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# GEN. JOHN SULLIVAN

AND THE

## BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND.

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A SKETCH OF THE FORMER AND A DESCRIPTION OF  
THE LATTER.

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THE battle of Rhode Island took place August 29, 1778. The Americans were commanded by Gen. John Sullivan, and the conflict resulted disastrously to the British arms. The Americans withstood and repelled successive attacks by the foe, and when the battle closed and the sun went down the British had lost nearly one fifth of the entire force they had taken into action.

Lafayette pronounced the engagement "the best fought action of the war." Congress passed a vote of thanks to General Sullivan and complimented him on having repulsed the enemy and maintained the field. He was also specially thanked by the states of Rhode

Island and New Hampshire, while the praise extended by Washington, himself, was also prompt and sincere.

Gen. John Sullivan was of Irish parentage and was born at Berwick, Me., in 1740. His ancestors were of the historic Clan O'Sullivan of the Irish Kingdom of Munster. The O'Sullivans in antiquity and prominence rank with the oldest and most distinguished families in Europe. Irish history for nearly a thousand years records their greatness. They have also been distinguished in France and Spain, while in the United States, John, father of the general, has been the founder of one of the most distinguished families.

As early as A. D. 909, a chief of the Clan was slain in battle with the Danes. Again, A. D. 943, in a great engagement with a Danish host in Ireland the Irish forces were commanded by another lord of the Clan. During the conflict, he slew in personal combat a son of the King of Denmark. The O'Sullivans have been hereditary chieftains of Beare and Bantry. They possessed the castles of Ardea, Dunkerron, and Dunboy, had various other strongholds, and for centuries could muster thousands of retainers and men-at-arms. The head of one branch of the family was styled O'Sullivan Mor; and that of another, O'Sullivan Beare. At the period of the English invasion of Ireland the Clan was among the most powerful in the country, and for a long period bravely kept aloft the Irish banner and unflinchingly opposed the forces of England.

In Spain, the O'Sullivans were Knights of St. Iago and Counts of Berehaven. Other representatives of the Clan

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there were of the Regiment of Limerick, the Regiment of Waterford, and the Regiment of Ultonia, all in the Spanish service. In France, Sir John O'Sullivan, a native of Kerry, became a colonel. In 1745, he was appointed Adjutant-General to the Pretender, and accompanied the latter in his invasion of Britain, landing at Lochnanuagh, August 5, 1745. With Cameron of Lochiel, O'Sullivan commanded the 900 Highlanders who captured Edinburgh, September 16, 1745. In his position as adjutant and quartermaster-general of the army, O'Sullivan formed the latter in line of battle at Culloden. The O'Sullivans have been allied by marriage with the MacCarthys, the MacDonoughs, the MacSweeneys, the O'Keefes, the Fitzgeralds, and other historic Irish families.

This, then, was the sturdy, gallant stock from which sprang Gen. John Sullivan, the hero of the battle of Rhode Island. The chastisement he administered on this occasion to the old-time enemy of his house and race, was worthy of the indomitable spirit of his heroic sires.

General Sullivan's grandfather, Major Philip O'Sullivan of Kerry, was an officer in the garrison that defended Limerick. General Sullivan's father was probably educated on the continent of Europe, as education of Irish Catholics was, at that period, banned by English law in Ireland. The father of the General was an excellent mathematician and a splendid Greek and Latin scholar.

He wedded Margery Browne, a native of Cork. A little girl at the time, she was among his fellow-passengers on the voyage from Ireland in 1723. They were married at

Berwick, Me., several years afterward. The husband became a schoolmaster and taught in Berwick and vicinity until he was nearly ninety years of age. Like "Old Master" Kelly at Tower Hill, R. I., he imparted tuition to large numbers of American youth. His wife was a woman of sterling worth and, like that other Irishwoman, Sarah Alexander Perry, of Rhode Island (mother of Commodore Perry, the hero of Lake Erie), early inculcated patriotism in her sons. There were five of these, to wit: Benjamin, John (the General), James, Daniel, and Eben Sullivan.

Benjamin was lost at sea some years before the Revolution. Daniel was a manufacturer and ship owner. He raised and commanded a company of Minute Men. The British considered him one of the most dangerous patriots in Maine. He was at length captured and confined in the Jersey prison ship. Later, he was exchanged but died on the way home as the result of the brutal treatment he had received. James became governor of Massachusetts, and served two terms in that position. Eben participated in military operations during the Revolution. John became a major-general and forms the subject of this sketch:

He received his early education from his father, the schoolmaster, studied law, and practised at Durham, N. H. In 1772 he was commissioned major in the militia, and was a delegate to the First Continental Congress. Upon the approach of hostilities, he, with John Langdon, conducted an expedition against Fort William and Mary, hauled down the British flag and captured

ninety-six barrels of powder. Much of this was subsequently used by the patriots at the battle of Bunker Hill. Sullivan was commissioned a brigadier-general by Congress, participated in the siege of Boston, and by his own exertions raised 2,000 New Hampshire men who also took part in the siege. A great many of these men were of Irish blood. The British evacuated Boston on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1776.

Immediately after this event, General Sullivan was ordered to Rhode Island with his brigade to repel a threatened attack by the enemy. This was the General's first military visit to the state. Of his second tour of duty there, more later. Sullivan and Greene, the latter a native of Warwick, R. I., were commissioned Major-Generals on the same day. The two became close friends and were associated on many an important occasion. At the crossing of the Delaware, Sullivan led the American right that captured the Hessians at Trenton. He made a night descent on Staten Island for which he received the thanks of Congress. He was with Washington at West Chester and Princeton. He commanded the American right wing at Brandywine and at Germantown, defeating the British left. These were but a few of many important events in which he prominently figured.

#### THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND.

The British, under General Clinton, had taken possession of Newport, R. I., in December, 1776. For some time it had been the design of Washington to drive them from thence and from the island of Rhode Island. Two

expeditions were planned to accomplish this. The original one was to have been put into execution in 1777 when Major-General Spencer had command in the state. He failed, however, to carry it out. As a result he was tried, and, though acquitted, his recall from the state was decided upon.

On the recommendation of Washington and Greene, General Sullivan was appointed by Congress to succeed Spencer. Under date of Providence, March 30, 1778, Gov. Nicholas Cooke, of Rhode Island, thus wrote to Sullivan :

“SIR:—I am favored with yours of the 26th informing me of your appointment to the command of the troops in this state. I have the pleasure of informing you that the appointment is highly satisfactory to us, and we hope will prove equally beneficial to the public and glorious to you.”

In May, 1778, the General Assembly of Rhode Island “*Resolved*, That it be recommended to the Hon. Major-General Sullivan, to take up all persons who are suspected or known to be unfriendly to the state, or to the United States in general, that he shall think proper, and proceed against them according to the known practice in such cases in the army under the immediate command of His Excellency General Washington.”

On May 3, 1778, Sullivan transmitted a report to Congress relative to the Rhode Island department in which he says :

“I do myself the honor to Inclose Congress a return



of the troops at this post. The three last-mentioned regiments leave on this day so that my force will consist of the residue mentioned in the return. We have not a man from Connecticut, and but part of two companies from Massachusetts Bay. Some few have arrived from New Hampshire and about half their quota are on the march. With these troops, I have to guard a shore of upwards of sixty miles in extent, from Point Judith to Providence on the west, and from Providence to Sakonnet Point on the east, against an enemy who can bring all their strength to any point they choose. I am exceeding happy that they know nothing of our strength, and are fortifying against an attack which they daily expect.

“ They have on the island and in the posts adjacent, four regiments of Hessians, and the Twenty-second, Forty-third, and Fifty-sixth British; making on the whole, 3,600, exclusive of a small regiment, consisting of 127, composed of refugees and deserters, and commanded by one Whiteman. I inclose Congress a plan of their fortifications round the town. They have besides, a very strong work on Butt’s Hill, a small redoubt opposite Bristol Ferry, another at the entrance of our common ferry point, and two small works opposite Frogland Point. . . . There are seven vessels of war [British], and two galleys, stationed in the following manner, viz. : The ‘ Kingfisher ’ and two galleys, in the East Passage at Little Compton; in the main channel, the ‘ Flora ’ and ‘ Juno ’; in the west channel, the ‘ Somerset ’; at the town, the ‘ Nonesuch,’ the ‘ Falcon,’ and a frigate, the name of which I have not learned.

“ This disposition of their shipping was made to entrap Captain Whipple, in the ‘ Providence ’ frigate ; but on the night of the 30th, he took advantage of a violent northeast storm, passed them under a heavy fire, which he warmly returned, and got safe to sea. As the number of troops destined for this department will be so incompetent to defend it against a sudden attack, I think that the two State galleys, if properly fitted, would be of great advantage. . . . I also beg Congress to order Gen. Stark, who has returned to New Hampshire from Albany, to me at this place as I shall need two brigadiers when the troops arrive ; and the more so, as the extent of country to guard will be so great. ”

On June 19, ensuing, Congress instructed Washington, at the request of General Sullivan and Governor Greene, to return the Rhode Island troops to their own state, for the latter’s defence. The Navy board was directed to prepare three galleys for the defence of the Providence, Warren, and Taunton rivers. Preparations for the expedition against the British at Newport went actively forward under the orders of General Sullivan. In the meantime, a British force of 500 or 600 was sent, on May 25, 1778, up the Bay to interrupt the preparations. The British landed about dawn and did great damage in Warren and Bristol. They plundered private dwellings and carried off such articles of value as could easily be transported. In Bristol, they burned the Episcopal church and eighteen of the best houses.

In some cases rings were torn from women’s fingers and buckles from their shoes. Aprons, handkerchiefs,

and necklaces were taken as well as household furniture and other articles. Several prisoners were captured, brutally treated, and carried off. A quantity of livestock was also collected, but the marauders were prevented from securing this by a party of volunteers, under Colonel Barton, sent down from Providence by General Sullivan. These fell upon the enemy's rear and compelled him to abandon at least so much of the booty. Next day the British soldiers offered their plunder for sale in the streets of Newport. The barbarities inflicted on the people of Warren and Bristol called from General Sullivan a sharp, condemnatory letter to the British commander, General Pigot. In this letter Sullivan declared the enemy's expedition to have been "darkened with savage cruelty and stained with indelible disgrace."

The news that a French fleet had arrived off New York, caused the British at Newport to make preparations for withstanding a combined attack,—from Sullivan's forces by land, and from the French by sea. The King's stores were removed from the Newport wharves to a place of safety. New redoubts were thrown up, and the forts on Brenton's Point, Goat Island, and Rose Island speedily rebuilt. In the meantime, Sullivan had been collecting men and material on the mainland ready to cross over, from Tiverton, to the island of Rhode Island on which Newport stands. For days, Providence, Warren, and Bristol resounded with the tramp of marching men and the rumble of artillery—patriots hastening to the front.

The island of Rhode Island, upon which the battle was fought, is within the state of Rhode Island but is sepa-

rated from the mainland by Narragansett and Mount Hope bays and the Sakonnet river. The island is about fifteen miles in length and of very irregular width, being only three or four miles across at the widest part. Newport is situated at the S. S. W. end of the island, which fronts on the Atlantic ocean. Irish settlers are found in Newport and vicinity fully one hundred years before the Revolution. Among the old-time Irish names there long before the Declaration of Independence are Casey, Larkin, Kelly, Murphy, and the like. That distinguished Irishman, George Berkeley, "the Kilkenny scholar," arrived at Newport in 1729, took up his residence in its neighborhood, and was quickly conceded the intellectual leadership of the colony.

On July 29, 1778, the magnificent French fleet under D'Estaing arrived off Brenton's ledge, below Newport. It comprised twelve ships of the line, four frigates, and a corvette. The ships of the line comprised the *Languedoc*, *Marseillais*, *Provence*, *Tonnant*, *Sagittaire*, *Guerriere*, *Fantasque*, *César*, *Protecteur*, *Vaillant*, *Zèle*, and *Hector*; the frigates were the *Chimère*, *l'Engageante*; *Aimable*, and *Alcègne*; the corvette was the *Stanley*. The fleet had aboard about 4,000 French troops of the line. The next day, General Sullivan went aboard the flagship *Languedoc* and had a conference with the French admiral. It was agreed that two ships of the line, two frigates, and the corvette should take position so as to cut off the retreat of the enemy's vessels lying in the bay.

As soon as this plan became apparent to the British, the latter ran four of their frigates—the *Lark*, *Orpheus*,

*Juno*, and *Cerberus*—ashore and burned them. Later, they destroyed other ships and a number of smaller vessels by burning or sinking the same to prevent them being taken by the French. Altogether, the British lost vessels carrying 212 guns, the guns also being lost. On the appearance of the French, the British troops on Conanicut, and in other localities, were withdrawn. The agreement between Sullivan and D'Estaing, who expected their landing on the island of Rhode Island would be contested, was that the Americans should cross over from the mainland first and the French from their ships next. It was later decided, however, that both movements should be made simultaneously. Sullivan's forces on August 4, 1778, comprised the following:

Varnum's brigade . . . .	1,037
Glover's brigade . . . .	1,131
Cornell's brigade . . . .	1,719
Greene's brigade . . . .	1,626
Lovell's brigade . . . .	1,158
Titcomb's brigade . . . .	959
Livingston's advance . . . .	659
West's reserve . . . .	1,025
Artillery . . . .	810
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Total . . . .	10,124

The British force at this time included the Twenty-second, Thirty-eighth, Forty-third, and Fifty-fourth regiments, the Anspach regiments of Vort and Seaboth, the Royal Artillery, the Hessian Chasseurs, the King's American Regiment (loyalists), and some other corps. The

larger part of *these troops were veterans*. A large portion of Sullivan's force was composed of volunteers who had never been in action. On August 9, 1788, D'Estaing began landing French troops on Conanicut island, while Sullivan, with his army, began crossing over from Tiverton to the north end of the island of Rhode Island. He there took possession of the redoubts deserted by the British, threw up new ones, posted artillery and gradually extended his lines in the direction of Newport. While the French were landing on Conanicut, a British fleet under Lord Howe was seen approaching outside. D'Estaing immediately reëmbarked his troops, regardless of the arrangements with Sullivan for the attack on Newport, and went out to give battle to the incoming fleet.

This sudden change of tactics on the French commander's part greatly mortified both Sullivan and Lafayette. On the night of August 12 a great storm arose which scattered both fleets. In the meantime, however, the French had engaged some of the British ships, inflicting and receiving damage. D'Estaing later returned to Newport, but, owing to the injury sustained by his fleet in the storm, decided on taking his ships to Boston for repairs. Sullivan and Lafayette tried to induce him to remain and carry out the design against Newport, but were unsuccessful. The ensuing events are thus told by Sullivan in a letter to the President of Congress. The letter is dated Tiverton, August 31, 1778 :

“ ESTEEMED SIR : Upon the Count D'Estaing finding himself under the necessity of going to Boston to repair the loss he sustained in the late gale of wind, I thought

it best to carry on my approaches with as much vigor as possible against Newport, that no time might be lost in making the attack upon the return of his fleet, or any part of it to coöperate with us. I had sent express to the Count to hasten his return, which I had no doubt would at least bring back a part of his fleet to us in a few days.

“Our batteries played upon the enemy’s works for several days with apparent good success, as the enemy’s fire from their outworks visibly grew weaker, and they began to abandon some of those next us; and on the 27th we found they had removed their cannon from all the outworks except one.

“The town of Newport is defended by two lines supported by several redoubts connected with the lines. The first of these lines extends from a large pond, called Easton’s pond, near to Tommony Hill, and then turns off to the water on the north of Windmill Hill; this line was defended by five redoubts in front.

“The second line is more than a quarter of a mile within this, and extends from the sea to the north side of the island terminating at the North Battery; on the south at the entrance by Easton’s beach, where this line terminates, is a redoubt which commands the pass, and has another redoubt about twenty rods on the north; there are a number of small works interspersed between the lines, which render an attack extremely hazardous on the land side, without a naval force to coöperate with it. I, however, should have attempted carrying the works by storm, as soon as I found they had withdrawn their can-

nons from their outworks, had I not found to my great surprise that the volunteers which composed a great part of the army had returned and reduced my numbers to little more than that of the enemy; between two and three thousand had returned in the course of twenty-four hours, and others were still going off upon a supposition that nothing could be done before the return of the French fleet. Under these circumstances and the apprehension of the arrival of an English fleet with a reinforcement to relieve the garrison, I sent away all the heavy articles that could be spared from the army to the main; also a large party was detached to get the works in repair on the north end of the island, to throw up some additional ones, and put in good repair the batteries at Tiverton and Bristol, to secure a retreat in case of necessity.

“On the 28th, a council was called in which it was unanimously determined to remove to the north end of the island, fortify our camp, secure our communication with the main, and hold our ground on the island till we could know whether the French fleet would soon return to our assistance. On the evening of the 28th we moved with our stores and baggage, which had not been previously sent forward, and about two in the morning encamped on Butt’s Hill, with our right extending to the west road, and left to the east road; the flanking and covering parties still further towards the water on the right and left. One regiment was posted in a redoubt advanced of the right of the first line. Col. Henry B. Livingston, with a light corps consisting of Colonel Jackson’s detachments and a detachment from the army,



was stationed in the east road. Another light corps under command of Colonel Laurens, Colonel Fleury, and Major Talbot, was posted on the west road. These corps were posted near three miles in front; in the rear of those was the picquet of the army commanded by Colonel Wade. The enemy having received intelligence of our movements came out early in the morning with nearly their whole force in two columns, advanced in the two roads and attacked our light corps; they made a brave resistance, and were supported for some time by the picquet.

“ I ordered a regiment to support Colonel Livingston, another to Colonel Laurens, and at the same time sent them orders to retire to the main army in the best order they could. They kept up a retreating fire upon the enemy, and retired in excellent order to the main army. The enemy advanced on our left very near, but were repulsed by General Glover; they then retired to Quaker Hill. The Hessian column formed on a chain of hills running northward from Quaker Hill. Our army was drawn up, the first line in front of the works on Butt's Hill; the second in rear of the hill, and the reserve near a creek and near half a mile in the rear of the first line. The distance between those hills is about one mile, the ground between the hills is meadow land interspersed with trees and small copse wood. The enemy began a cannonade upon us about nine in the morning, which was returned with double force; skirmishing continued between the advanced parties till near 10 o'clock, when the enemy's two ships of war and some small armed

vessels having gained our right flank and begun a fire, the enemy bent their whole force that way, and endeavored to turn our right under cover of the ships' fire, and to take advanced redoubt on the right; they were twice driven back in great confusion; but a third trial was made with greater numbers and more resolution, which, had it not been for the timely aid sent forward, would have succeeded; a sharp conflict of near an hour ensued, in which the cannon from both armies placed on the hills played briskly in support of their own party.

“The enemy were at length routed, and fled in great confusion to the hill where they first formed, and where they had artillery and some works to cover them, leaving their dead and wounded in considerable numbers behind them. . . . Colonel Campbell [British] came out the next day to gain permission to view the field of action to search for his nephew who was killed by his side, whose body he could not get off, as they were closely pursued. The firing of artillery continued through the day, and the musketry, with intermission, six hours; the heat of action continued near an hour, which must have ended in the ruin of the British army had not their redoubts on the hill covered them from further pursuit. We were about to attack them in their lines, but the men having had no rest the night before, and nothing to eat either that night or the day of the action, and having been in constant action through most of the day, it was not thought advisable, especially as their position was exceedingly strong, and their numbers fully equal, if not superior, to ours.

“ Not more than fifteen hundred of my troops had ever been in action before. . . . I have the pleasure to inform Congress that no troops could possibly show more spirit than those of ours which were engaged ; Colonel Livingston, and all the officers of the light troops, behaved with remarkable spirit ; Colonels Laurens, Fleury, and Major Talbot, with the officers of that corps, behaved with great gallantry.

“ The brigades of the first line, Varnum’s, Glover’s, Cornell’s, and Greene’s, behaved with great firmness. Major-General Greene who commanded in the attack on the right, did himself the highest honor by the judgment and bravery exhibited in the action. One brigade only of the second line was brought to action, commanded by Brigadier-General Lovell ; he, and his brigade of militia, behaved with great resolution ; Colonel Crane and the officers of artillery deserve the highest praise. I enclose Congress a return of the killed, and wounded, and missing on our side, and beg leave to assure them that from our own observation the enemy’s loss must be much greater. Our army retired to camp after the action, the enemy employed themselves in fortifying their camp through the night ; in the morning of the 30th, I received a letter from his excellency, General Washington, giving me notice that Lord Howe had again sailed with the fleet, and receiving intelligence at the same time that a fleet was off Block Island, and also a letter from Boston informing me that the Count D’Estaing could not come round so soon as I expected. A council was called, and as we could have no prospect of operating against New-

port with success, without the assistance of a fleet, it was unanimously agreed to quit the island until the return of the French squadron; to make a retreat in the face of an enemy, equal, if not superior in number, and cross a river without loss, I knew was an arduous task, and seldom accomplished if attempted; as our sentries were within 200 yards of each other I knew it would require the greatest care and attention. To cover my design from the enemy, I ordered a number of tents to be brought forward and pitched in sight of the enemy, and almost the whole army to employ themselves in fortifying the camp.

“The heavy baggage and stores were falling back and crossing through the day; at dark the tents were struck, the light baggage and troops passed down, and before 12 o'clock the main army had crossed, with stores and baggage. The Marquis de Lafayette arrived about 11 in the evening from Boston, where he had been by request of the general officers, to solicit the speedy return of the fleet. He was sensibly mortified that he was out of action, and that he might not be out of the way in case of action, he had rode from hence to Boston in seven hours, and returned in six and a half, the distance near seventy miles. He returned time enough to bring off the picquets, and other parties which covered the retreat of the army, which he did in excellent order; not a man was left behind, not the smallest article lost. . . .”

The loss of the Americans in the battle was 211; (killed, wounded, and missing), and that of the British 1023. On Sullivan's staff that day were two of his

brothers: Captain Eben Sullivan, aide-de-camp, and James Sullivan, then a judge of the Massachusetts Superior Court. In one spot on the field of battle sixty British dead were found; in another, thirty Hessians were buried in one grave. Many officers and men of Irish descent served in Sullivan's army that day. Washington complimented Sullivan and his army upon the result of the battle. Congress

“*Resolved*, That the retreat made by Major-General Sullivan, with the troops under his command from Rhode Island, was prudent, timely, and well conducted, and that Congress highly approve the same,” and “That the thanks of Congress be given to Major-General Sullivan, and to the officers and troops under his command, for their fortitude and bravery, displayed in the action of August 29th, in which they repulsed the British forces and maintained the field.”

General Sullivan's modest account of the victory won by him on this occasion, is well supplemented by the Hon. Samuel G. Arnold. The latter in an address at Portsmouth, R. I., in 1878, on the centennial anniversary of the battle, gives the following account of the latter:

“A series of heavy skirmishes opened the engagement, and a regiment was sent [by Sullivan] to reinforce each of the two advanced corps, with orders for them to retire upon the main body, which was done in perfect order. The accounts vary as to which commenced the fight, one attributing it to Major Talbot on the west road, but the most circumstantial point to a spot near the Gibbs farm, where a cross road connects the two main roads, and to a

field now included between the east road and a middle road which at this point runs north from the cross road and parallel with the main road. A broad field enclosed by stone walls at this corner concealed a portion of the American pickets. The Union meeting-house now stands at the southeast angle of this field.

“Here the Twenty-second British regiment, Colonel Campbell, which had marched out by the east road, divided, and one half of it, turning to the left into the cross road, fell into the ambushade. A terrible slaughter ensued. The Americans, springing from behind the walls, poured a storm of bullets upon the bewildered enemy, and reloaded and repeated the desolating fire before the British could recover from the shock. Nearly one quarter of the ill-fated Twenty-second were stretched upon the field. Two Hessian regiments came up to their relief, but too late. The Americans, according to orders, had already retreated [to the main body].

“A general assault was [then] made upon the American left wing. This was repulsed by Gen. Glover, who drove the enemy into their works on Quaker hill. Upon the highlands extending north from the hill the Hessian columns were formed. The American army was drawn up in three lines, the first in front of their works on Butts hill, the second in rear of the hill, and the reserves near a creek about half a mile in rear of the first line. Between the two hills the distance is about one mile, with low meadow and, at that time, woodland between. At nine o'clock a heavy canonnade commenced, and continued the whole day.

“About ten o'clock the British ships of war and some gunboats came up the bay and opened fire upon the American right flank. Under cover of this fire a desperate attempt was made to turn the flank and storm a redoubt on the American right. The British right wing had already been repulsed by Gen. Glover. The enemy now concentrated his whole force upon the new point of attack. The action became general, and for nearly seven hours raged with fury, but between ten o'clock and noon the fighting was most desperate. Down the slope of Anthony's the Hessian columns and British infantry twice charged upon the forces led by Major-General Greene, which were composed of the four brigades of Varnum, Cornell, Glover, and Christopher Greene. The attacks were repulsed with great slaughter. . . .

“To turn the flank and capture the redoubt was to decide the battle. A third time, with added ranks and the fury of despair, the enemy rushed to the assault. The strength of the Americans was well nigh spent and this last charge was on the point of proving successful when two events occurred which turned the tide of battle. Two Continental battalions were thrown forward by General Sullivan to the support of his exhausted troops, and at the critical moment a desperate charge with the bayonet was made by Colonel Jackson's regiment, led by the gallant Lieutenant-Colonel Henry B. Livingston. This furious bayonet charge, says an eye witness, immediately threw the balance of victory into the American scale. And now it was that the newly raised black regiment, under Col. Christopher Greene, justified the hopes of its leaders and

contributed in no small degree to decide the fortunes of the day. Headed by their major, Samuel Ward, and posted in a valley, they three times drove back the Hessians, who strove in vain to dislodge them, and so bloody was the struggle that on the day after the battle the Hessian colonel who had led the charge applied for a change of command, because he dared not lead his regiment again to action lest his men should shoot him for causing them so great a loss.

“While the fight was raging at the right and centre of the line, the Massachusetts brigade, under General Lovell, attacked the British right and rear with complete success. Two heavy batteries brought forward to engage the ships of war obliged them to haul off. The desperate attempt to turn the American flank had failed, and the battle was already won by Sullivan. The British retreated to their camp, closely pursued by the victorious Americans, who captured one of their batteries on Quaker hill. Sullivan then desired to storm the works, but the exhausted condition of his troops, who had been for thirty-two hours without rest or food, and continually on the march, at labor or in battle, compelled him to abandon the attempt. The hand-to-hand fighting was over early in the afternoon, but the cannonade continued until night.”

In the army was a picked corps known as Sullivan's Life Guards. They behaved with great gallantry throughout the action and rendered valuable service. In recognition thereof Sullivan issued the following :

*Handwritten notes:*  
 1. Sullivan's Life Guards  
 2. Sullivan's Life Guards  
 3. Sullivan's Life Guards



“HEADQUARTERS, September 10, 1778.

“GENERAL ORDERS FOR THE DAY—TOMORROW.

“At the gallant behavior of the General’s Guards on Rhode Island, the General expresses his highest satisfaction, and returns them his thanks, and appoints Aaron Mann, who commanded the Guards on Rhode Island, to the rank of Captain; Levi Hopkins, First Lieutenant; George Potter, Second Lieutenant, and John Wescott, Ensign. The General assures them they shall have their Commissions as soon as possible.

“JOHN SULLIVAN.”

Colonel Ephraim Bowen of Rhode Island was appointed Quartermaster-General in the United States army, and in June, 1778, was assigned to the Rhode Island department. October 20, 1778, he writes to Gen. Nathaniel Greene that he has borrowed of Sullivan “one hundred and forty thousand dollars, which he wishes me to return as soon as convenient. If it is possible wish it might be sent forward, and at the same time should be glad to receive some for the department.” Writing to Greene from Providence, November 14, 1778, Bowen says: “Have paid General Sullivan out of the money you last sent me, sixty-five thousand dollars, which leaves a balance of seventy-five thousand more. I have directed all accounts whatever to be made up to the last of this month, that you may have the true and exact amounts of the disbursements of the department.”

Sullivan remained in command in the state until March, 1779, when he was succeeded by Gates. Previous to his

departure, however, he was presented with the following address by the town of Providence :

“ *To Major-General John Sullivan :*

“ SIR,—As you have sustained the high office of commander-in-chief at this post for about a year past, and during that whole time have carefully attended to, and cordially promoted the peace, interest, and safety of the state in general, and of this town in particular, all that prudence could suggest, that diligence could effect or valor attempt, has been done for us. But as the service of America is now to deprive us of your further continuance here, and calls you to fill the same high office, in more important commands, we can do no less than honestly to return you our sincere thanks and most grateful acknowledgments, wishing you the blessings of Heaven, success in all your efforts to serve your country, that you may happily tread the courts of virtue, and finally reach the temple of fame.

“ We are, Sir, with every sentiment of gratitude and the highest respect, Your Honor’s most obedient humble servants.

“ Signed by the unanimous order and in behalf of a town meeting of the freemen of the town of Providence, assembled on the 18th day of March, 1779.

“ THEODORE FOSTER, *Town Clerk.*”

GENERAL SULLIVAN’S REPLY.

“ *To the respectable freemen and inhabitants of the town of Providence :* Permit me, Gentlemen, to return you my most sincere and cordial acknowledgments, for

your very polite and affectionate address. The unanimous voice of so respectable a number of my fellow citizens, approving my conduct as Commander-in-chief of this department, affords me unspeakable satisfaction; and it is with great truth and sincerity, I assure you, that the parting with so spirited and virtuous a people, whose efforts to support me in my commands and to oppose the common enemy have so well witnessed their zeal for the interests of America, gives me the most sensible pain; and, in a great degree, damps the pleasure arising from a prospect of rendering my country essential service, in the department to which I am called.

“I have the honor to be, with the most lively sentiments of esteem and gratitude, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

“JOHN SULLIVAN.”

Addresses were also presented General Sullivan by the officers of the army in Rhode Island, the surgeons of General Glover's brigade, and by other bodies. Previous to his departure from Providence, Sullivan was entertained at a grand banquet and other courtesies were extended him. On leaving, he was accompanied out of town by Generals Glover and Varnum, officers from each corps of the army, and many leading citizens. An artillery salute of thirteen guns rounded out the farewell.

After the war, Sullivan resumed the practice of law in New Hampshire; was a member of Congress, became attorney-general, president of the state senate, was three times elected chief magistrate (governor) of the state, and at his death, in 1795, was federal judge for New Hampshire.

In October, 1779, Newport was evacuated by the British. For a long time their position in the town and on the island had been a trying one. Food at times was scarce, scurvy broke out, and there was much suffering. Fuel ran low, necessitating the destruction of wharves and houses to obtain firewood. Several hundred houses and other buildings were thus demolished. The evacuation took place October 25.

Some six or seven thousand troops were embarked in fifty-two transports and were accompanied by a large number of refugees and other royalists. The lighthouse at Beaver Tail was burned and much other damage done. The enemy took away the records of Newport, and the vessel containing them was sunk near New York. They remained under water three years when they were finally dredged up, brought back to Newport and copies made where it was possible. But over thirty volumes were a total loss. On the morning of October 26, Gen. John Stark crossed over from Tiverton at the head of a body of troops and took possession of Newport. The British were never again in control.

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PUBLIC CAREER OF GEN. JOHN SULLIVAN.

Major in the New Hampshire militia.

Conducts, with John Langdon, a successful expedition against Fort William and Mary.

Member of the Continental Congress.

Brigadier-general in the Continental army.

Participates in the siege of Boston.

Raises 2,000 New Hampshire men for the patriot cause.

Is ordered to Rhode Island with a brigade to repel a threatened British attack.

Commands the Northern army.

Holds chief command on Long Island.

Is commissioned major-general.

Assists Gens. Lincoln and Stirling and 8,000 men in holding at bay a British force of 23,000 men.

Leads the American right wing to join Washington on the Delaware.

Commands the right on the passage of the river and the capture of the Hessians at Trenton.

Participates in the Battle of Princeton.

Makes a night descent on Staten Island.

Commands the American right at the Brandywine and at Germantown, where he defeats the British left.

Is appointed to command the Rhode Island department.

Instrumental in raising 10,000 men, in a few weeks, for the siege of Newport, R. I.

Greets D'Estaing, the French admiral, on the latter's arrival (1778) with a French fleet off Newport.

Engages and repulses the British at the battle of Rhode Island (August 29, 1778).

Enters the Iroquois country, in New York (1779), to punish the savages and their British allies, which he does very effectually.

Defeats a force under Joseph Brandt and Sir John Johnson.

Again a member of the Continental Congress.

Assists in reorganizing the army, and establishing the national finances and public credits.

Chairman of the committee that aided in suppressing the mutiny (1781) of Pennsylvania troops.

President (governor) of New Hampshire (1786-'89).

Member of the state constitutional convention (1784).

Commissioner to settle the "New Hampshire Grants" difficulty with Vermont.

United States judge for New Hampshire.

General Sullivan's son, the Hon. George Sullivan, was, like his father, a lawyer of note, became attorney-general of New Hampshire, a state senator, and a member of Congress.

PUBLIC CAREER OF THE HON. JAMES SULLIVAN (BROTHER  
OF GEN. JOHN SULLIVAN).

Member of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts (1775).

Executes a difficult mission to Ticonderoga.

Is appointed a judge of the Massachusetts Superior Court (1776).

Member of the State Constitutional Convention.

Delegate from Massachusetts to the Continental Congress.

Serves with his brother, Eben, on the staff of their brother, Gen. John Sullivan, at the battle of Rhode Island.

Reputedly a member of the Massachusetts state legislature.

Commissioner to settle land controversy between Massachusetts and New York (1784).

Member of the council of the governor of Massachusetts.

Judge of probate, Suffolk county, Mass.

Attorney-General of Massachusetts.

Governor of Massachusetts (1807-1808).

Commissioner (appointed by Washington) to settle boundary between the United States and the British North American provinces.

Projector of the Middlesex Canal, Massachusetts, his son, John Langdon Sullivan, being agent and engineer for the construction of the same.

A founder, and for many years president, of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

#### A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE SULLIVAN FAMILY.

The following is a list of works by the late Mr. Thomas C. Amory of Boston, on the Sullivan family :

The Life of James Sullivan, with selections from his Writings (2 vols., Boston, Mass., 1859).

The Military Services and Public Life of Major-General John Sullivan of the American Revolutionary Army. (Albany, N. Y., and Boston, Mass., 1868.)

General John Sullivan : A Vindication of his Character as a Soldier and a Patriot. From the *Historical Magazine* for December, 1866. (Morrisania, N. Y., 1867.)

The Military Services of Major-General John Sullivan

in the American Revolution Vindicated from recent Historical Criticism. (Cambridge, Mass., 1868.)

Master Sullivan of Berwick, his Ancestors and Descendants.

General Sullivan not a Pensioner of Luzerne. (Cambridge, Mass., 1875.)

Memoir of Hon. William Sullivan. (Cambridge, Mass., 1879.)

Daniel Sullivan's Visits, May and June, 1781, to General John Sullivan. (Cambridge, Mass., 1884.)

Memoir of Hon. Richard Sullivan. (Cambridge, Mass., 1885.)

Materials for a History of the Family of John Sullivan of Berwick, New England, and of the O'Sullivans of Ardea, Ireland. (Cambridge, Mass., 1893.)

Centennial Memoir of Major-General John Sullivan, 1740-1795 (presented at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 2, 1876; printed at Philadelphia, 1878-9).



The following letter, written in 1900, to the author of this leaflet, has a bearing upon the subject just treated:



MY DEAR MR. MURRAY:

Mr. R. H. Tilley has advised me to write you, as a valuable man to interest in a project which should be of interest to every loyal Rhode Islander.

The old historic fort on Butts Hill in Portsmouth is being surveyed with the idea of selling in small lots, and thus totally obliterating the fort where General Sullivan and his troops fought so well and so bravely. Does it not seem as if this spot should be preserved if possible? I believe a bill was introduced into the legislature some time ago, making this fort a state park, but nothing has since been heard of it, so far as I can find out.

Miss Swinburne, regent of William Ellery Chapter, D. A. R., and I are very desirous of rousing among the patriotic societies a sufficient interest to save this well-preserved relic of Revolutionary days. It seems a peculiarly fitting season to begin the agitation, and I hope



that some of the speakers on Wednesday, both at the celebration by your own Historical Society and also at the meeting of the Sons of the Revolution on the same day, may feel inclined to call attention to this subject.

I talked with Mr. Tilley<sup>1</sup> yesterday and found him as kindly disposed to help as I could desire, and he has promised to add his word in support of my request whenever he may chance to see you. I can answer for my own Gaspee Chapter, D. A. R., if our assistance is needed, but with such influence as you could wield, coöperating with the S. A. R. and S. R. of the state, I feel very hopeful of success in our patriotic project.

I do not feel as if I had at all adequately presented my case, but it is very hard to condense all that might be said on such a subject into the limits of a reasonable note. I hope you will recognize my endeavor to save your valuable time, and read into my words an enthusiastic interest which I have not expressed.

Very sincerely yours,

MARGARET B. F. LIPPITT,

*Regent, Gaspee Chapter, D. A. R.*

NEWPORT, R. I., August twenty-sixth.

<sup>1</sup> State Record Commissioner of Rhode Island.



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