

“One stout fellow atacked me ... But I parried him off ...”
Alexander Dow's Account of Service, 1776 to 1781,
Including a 1777 Skirmish and the 1778 Battle of Monmouth

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The Parsonage Farm, site of some of the heaviest fighting at the battle of Monmouth Courthouse, June 28, 1778. Lt. Alexander Dow, Malcolm's Additional Regiment, was in the thick of the action. The house stood until 1859.

Even if you think you know the history of the war, this campaign, and the armies, this book is a must-read: Mark Edward Lender and Garry Wheeler Stone, *Fatal Sunday: George Washington, the Monmouth Campaign, and the Politics of Battle* (Norman, Ok.: Oklahoma University Press, 2016)

In the 1990s Garry W. Stone of Monmouth Battlefield State Park instituted a project to gather primary material on the June 1778 campaign and battle. That undertaking was a profound success, with newly found firsthand accounts, maps, and returns being donated by many researchers or uncovered by Dr. Stone. Among several contributions I was fortunate enough to make was the following narrative, discovered while researching the microfilmed Papers of the Continental Congress.

Alexander Dow's letter to Congress recounting his service is, in effect, an early precursor of the thousands of pension depositions made by Revolutionary War veterans in the 19th century. Like some of those later narratives Dow's eyewitness account

conveys a wonderful sense of immediacy, in language both simple and dramatic, and with that charmingly idiosyncratic spelling so often found in documents of the period.

Dow's description of his experiences at the Battle of Monmouth comprises only a small portion of his narrative. The greater part is taken up with his personal history and his service during 1776 and 1777, including an encounter typical of hundreds of small-unit actions fought throughout the war, north and south. It is the type of action often ignored in histories of the war, and yet the sort most soldiers were likely to participate in.

Alexander Dow was commissioned on 12 April 1777. He was listed as a 1st lieutenant in John Hunter's company of Malcolm's Additional Regiment from September to December 1777; in Thomas Lucas' company, from January to February 1778; and Daniel Nivens' company, July 1778 to January 1779. Sometime in 1779 or 1780 Dow was transferred to Col. Benjamin Flower's Regiment of Artillery Artificers. He retired from service on 1 May 1781.

On May 23d that same year, Dow, then in Philadelphia, wrote the following letter to the President of Congress (Note: A forward slash / has been inserted to delineate sentence breaks wherever necessary, clarifications are set within brackets, and illegible words are denoted by a question mark [?].):

Sir Your Kind Consideration in receiving and presenting my petition to Congress (thow a stranger to you) Clames my sincear thanks allthow the Efects of it appears to have no weght in my favor, my [pressing necessitys?] ar now in dispare, which alone has tempted me to trubel Your Exelency with this Epistel - I arived hear from Boston Early in 1773 I lived in [?] Chesnut street three years in [?] & reput as a Cittison, so sune as Tiriney and Opression thretned America I tuck an active part in its defence forsaking all Luster for advantage which I Ever Dispised During our Glorius Strugal, so sune as I was (at a Great Expence) Qualifyd for military Disipline in any degree I raised a Company of men for the flying Camp [militia] as a first lieut. under Coll John Lawerance / my Capt I forbear to name he not having fuley Suported the Charater of a whige [Whig], after that Corpes was demolished I by a grant from [Brigadier] General [Thomas] Miflin [Continental Army quartermaster general] served out the winters Campean as a Valenteer, on the banks of the Dalware [River], in April 1777 I Entred as a first Lieut in a Company of Independent Partizans / I sun raid in this Cittey near fortney men for I was alass the principal recruiting officer, I was then Ordred in Company with Capt [Allan] McLane [formerly a lieutenant in the Delaware militia] To Joyn ... Coll Jon. Pattons [Additional] Regt then at Midilbrook whear I remained with the Company Doing Dutey as no other Officer of Ours Came forward till the Later End of June Whine I was Joyned by my Capt [John] Hunter &c he in a short time Obtined an order from his Exelency Jeneral Washinton to Joyn Coll [William] Malcoms [Additional] Regt then lying in the Clove state of Newyork, what we was principaly Engaged in During the sumar was Exercising and hunting torey's till Sepr whine the Enemy Cam over to Hakensack / we then marched towards that place and halted in the woods near Paramas, Lieut Coll [Aaron] Burr [of Malcolm's Regiment] next morning with Chosen Officers and men the party Consisted of 22 men and 5 Officers in order to Intercept the Enemys plundring parteys but found non[e], Towards Evening and being Quit[e] bewildred we saw a fire on an Eminence but far off / we tuck our Coors Towards it which was our Only [Direction?] whine we was near it we Consealed our Selves, the Coll reconitred the Ground being on fut and found it to be the Enemys picket nearly [?] at But a Small Distance from Hackensack New-bridge / on the other side six thousand wer Incamped in full Vew, we weated till [?] Our [i.e., hour] whine the moon was down, and by full consent of Officers maid seekret and sudant atack / Emagining

them to be one hundred strong Coll Burr proportenad our difrent atacks in platuns, he pitched [mine?] to Enter first without aney alarm and Chalange the whole to serender which I dide that moment finding them both Brave and Obestinat, as they flew to ther arms I dropped three of them with my Baynet on the musel of my fusee by this time one stout felow atackted me in the same manor But I parried him off and in his Indeivering to disarm me he Bit sevrul holes in the Baral of my fusee, whilst my worthey [Serjt.?] Williams Cam[e] to my releff and staded him Dead, I then turned on another full armed who beged for mercy I bid him serender his arms to me which he did into my hand, by this time the rest of our partey had dun ther part and taken one moar prisner, with which we finding no moar Live men we Cam[e] of[f] living sixten on the Ground which had a still moar Grand Efect for by ten Oclock in the morning the whole of the Enemy were Gon [?] in Great fright / thiss was on the 13th Day of Sept 1777 [Howard Peckham, in his work *The Toll of Independence*, places this action on 14 September 1777.]

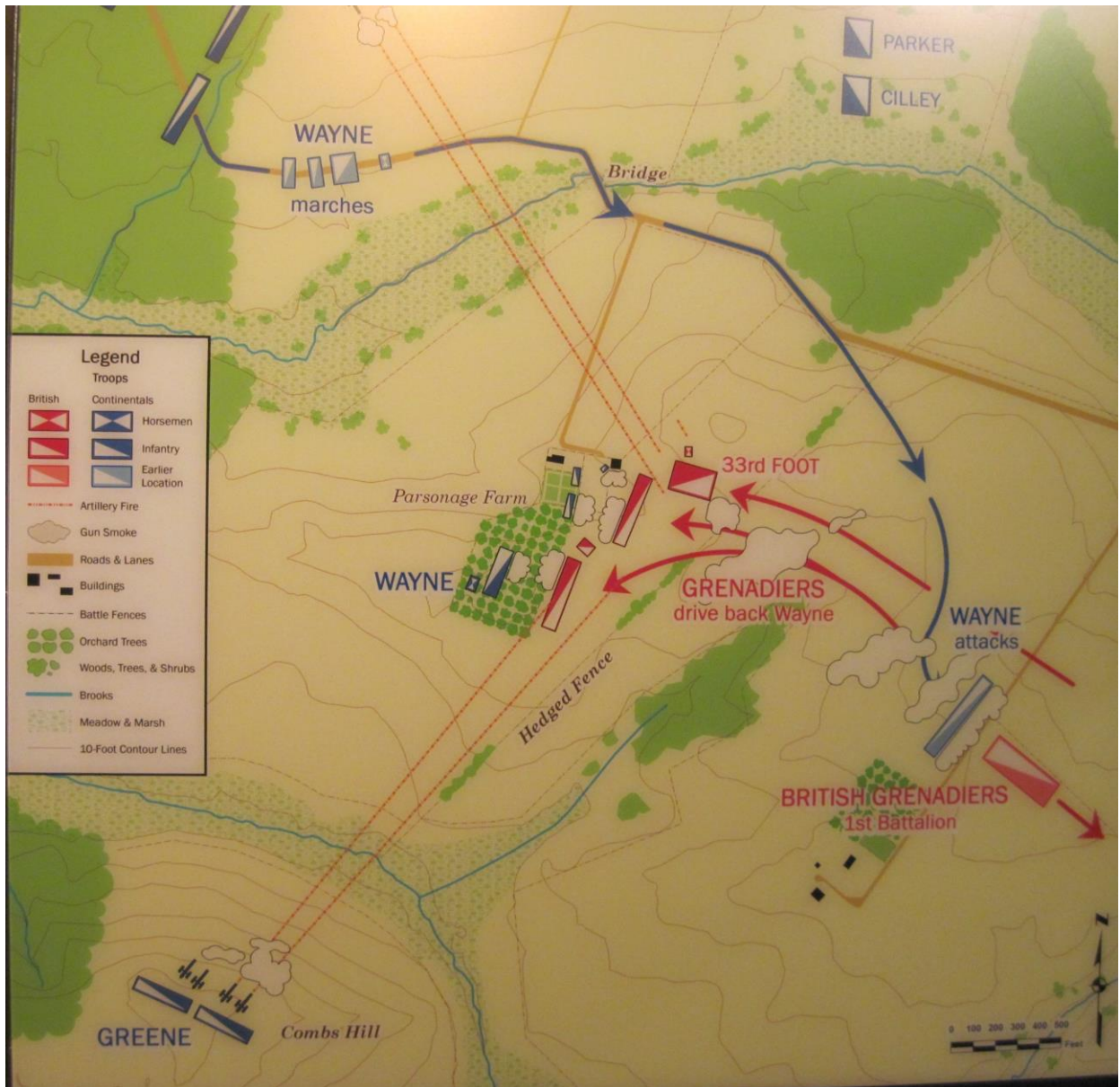
Dow goes on to describe his experience during some of the hardest combat at Monmouth Courthouse:

I was afterwards at Munmoth Battel in a sharp Incanter ageanst British Graniders Whilst Lt Coll [Rudolph] Bunner [3rd Pennsylvania Regiment, killed 28 June 1778] fell near me [and] Coll [Francis] Barber [3rd New Jersey Regiment] much wounded / four subalterns of our Regt [were] wounded one of which [was] Adjintant Talman [Peter Taulman, Malcolm's Regiment, shot in the throat] Closs by my side / I Commanded the platun on the left of our partey and being Closs prest by the right of the Enemy in frunt Lost three of my men the English Comanding Officer on the right of the Enemy holoring Com on my brave boyes for the honour of Great briton, I ordred my men to Lavel at him and the Cluster of men near him as I dreaded the next momant he would ride me down / he dropped [and] his men slackened ther pase whin Coll [Oliver] Spencer [Spencer's Additional Regiment] ordred me to fall back the rest of ours wer in flight / so sune as we gave way Lo[r]d Starlings [American Major General William Alexander, Lord Stirling] Artillery Played on the Enemy so well That they Run Back and we Imeditly rallied and returned to our own Ground wher we remained under arms till next morning / I sune found that the Officer who fell By my Directions provd to be Coll [Henry] Munkton [commander 2nd Grenadier Battalion]

As with many first-hand battle accounts some details are not quite correct. In this case the inaccuracy concerns Lieutenant Dow's claim to have been responsible for Colonel Monckton's death. Garry Stone places Dow's Monmouth narrative in its proper context:

The Parsonage fight was between three [actually five, the 3d, 6th, and 12th Pennsylvania, and Malcom's and Spencer's] small regiments commanded by Brigadier-General Anthony Wayne and the 1st Battalion of British Grenadiers. The 3rd Pennsylvania Regiment was on the Continental right, and as implied by Dow, Malcom's and Spencer's Additional Regiments were to the left. Malcolm's Regiment may have been on the extreme left, at the Parsonage barn and dwelling, as an account of Adjutant Peter Taulman's wounding states that he "crawled behind the barn."

As none of the battalion officers of the 1st Grenadiers was killed or wounded apparently Dow's men killed only an officer's horse. Lieutenant-Colonel Monckton, commander, 2nd Battalion of British Grenadiers, had been killed hours earlier during the Grenadiers' attempt to cross the bridge between the Parsonage Farm and the Continental positions on the Perrine Farm.



Garry Stone's map for the action at the Hedgerow and Parsonage between late Conway's Brigade (comprising six small regiments, the 3d, 6th, 9th, and 12th Pennsylvania Regiments, and Malcolm's and Spencer's Additional Regiments) and the 1st Battalion, Grenadiers and 33d Regiment. (On display at the Visitors Center, Monmouth Battlefield State Park.)

The remainder of Dow's 1781 letter concerns his attempts to settle an account of at least 63 pounds due him from the government.

Further details of Alexander Dow's career are found in a December 1777 letter he sent to General George Washington. Laying out his claim for promotion to "the Comand of Capt John Hunters Company now in Colo Malcoms Redgement . . .," Dow set out his early-war experiences:

I Lived in Good Credit in Philadelphia / I was one of the first asaaseaters [i.e., Associators, Pennsylvania's voluntary civilian soldiers prior to embodiment of that state's militia] ther and Thow a person of no Established fortun I Sackrified Every Comphart [comfort] for the Lebery and Safety of my Cuntry / I wint out as a first Lieut in the five months Searvis and was free the 1th of Last December 76 than went a Volanter With Capn James Montgomery [perhaps formerly 2nd lieutenant, 2nd Pennsylvania Battalion] and Sarved in the Winters Campean By which I Lost my Birth [i.e., berth] of Capn of Marens [Marines] in the [ship] Oli[] / in April [1777] Capn [John] Hunter [captain of an independent company, formerly 1st lieutenant in "Hardenbergh's New York Regiment, August 1776"; possibly Colonel Johannes Hardenbergh's New York militia] Chos[e] me for his first Lieut / I Raised near all the Compeny at a Vast Expenche and Trubel maney of which Listed with me that would not a Listed with aney othar Officar and I have had the Ch[i]ef Comand of them all along as Capn Hunter has nevar Ben a full week at one Time present [Hunter was captured at Fort Montgomery, on the Hudson River, 6 October 1777, and resigned 22 December that same year], as to my Chara[c]ter as an Officer and Solgar I ... Refer your Excelancy to Collns Malcom & Burr or Colln Patton wher eve [I've] Did Duty the foarpart of the Sumar Eather of which I flatter my Self will Do me Honour and as Rank is not Properly Settled in our Regdt [regiment] I think this may Be Easely Determened / one Allan [James Allen of Massachusetts, brigade quartermaster 1 January 1778] Cals himself Oldast Lieut / he has Ben Tried fir Cowerdiss and one Robert [John Roberts, 1st lieutenant 17 November 1777] Cals himself Ouldest Lieut. ... and he has Dun wondars By Listing one man ... If I am to Be Subjct To Such I Shall Then think there is Small Regard for me and the Soldars Say They will have no other Capn ...

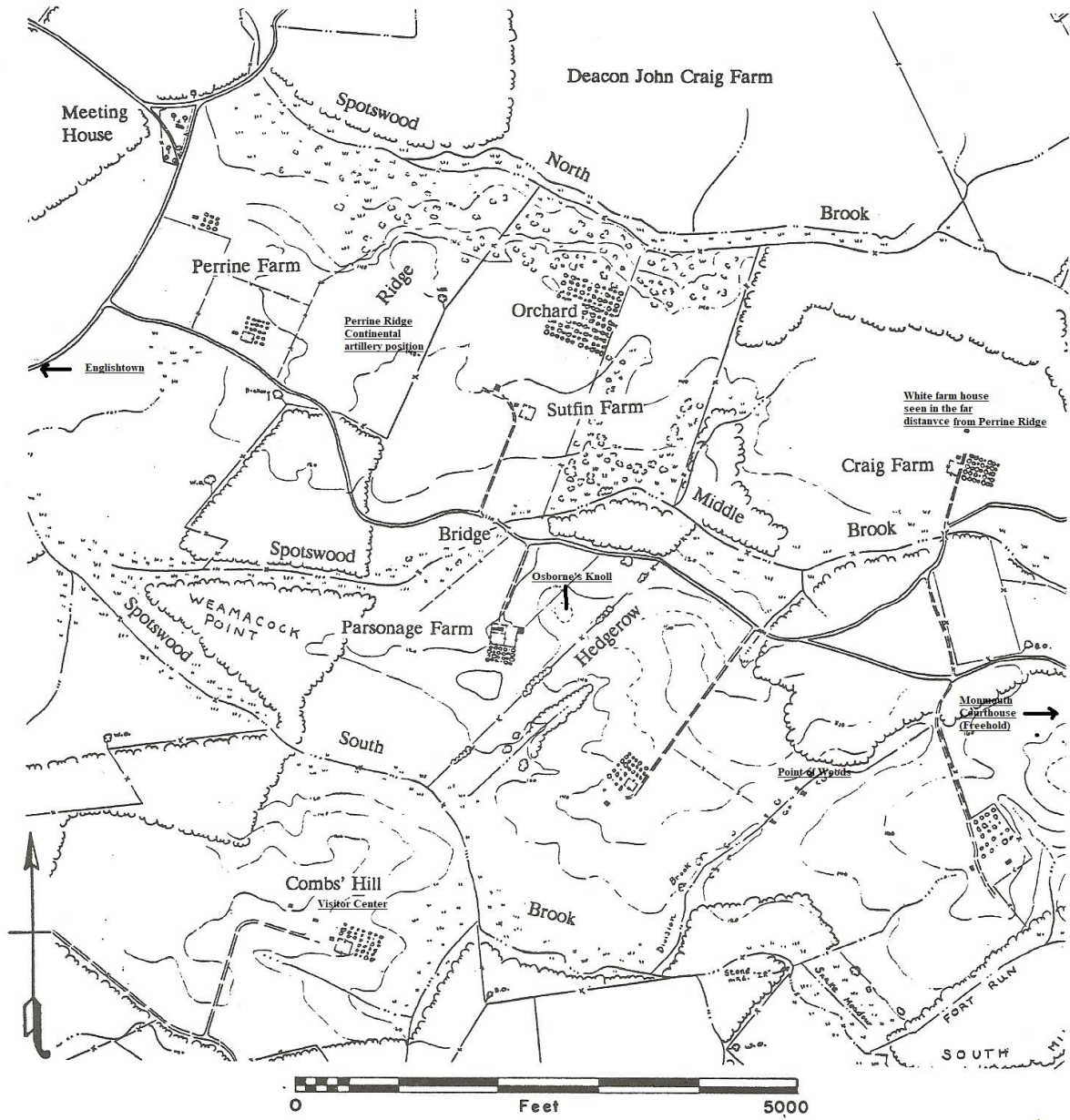
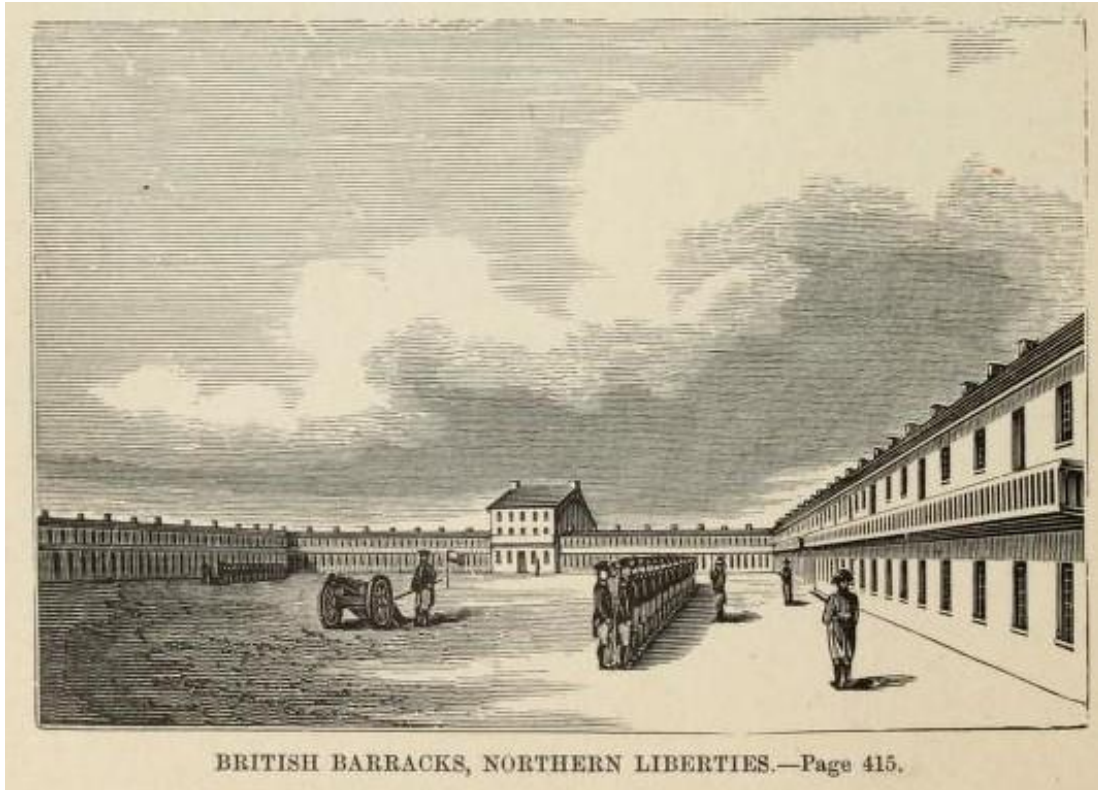


Figure 1. The Landscape of The Afternoon Battlefield identifying places mentioned in the text. Detail from Garry Wheeler Stone, "The Fields of Battle at Monmouth Courthouse," NJDEPE, Division of Parks & Forestry, 1992.



TENNENT PARSONAGE FARM *This wood engraving of the farmhouse was made in 1857, two years before the building was demolished because it was in such ruin. As to the location and dimensions of the farm property, there is no question. It is described in a deed and declaration of trust made May 8, 1736 by the "Elders and Deacons of the Presbyterian Church of Freehold." The deed states in part as follows: "All that tract of Land Scituate Lying and being in the County of Monmouth aforesaid betwixt Spotswoods Middle (Weamaconk) Brook and his South (Wemrock) Brook Supposed to Contain One Hundred and Fifty Acres be the Same more or less Beginning Where the two brooks doth meet and running up the Middle Brook Eighty Chains (5280 feet or one mile) thence South West and by West and three Degrees more Southerly about Sixty Chains (3960 feet) to the South Brook and thence as the Said South Brook runs about Fifty Chains (3300 feet) to the place where it first began. Bounded South-erly and Northerly by aforesaid Spotswoods mid and South Brooks . . ."*



Philadelphia barracks, sit of the Continental public manufactory, where Lieutenant Dow was stationed from 1779 to 1781. The barracks were built in the Northern Liberties of Phladelphia, 1755-1756.



On this map the barracks are the horseshoe shaped structure located next to the letter A. "A survey of the city of Philadelphia and its environs shewing the several works constructed by His Majesty's troops, under the command of Sir William Howe, since their possession of that city 26th. September 1777, comprehending likewise the attacks against Fort Mifflin on Mud Island, and until it's reduction, 16th November 1777," by Pierre Nicole and John Montrésor, 1777-1778. (Library of Congress)



Col Benjamin Flowers, Commissary General of Military Stores and commander of the regiment of Artillery and Artificers stationed in Philadelphia.

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