

New Hampshire



Minute Man

A bulletin issued in the interests of the New Hampshire Society, SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION and in tribute to the PATRIOTS OF THE THIRTEEN COLONIES, who pledged their lives and fortunes to establish the Republic.

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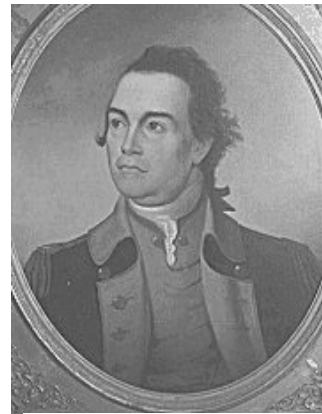
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No. 3

FROM SEACOAST LAW OFFICE TO THE CONTINENTAL ARMY: JOHN SULLIVAN AND ALEXANDER SCAMMEL IN THE REVOLUTION



COL. ALEXANDER SCAMMELL



MAJ. GEN. JOHN SULLIVAN

When John Sullivan, a 34 year-old attorney, led the men of Durham on the second raid of Fort William and Mary, he was accompanied by his law clerks, Peter French, James Underwood and 27 year-old Alexander Scammell. Both Scammell and Sullivan were Harvard University graduates – Sullivan in 1758 and Scammell in 1769 – both showed an interest in military affairs and both early regarded Britain as a “cruel stepmother.” Sullivan was a major in the Provincial Militia and a representative to the Continental Congress in December of 1774. When Sullivan was elected to the Second Continental Congress in 1775, Alexander Scammell was left behind to run his law firm. The desk did not hold Scammell for long. By June of 1776, he was serving outside Boston as a brigade major in Col. Poor’s New Hampshire Regiment. No doubt upon the recommendation of John Sullivan, who had recently been appointed a Continental brigadier general, Washington soon made Scammell a brigade major in the Continental Army.



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In 1776, after General Sullivan was appointed commander of the Northern Army, Scammel and his men traveled up the Hudson to join the General at St. Johns, Canada. In July, however, Sullivan was relieved of command and replaced by General Gates. Angered, he intended to tender his resignation. Only intervention by John Hancock dissuaded Sullivan from this course of action. In August of 1776, Sullivan was commissioned a major general and chose as his aide de camp his trusted law clerk, Alexander Scammel.

During the Battle of Long Island, which proved unfortunate for General Sullivan, Scammel was detached to support New Hampshire troops. During the battle, Sullivan was captured by the British. He was soon released, however, with instructions to extend (futile) peace overtures from British General Howe to the Continental Congress. Sullivan was ultimately exchanged for British General Richard Prescott and rejoined the Army in Westchester County, New York in the fall of 1776.

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After the battle of Long Island, Scammel served for a time as assistant adjutant general to Gen. Charles Lee but soon became a colonel of New Hampshire troops. He and his men served with distinction in some of the best-known battles of the Revolution. On Christmas Night, 1776, Scammel and Sullivan crossed the Delaware River (in the same boat) to attack the Hessians at Trenton. Scammels' men later stormed Nassau Hall at Princeton, fought at Ticonderoga, and performed well under fire at Stillwater (Saratoga).

By July of 1777 General Sullivan was developing a reputation for quarrelsomeness. He, General Greene and General Knox threatened to resign when they learned that a newly-arrived French officer was to be appointed over them. Resignation was avoided only when the Frenchman drowned. Thereafter, when an attack on Staten Island planned by Sullivan failed, some of his coterie of enemies suggested that he be suspended from command. Washington refused to recall Sullivan, however, and the two men spent the winter of 1777/1778 together at Valley Forge.



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Meanwhile, Scammel's good nature, his sense of humor, his tendency to tell amusing anecdotes and his concern for the well-being of American soldiers made him a rare commodity in the Continental Army: a man favored by Washington, Congress, other officers and the troops alike. In January of 1778, Congress appointed Scammel Adjutant General of the entire Continental Army, a position that suited his talents well. The new post also enabled him to address some of the deplorable conditions of the common soldier that had troubled him since the early days of the war. Scammel recalled seeing Continentals in Boston selling their guns to the militia and drawing new ones; playing cards while on duty; frequently being absent without leave, and suffering from miserable clothing and supplies. As Adjutant General, he would attempt to bring his considerable administrative acumen to bear in addressing some of these problems.

When Scammel was serving as Adjutant General, Sullivan was commanding in the Battle of Rhode Island and mounting a highly successful, if harsh, campaign against the Tories and Iroquois Indians in Pennsylvania and New York. In 1779, suffering from deteriorating health, Major General Sullivan resigned from the army and reentered politics. He returned to Congress in 1780.

1780 was also a momentous year for Alexander Scammel. That year, Scammel was selected to handle the unpleasant task of executing British Major John Andre (Benedict Arnold's co-conspirator). After this difficult assignment, Scammel requested that he again be assigned to active duty and joined the First New Hampshire. On the march to Yorktown, Scammel was shot and captured by the British. In spite of the fact that he had apparently surrendered, he was slashed with a British saber. Disregarding both his wounds and his rank, his captors left the man who hauled down the British flag during the second raid on Fort William and Mary to die at the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia. His death in captivity in 1781 outraged the American Army. In fact, after the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown some commanders had difficulty restraining their men from slaughtering British prisoners in retaliation for Scammel's death. Scammel was buried on the grounds of the Governor's Palace, but his grave was destroyed during the Civil War. It was subsequently relocated in the course of an archeological dig.



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John Sullivan experienced an even more tempestuous career in politics than he did in the Army. Although often faced with harsh - and perhaps unfounded – accusations of financial impropriety, Sullivan remained on the New Hampshire political stage until his death. He served as New Hampshire Attorney General from 1782 to 1786, as Speaker of the NH House of Representatives in 1785 and was elected “president” (governor) of the State in 1786. In that capacity, he was called upon to put down riots against the issuance of paper money. He was reelected President in 1787 and 1789 and, in 1788, served as chairman of the convention that ratified the Constitution of the United States. Interestingly, the President of New Hampshire in the years before (and between) Sullivan’s terms was John Langdon, the leader of the first raid on Fort William and Mary - and a signer of the United States Constitution.

Sullivan’s final public duty was in the judicial branch. In 1789 he became the first United States District Court judge for the Federal District of New Hampshire, a post he held until his death in 1795 at the age of 55. He is buried in a family plot in Durham.

On July 31, 1781, shortly after General Sullivan left the Army, his colleagues in Congress voted to compensate him for some of his out-of-pocket expenditures in the service of the United States. He was paid \$1,000 for his expenses as a general in charge of a full department of the Army - and another \$100 “as compensation for the expenses incurred by him in securing the military stores and ordinances at Fort William and Mary, New Hampshire, in the year 1775, and distributing them in various parts of the country for the use of the United States.” Thus, while the Revolution was still being fought, the United States Congress itself recognized the attacks on Fort William and Mary as actions of the Revolution. Unfortunately, Congress, like many others in the centuries that followed, failed to recall that this engagement, which heralded the collapse of royal authority in New Hampshire, occurred not “in the year 1775,” but on a cold December day in 1774, four months before the Lexington Alarm.

