

THE SERVICES OF PETER SMITH, REVOLUTIONARY HERO.

This is not the story of a great general nor has it to do with great deeds of valor, it is just the story of a man who wanted a good country to live in and who was willing, therefore, to help make a good country. As protection is one of the requisites of a good country, when protection was necessary Peter Smith was there. He was not a coward, he was not a laggard, part of the time he served without pay, endured severe hardships, yet returned, year after year, to the duty of protecting his country. This, then, is not the story of a great hero but a plain man who did his duty and did it without question. One of the many who when Congress had changed a name which read "United Colonies" to the "United States of America" helped by his unselfishness to make a possibility a certainty.

When General Washington changed his headquarters in April, 1776, from Cambridge to New York he was much concerned about two things, the affairs in Canada and the safety of New York. The British troops had left Boston and whether they would go north and join the Quebec campaign or come down and attempt to gain possession of New York was a matter for much conjecture. On June 10, 1776, in a letter to Congress he noted the fact that the enemy's troops were embarking, their destination being New York.¹ Two Pennsylvania battalions were ordered at once from Philadelphia to help with the fortifications.² Other companies were ordered to join Washington. But conditions were not satisfactory, as in the latter part of June Washington said concerning affairs at New York: "But few militia have yet come in, the whole being about twelve hundred, including the two battalions of this city and one company from the Jerseys. I wish the delay may not be attended with disagreeable consequences and their aid may not come too late, or when it may not be wanted."³ With not enough troops to hold New York and in anticipation of the enemy's possible possession, Washington realized that all that lay between New York and Philadelphia was the unprotected State of Jersey. This pressing need for defense brought into existence the Flying Camp and it was with this particular part of the Revolution that the services of Peter Smith had to do.

The Pennsylvania Archives acknowledge to very little data concerning the Flying Camp. As the companies comprising this part of the Army were hastily gotten together perhaps the rosters of the companies were not kept or if kept then not properly cared for and eventually lost. Nevertheless, we have manuscript record that one Captain Henry Hambright formed a company for the Flying Camp, and that Peter Smith, of Brecknock township, Lancaster county, enlisted in this company as a private. No record can be found of Captain Henry Hambright's company, hence this must be one of the missing link of information about the men who took part in the Jersey campaign. It is unfortunate that no other names are given of this company.

Captain Henry Hambright was a resident of Earl township.⁴ He was born April 11, 1749, died April 12, 1835, and is buried in the old Welsh graveyard in the township in which he lived.⁵ He was one of the officers of the Flying Camp listed for depreciation pay.⁶ It is quite probable that Captain Hambright formed his company in Earl township, and that Peter Smith came over from the neighboring township of Brecknock to joint it.

In the latter part of June, 1776, mention was made of a Flying Camp, but it was not until July 5, 1776, that the Continental Congress gave it definite recognition. On that day they "resolved" that it should be "under the command of such continental general officers as the commander-in-chief shall direct." Washington replied to this, saying—"It is with great pleasure that I hear the militia from Maryland, the Delaware Government, and Pennsylvania, will be in motion every day to form the Flying Camp. It is of great importance, and should be accomplished with all possible despatch. The readiness and alacrity with which the committee of safety of Pennsylvania and the other conferees have acted in order to forward the associated militia of that State to the Jerseys for service, till the men to compose the Flying Camp arrive, strongly evidence their regard to the common cause, and that nothing on their part will be wanting to support it. I hope and I doubt not, that the associated militia, impressed with the expediency of the measure, will immediately carry it into execution and furnish in this instance a proof of the continuance of that zeal which has so eminently marked their conduct. I have directed the commissary to make the necessary provision for their reception, who will also supply the Army for the Flying Camp with rations. A proper officer will be appointed to command it."⁸

However, Peter Smith had not waited for Congress to resolve nor Washington to reply. A call had come from his country and to this he responded in May, 1776. According to his own statement he enlisted under Captain Henry Hambright in the Flying Camp and marched to Lancaster. Here the company remained for a week under drill and on guard, and after an examination marched to Philadelphia attached to Colonel Peter Grubb's Regiment. Hence, while Congress was trying to make the Flying Camp a reality, this company was at Philadelphia awaiting orders and was, no doubt, one of the first to take up its duties in Jersey. Many companies "destined for the camp in the "Jerseys" were mustered in at Lancaster during the latter part of July and in August, but Captain Hambright and his men were much in advance of these. The company remained at Philadelphia for about two weeks when it was attached to Colonel Glatz's Regiment and taken in boats up the Delaware to Trenton. In Washington's letter of July 10th, from which I have already quoted, he says—"General Mercer is now in the Jerseys, for the purpose of receiving and ordering the militia coming for the Flying Camp; and I have sent over our chief engineer to view the ground within the neighborhood of Amboy, and to lay out some necessary works for the encampment, and such as may be proper at the different passes in Bergen-Neck, and other places on the Jersey shore opposite Staten Island, to prevent the enemy making impressions, and committing depredations on the property of the inhabitants."⁹ Peter Smith says from Trenton they marched to Amboy where they remained seven weeks under drill and doing guard duty. Colonel Klotz's (Glatz) command at Perth Amboy, on October 8, 1776, consisted of thirteen commissioned officers, twelve non-commissioned officers and one hundred and twenty-five men.¹⁰ At the end of seven weeks they moved over to Staten Island but remained only twenty-four hours, returning to Amboy. After another week of guard duty, they were ordered to the North River where all of the troops were being concentrated. Washington, appreciating a desperate situation, was making a

last stand to keep the enemy out of Jersey. This failed, for the British took Fort Washington on November 15th, and the retreat through Jersey began. Captain Hambright's company had been about four weeks along the North River when Fort Washington was lost, and according to Peter Smith's statement when the commanding officer gave orders to retreat, they marched to the Hackensac River and then to Newark. Here they remained for two weeks "nearly destitute of provisions." General Washington was in Newark, for he wrote from there on November 23d, that "the situation of our affairs is truly critical * * *."¹¹ He also asked for money to pay the troops of the Flying Camp. From Newark the company moved to Trenton by way of Elizabeth. Colonel Klotz's (Glatz) Battalion, of which Captain Hambright's company was a part, on December 1st, at Trenton contained nineteen commissioned officers, twelve non-commissioned officers and one hundred and thirty-eight men.¹² Washington arrived at Trenton on December 2d, and immediately ordered all military and other stores and baggage to the other side of the Delaware. Peter Smith assisted in carrying out this command, for during the time he was at Trenton he was busy conveying soldiers, arms and boards to Bordentown. On the seventh Washington was compelled to retreat to the Pennsylvania side of the river and two days later informed Congress that all troops had been moved over as well as all the stores with the exception of a few boards.

Then began the activity along the Delaware which formed the setting for one of the notable events of the Revolution. Washington had plenty of cause to feel disheartened, but undaunted he continued to make preparations to withstand the enemy. Up and down the river bank he went posting his soldiers at any and all possible places of crossing. By December 13th, he had "General Ewing, with the Flying Camp, of Pennsylvania, and a few Jersey troops under General Dickinson," stationed "from Yardley's ferry down to the ferry opposite Bordentown."¹³ Colonel Cadwalladar, with the Pennsylvania militia, and Colonel Nixon, with the Third Battalion, of Pennsylvania, held positions below Bordentown. The situation, as time passed, became more discouraging. Washington was less hopeful and wrote "That I should dwell upon the subject of our distresses, cannot be more disagreeable to Congress than it is painful to myself. The alarming situation to which our affairs are reduced impels me to the measure."¹⁴ The next day, December 25th, he told Robert Morris in a letter:—"I agree with you that it is vain to ruminate upon, or even reflect upon, the authors or causes of, our present misfortunes; we should rather exert ourselves, and look forward with hopes that some lucky chance may yet turn up in our favor."¹⁵ And that very day Fate was standing by with the "lucky chance" in her hand; ready to turn the tide, not of the Delaware, but of events which would bring cheer to the commander-in-chief as well as the people of America.

In the letter to Morris was not the slightest hint of the coup Washington was planning. Yet there was, within a few hours, as the darkness came on, the movement of soldiers and of artillery, the contentions with water and ice, there was delay and then too soon the daylight. But Fate was smiling and Washington won.

In the meanwhile, where was Peter Smith? Capricious Fate, smiling in one place and frowning in another. Here was the great opportunity given Peter Smith to serve his country, yet Peter Smith was not serving. He was down at the ferry opposite Bordentown having a case of the mumps. And good reason he had for it to, for while erecting huts for Winter quarters many a night he had to lay in the snow. Had this been the only reason for not being at Trenton when most necessary, it would have been sufficient. A

second reason, more inexorable, prevented, not one but all of the men of the Bordentown encampment from assisting Washington with the victory which stopped the British and then turned them back toward New York. The ice in the river proved a big factor in the affairs around Trenton that night. Fortunately, it was possible for Washington to conquer this circumstance, but Generals Ewing and Cadwallader with their men, farther down the river, were not able to master the situation. They could not cross the Delaware and hence could not carry out the commands of Washington, and though the British were driven from Trenton the victory would have been greater had the two Generals with the Pennsylvania troops been on the other side of the river. The enemy at Trenton consisted of three Hessians regiments and a troop of British light horse which when attacked took the road toward Bordentown. Washington's account explains the situation definitely. He said "These," meaning the enemy, "would likewise have fallen into our hands could my plan have been completely carried into execution. General Ewing was to have crossed before day at Trenton ferry and taken possession of the bridge leading out of town; but the quantity of ice was so great, that, though he did everything in his power to effect it, he could not get over. This difficulty also hindered General Cadwalladar from crossing with the Pennsylvania militia from Bristol. He got part of his foot over; but finding it impossible to embark his artillery, he was obliged to desist. I am fully confident that, could the troops under Generals Ewing and Cadwalladar have passed the river, I should have been able with their assistance to have driven the enemy from all their posts below Trenton."¹⁶ And a second time he referred to this circumstance by saying that—"Had it not been for the unhappy failure of Generals Ewing and Cadwalladar in their attempts to pass on the night of the twenty-fifth—and if the several concerted attacks could have been made—I have no doubt but that our views would have succeeded to our warmest expectations."¹⁷ Regarding the affairs of that night Peter Smith wrote—"A battle was fought on Christ. Hol. by Genl. Washington at Trenton, and our Officers gave orders to march back to Trenton to take part in the engagement. We could not cross on account of the ice and I lay sick at the time." It is regrettable that the Pennsylvania troops, under Generals Ewing and Cadwalladar, more especially our Lancaster county men of the Flying Camp, could not have had the distinction of assisting Washington at the Battle of Trenton, but they had to bow to the fact that small circumstances often govern big cases.

The Regiment, of which Captain Hambright's Company was a part, returned to Trenton on January 1, 1777, and here Peter Smith received his discharge from Captain Hambright. He went to Philadelphia for his pay and received none. He remained there a week and then "sold a coat and a pair of pants to raise money" to take him back to Brecknock township. He returned home after seven months of service, without glory and without pay. Later he was paid in continental currency which depreciated and he received nothing from this source. Among the soldiers of the Flying Camp listed for depreciation pay was one Smith, marked "private," but the first name is missing.¹⁸

The hardships of the Jersey campaign had evidently not daunted the spirit of the man who was willing to serve his country. In the Fall of 1777, Peter Smith returned again to service, this time, however, to do the duty of another man. He went as a substitute for Henry Geyer, in Captain Isaac Adams' company of militia. As the British now occupied Philadelphia and vicinity this company was detailed for guard duty, first at Newton Square and later near Chestnut Hill, where light skirmishes took place in which the Pennsylvania militia had a part. Captain Adams made a report of his "Company of Lancas-

ter County Militia now in the service of the United States" from Whitemarsh on December 9, 1777. In it is the following record—"Peter Smith—Entered Oct. 22d.—Subte."¹⁹ After two months of duty he received his discharge from Captain Adams and returned to Brecknock township. In the next year, 1778, he was drafted for another two months of guard duty. This time he was with Captain John Lutz whose company, after marching to Lebanon, was attached to Colonel Curtis Grubb's Regiment. Having served his time, he received his discharge and returned home. Again, after this, he was drafted, but as he gives no details concerning this part of his service we can willingly omit it, feeling that he had already done what duty had required.

Appended hereto is a copy of the original paper which contains Peter Smith's account of his services in the Revolution. It is the property of Miss Anna M. Weaver, a descendant of Peter Smith and a member of this Society.

"Peter Smith, of Ephrata, a soldier of the Revolution. I lived in Brecknock Tp. L. C., in May 1776, I enlisted under Cap. Henry Hambright, in the Flying Camp I marched to Lancaster where we remained for one week, under drill and on guard after an examination we marched to Phila. attached to Col. Peter Grubs Regiment where we remained for upwards of two weeks, Cap. Hambrights com. to which I belonged was then attached to Col. Glatz's Regt. we were then taken on boats and sailed to Trenton, from there we marched to Amboy in the State of New Jersey. We remained seven weeks in Amboy under drill and on guard. Were then taken across to Staten Island where we remained for about 24 hours, were then sailed back again to Amboy. We remained one week in Amboy under drill and on guard. We then marched under command of Col. Glatz to Bunkers Hill on North River—for about four weeks during our stay at this place the British took Fort Washington, and our Com. G Officer gave orders to retreat. We first marched to Hackensack river, from there to New Wark where we remained for 2 weeks nearly destitute of Provisions, we then marched to Elizabeth Town, in Jersey from there we marched to Trenton on the Del. river. We remained about 2 weeks at this place during which time I was engaged in conveying soldiers arms and Boards to Bordenton where we erected Huts for to take up Winter quarters, many a night I had to lay in the snow and I got the mumps which was very severe on me. (We remained in Bordenton till Christmas, a Battle was fought on Christ. Hol. by Genl. Washington, at Trenton, and our Officers gave orders to march back to Trenton to take part in the engagement, we could not cross on account of the ice and I lay sick at the time). The prisoners were taken to Philadelphia and our Regt. ret'd. to Burdonton and remained one week then returned to Trenton on the 1st Jany. 1777, I here got my discharge from Cap. Henry Hambright and went to Phila. for my pay after remaining there for a week I went home without a cent in my pocket and I sold a coat and a pair of Pants to raise money to take me home. I then went home to Breck—Tp. L. C. after having serd. a Tour of 7 months I was paid in continental money which depreciated, and I never recd. a cent. In the month of Sep. 1777, I went as a Substitute for Henry Geyer in Capt. Isaac Adams comp. of Militia to Lancaster. Remained one week from there to near Darby in Chester or Delaware called Newton Square we remained about 3 weeks at this place were then taken across the Schukill to near Chest Hill until our tour of two months was up (here we were on guard) I got a discharge from Cap Adams which I have lost then went home to Breck-Tp. I was then drafted for one Tour of 2 months as a Mil in Cap John Lutzs camp the Lieut name was John Ream. We started from home in the month of July, 1778, and marched to Lebanon then Dauphin county where I was attached to Col Curtis Grubbs Regt I was on guard and

discharged which is lost—from where I returned home—I was afterwards drafted and paid.”

REFERENCES.

- 1—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 131.
- 2—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 133.
- 3—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 144.
- 4—Ellis and Evans' History of Lancaster County, page 811.
- 5—Lanc. Co. Historical Society, Vol. 1, page 372.
- 6—Penn'a. Archives, 5th Series, Vol. IV, page 229.
- 7—Journals of the Continental Congress, Vol. V, page 418.
- 8—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 153.
- 9—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 154.
- 10—Penn'a. Archives, 2d Series, Vol. XIV, page 778.
- 11—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 262.
- 12—Penn'a. Archives, 2d Series, Vol. XIV, page 779.
- 13—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 281.
- 14—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 290.
- 15—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 292.
- 16—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 295.
- 17—Washington Letters, Vol. 1, page 296.
- 18—Penn'a. Archives, 5th Series, Vol. IV, page 231.
- 19—Penn'a. Archives, 5th Series, Vol. VII, page 1091.

Author: Bausman, Lottie M.

Title: The services of Peter Smith, Revolutionary hero / by Miss
Lottie M. Bausman.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Smith, Peter.
Flying Camp.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--Militia.
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1917

Description: 137-142 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 21,
no. 8 & 9

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.21

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

=====

+++++

Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address