artillery, a distance of 100 miles in advance could be attained by rapid marches before a sufficient force could be detached in pursuit. In adopting this plan the sick and wounded were to be left under a flag of truce while all the artillery and vessels of war, baggage and stores were to be abandoned. The boats attached to the army could with the assistance of the squadron transport over 2000 men at a trip, and to oppose them the blockading force consisted of the Duc de Laureen's legion 350 men, 700 marines and 1200 militiamen, in all 2250, of which the main body was encamped on the plain three miles from Gloucester behind a slight abattis—a large detachment was advanced to a narrow wood previously described a mile and a half in front where a work had been commenced which was not half finished when the capitulation was signed at Yorktown. No doubt could be entertained that he could be beaten and cut to pieces before any succour could reach him from the French and American camp before Yorktown, a river over a mile in width interposing between.

Under this plan over 4000 picked infantry and 400 cavalry could be withdrawn, nearly half of which could be mounted at the expense of the enemy or by the country, and a dash on Philadelphia might well repay the loss at Yorktown—the plan was feasible, might succeed, and would avert the dishonor of a capitulation which was inevitable, especially as the fire of the besiegers compelled the British to close all the entrances on the left of their lines, while their men were fall-

ing fast from the enemy's fire and sickness.

On the evening of the 14th an attack was made on the two outer redoubts on the left front of the British lines at Yorktown by detachments from each of the combined armies, it fully succeeded, and before morning both were included in the second parallel; next day the British General wrote the following letter:—

"YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA,

"October. 15th, 1781.

"Sir,—Last evening the enemy carried two advanced redoubts on the left by storm, and during the night included them in the second parallel which they are at present busy in perfecting; my situation now becomes very critical: we dare not show a gun to their old batteries and I expect their new ones will open to-morrow morning. Experience has shown that our fresh earthen works do not resist their powerful artillery, so that we shall soon be exposed to an assault in ruined works in a bad position and with weakened numbers.

"The safety of the place is therefore so precarious that I cannot recommend that the fleet and army should run great risk in endeavoring to save us.

"I have the honor to be, Sir, &c.,

"CORNWALLIS.

"His Excellency Sir H. Clinton, K. B."

No attempt appears to have been made to retake those important redoubts, indeed the whole business of the defence was carried on in a most dilatory and unsatisfactory manner: it was marked by no effort of energy or ability, nor was there a single attempt to extricate the army from a position of such danger. A sortie was made on the night of the 10th, and two batteries in the second parallel were carried without considerable loss, eleven pieces of heavy artillery spiked and other considerable damage inflicted, but the attack was made by only 350 men and was not supported, when the French advanced in force the British retreated—the guns were unspiked and the batteries repaired before evening. This was the last effort of the garrison, all hope of prolonging resistance seems to have been abandoned, as it was conceded that when fire was opened from the second parallel no part of the position could be free from its effect and a general assault could not be withstood.

Lord Cornwallis now attempted to carry out