

Our Bones Shall Lie With Yours

Regardless of which side they supported, American Indians lost when the Colonials won the American Revolution.

In January 1775, two years after a band of Bostonian rebels disguised as Indians boarded British ships and dumped "3 Cargoes of Bohea Tea" into Boston Harbor, Colonel Guy Johnson, British superintendent of Indian affairs in the northern colonies, sought to explain the nature of the complicated quarrel between the British and the Americans to an Iroquois audience in the following words:

This dispute was solely occasioned by some people, who notwithstanding a law of the King and his wise Men, would not let some Tea land, but destroyed it, on which he was angry, and sent some Troops with the General [Thomas Gage]...to see the Laws executed and bring the people to their sences, and as he is proceeding with great wisdom, to shew them their great mistake, I expect it will soon be over.

In July of that year, three months after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress drafted a speech to be delivered by the commissioners of the newly established departments of Indian affairs who were empowered to take over the administration of the king's men. It stated:

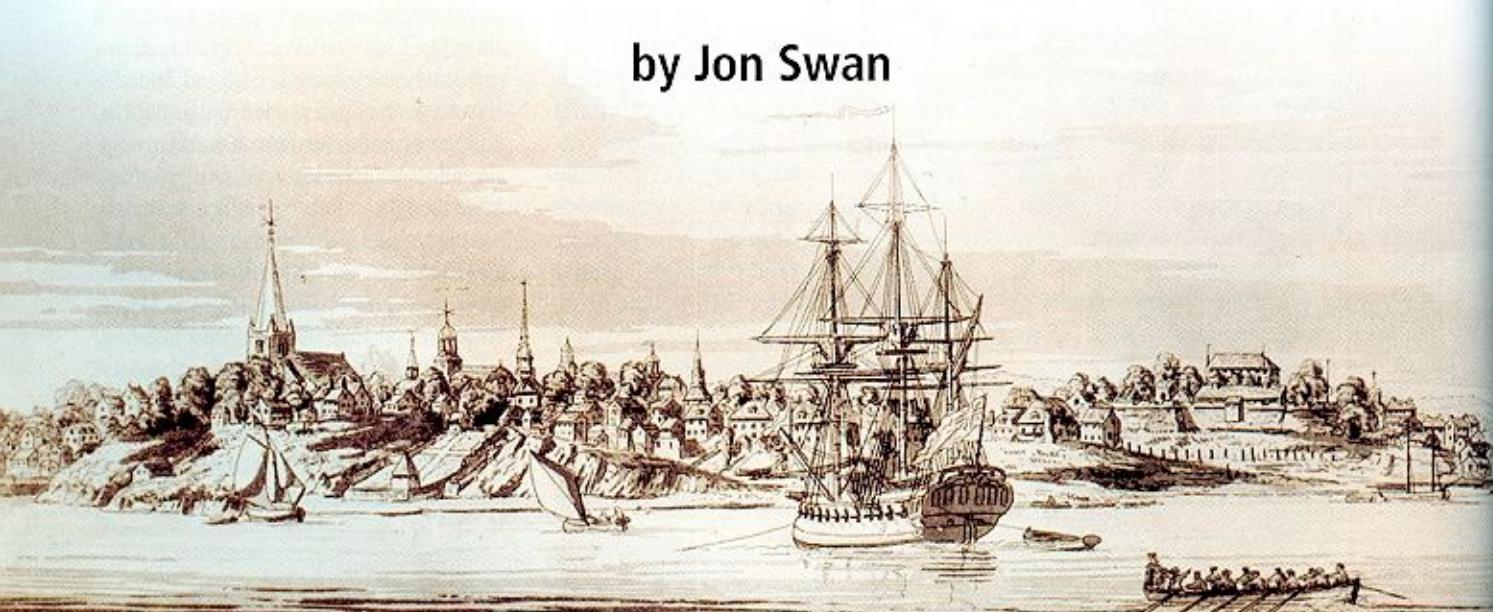
This is a family quarrel between us and Old England. You Indians are not concerned in it. We don't wish you to take up the hatchet against the king's troops. We desire you to remain at home, and not join either side, but keep the hatchet buried deep.

At the time, the Six Nations Confederacy, or the League of the Iroquois, constituted the most powerful Indian group in the North, and on August 25, 1775, a gathering of representatives of all the tribes of the league was convened in Albany, New York. The authorized speech was read aloud, and the Iroquois were assured that their assistance would not be requested. The Iroquois, for their part, were eager to stay out of the conflict. As one Mohawk chief put it: "We bear as much affection for the King of England's subjects upon the other side of the water as we do for yours born upon this Island."

One of the commissioners attending the Albany conference was Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler. On August 27, while the conference was still in session, Schuyler left Albany to take command of an American army of two thousand men whose ambitious objective was to wrest Canada from British control. The plan called for proceeding by boat up Lake Champlain and across the border to St. John's, a fortified site with a complement of 380 infantry and forty artillerymen, and thence marching on to Montreal. While the Americans had been urging the Indians not to take sides, the British had been busily recruiting Indians in upstate New York and Canada to prepare to defend Canada at a time when Montreal was protected by only about 110 soldiers, and Quebec City by an even smaller number.

Swift seizure of St. John's was crucial to the success of this campaign, but on September 6, Schuyler's army was stopped in its tracks by a force of fewer than ninety Indians under British

by Jon Swan



command. The British military commander and governor, Guy Carlton, commended "the Indian Chiefs and Warriors who behaved so gallantly in the action of the 6th Instant near St. Johns...." According to dispatches sent from St. John's to Montreal, some thirty miles away, the Indians "engaged [the Americans] with so much success that they obliged them to retire twice." While the setback at St. John's was only one of a series of misfortunes that befell the Americans during the ill-fated campaign, it was a significant one, giving the British time to prepare their defenses and beef up their garrisons.

General Schuyler was furious at the British for using "the Savages against us," apparently unaware that thirty-five Indians from western Massachusetts, the so-called Stockbridge Indians, had enlisted in the Provincial army in the spring of 1775. Indeed, the British used the presence of these Indians at the siege of Boston to justify their own employment of Indians. "The Rebels have themselves open'd the Door," General Gage wrote from Boston in September 1775; "they have brought down all the Savages they could against us here, who with their Rifle men are continually firing on our advanced Sentries."

While Massachusetts was quick to accept assistance from various Indian tribes, the Continental Congress vacillated. In May 1776, Congress authorized General George Washington to raise a force of Indians. The next month, President John Hancock issued an order "forbidding the raising of companies of Mohegan and Stockbridge Indians." In August he rescinded that order.

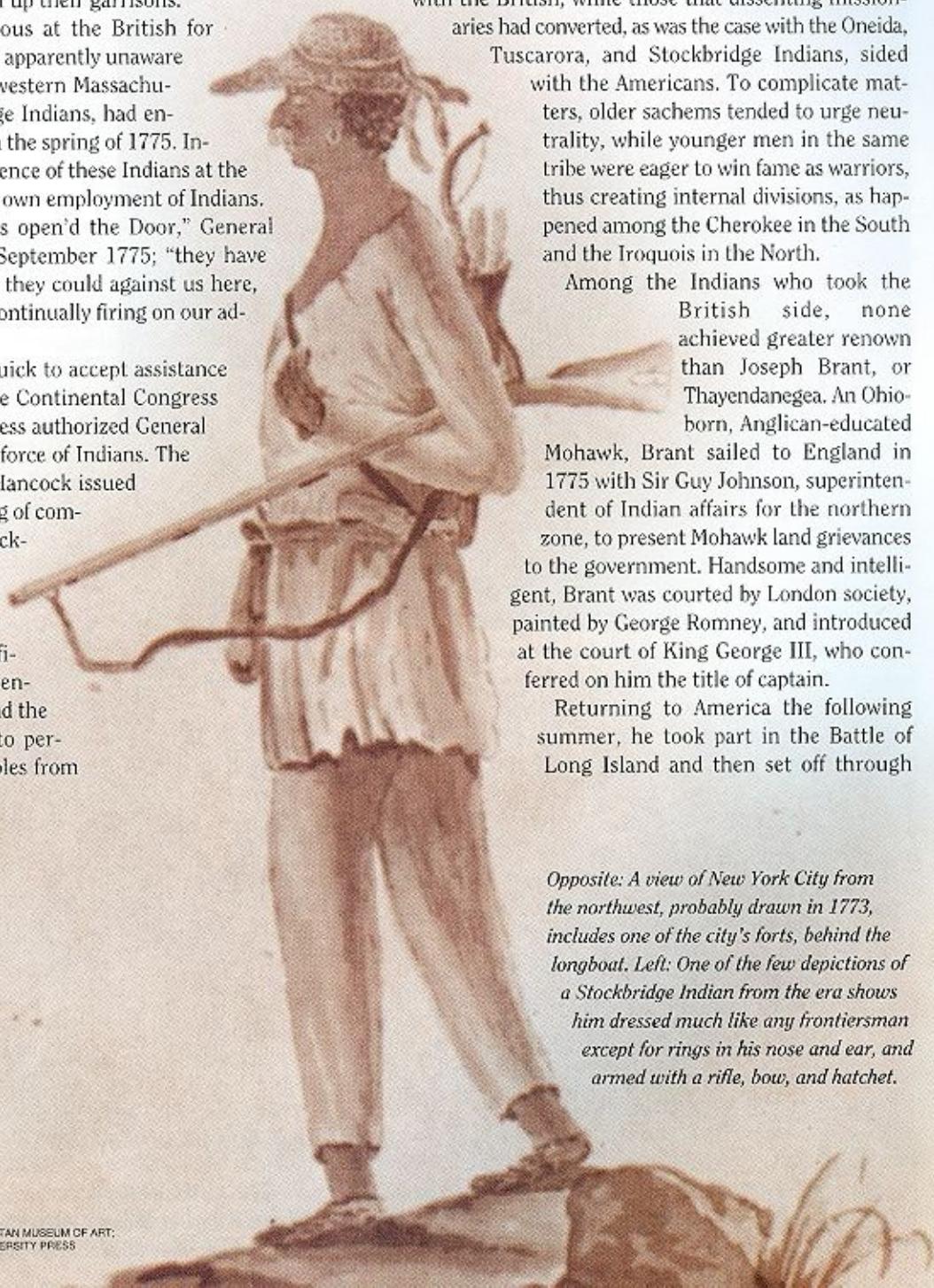
It was during the summer of '76, when the colonies officially declared their independence, that both the British and the Americans set about trying to persuade the various Indian peoples from

New England south to Georgia and west to the Mississippi to take up the hatchet against—or at least not to assist—the enemy. If most tribes chose to side with the British, this was in large part because the colonists, pressing ever westward, had shown scant respect for Indian land claims or for Indians as a people. It was to the British that the Indians turned for protection, and for provisions in time of need. Meanwhile, tribes that had received religious instruction from Church of England missionaries, as the Mohawks had, were inclined to side with the British, while those that dissenting missionaries had converted, as was the case with the Oneida,

Tuscarora, and Stockbridge Indians, sided with the Americans. To complicate matters, older sachems tended to urge neutrality, while younger men in the same tribe were eager to win fame as warriors, thus creating internal divisions, as happened among the Cherokee in the South and the Iroquois in the North.

Among the Indians who took the British side, none achieved greater renown than Joseph Brant, or Thayendanegea. An Ohio-born, Anglican-educated Mohawk, Brant sailed to England in 1775 with Sir Guy Johnson, superintendent of Indian affairs for the northern zone, to present Mohawk land grievances to the government. Handsome and intelligent, Brant was courted by London society, painted by George Romney, and introduced at the court of King George III, who conferred on him the title of captain.

Returning to America the following summer, he took part in the Battle of Long Island and then set off through



Opposite: A view of New York City from the northwest, probably drawn in 1773, includes one of the city's forts, behind the longboat. Left: One of the few depictions of a Stockbridge Indian from the era shows him dressed much like any frontiersman except for rings in his nose and ear, and armed with a rifle, bow, and hatchet.



sent-day Rome, New York, faced fewer than a hundred Oneidas serving under the command of General Nicholas Herkheimer, who was coming up with a force of a thousand militiamen to relieve the siege.

Herkheimer blundered into a well-prepared ambush. The Indians led the attack, swinging their tomahawks and lunging with their spears. The Seneca chief Blacksnake later recalled: "There I have seen the most Dead Bodies all it over [sic] that I never Did see, and never will again...." Joseph Brant and his Mohawks distinguished themselves by their ferocity. Brant subsequently led his warrior band on raids on rebel settlements throughout the western colonial frontier; according to a contemporary biographer, "public writers" magnified his raids until his "name was terrible in every ear...associated with every thing bloody, ferocious, and hateful."

For nearly two years, the British and their Indian allies in the North had the upper hand. In March 1779, General Washington ordered an expedition against the Six Nations to put an end to the Indian-Tory ravages. They razed scores of Indian towns and villages along the Allegheny and Mohawk rivers during the months-long campaign, and burned hundreds of acres of crops. An American major summed up the result: "The nests are destroyed, but the birds are still on the wing." Indeed, the scorched-earth campaign left the dispossessed Indians more dependent on the British than ever, and more determined to exact vengeance on the Americans.

Imposing Joseph Brant could impress London society, but the Mohawk chief also persuaded many Indians, from his tribe and others, to take sides during the French and Indian War, Pontiac's Rebellion, and the Revolutionary War.

"rebel" territory on a mission to persuade the Iroquois to take up the hatchet against the Americans. He moved from village to village, to Susquehanna River settlements and on to Fort Niagara, telling tales of his experiences abroad and of the recent victory on Long Island, and delivering messages from Superintendent Johnson and General William Howe. For their own "safety and welfare," he told his listeners, they should side with the British, who he said were sure to win this war. Almost everywhere he went, he won over his audience. Of the six nations in the Iroquois Confederacy, only the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras refused to break their neutrality. Both finally sided with the Americans.

It was at the Battle of Oriskany, on August 6, 1777, that members of the now-divided Iroquois Confederacy first faced each other as enemies—several hundred Mohawks, Senecas, and Cayugas fighting under British General Barry St. Leger, who was laying siege to Fort Stanwix near pre-

While Brant took up the hatchet against the Americans, no tribe showed more devotion to the patriot cause than the Stockbridge Indians of western Massachusetts. The Stockbridge people were a mixture of Mohican and Wappinger Indians who, having been pushed out of their homelands along the west bank of the Hudson River by Dutch and English settlers, had found refuge along the banks of the Housatonic River. Settlers from central Massachusetts arrived in the area in the 1720s. Soon, with the consent of Chief Konkapot, dissenting missionaries—the kind who were being educated at Yale and Dartmouth and Harvard—were allowed to preach the Gospel, and a mission school was established in Stockbridge. This frontier settlement was an altogether unusual one, bringing together in one community Native Americans, newcomer Americans, and several freeborn blacks. When the town was incorporated in 1739, both Chief Konkapot, who by then had been commissioned a captain in the militia, and his subchief served as members of the original board of selectmen.

Many Stockbridge Indians fought under British command during the French and Indian War (1754-63), often serving with the celebrated "Indian-style" fighters known as the Queen's Rangers, or more familiarly as Rogers' Rangers, named after Colonel Robert Rogers. When the prospect of war loomed in April of 1774, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts sent a message to Captain Solomon Wahaunwanwanmeet, the chief sachem of the Stockbridge Indians, expressing the hope for continued friendly relations with his nation. His reply was biblical in its eloquence:

Wherever you go, we will be by your sides; our bones shall lie with yours. We are determined never to be at peace with red-coats while they are at variance with you. If you are conquered, our lands go with yours; but if you are victorious, we hope you will help us recover our just rights.

The Stockbridges requested that they "be considered as Rangers" and "to be allowed to fight in their own Indian way, as they were not used to train and fight English fashion."

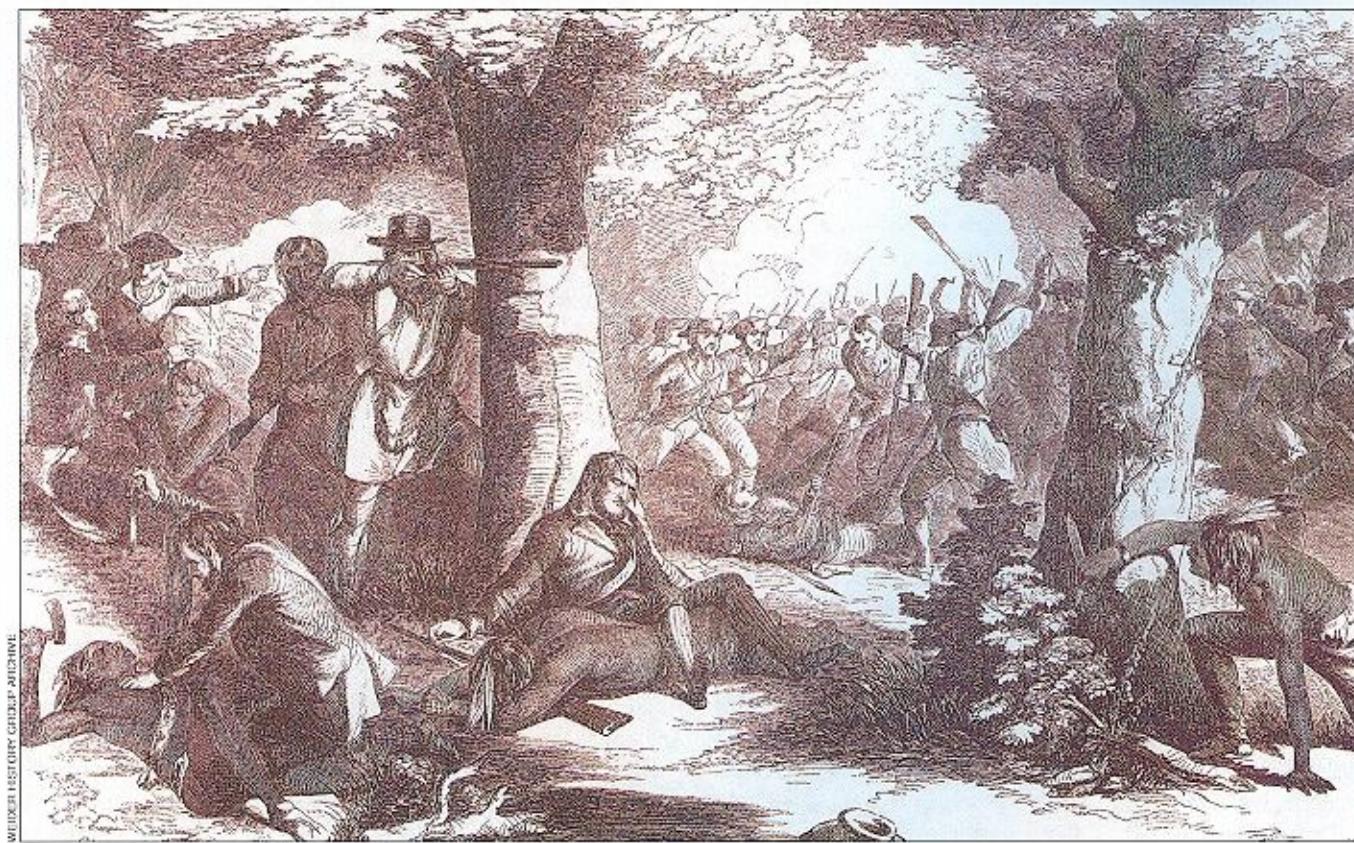
In June, Stockbridge volunteers—bringing their wives and wigwams with them—trekked from western Massachusetts to Boston, where they saw service in the siege of Boston and the Battle of Bunker Hill, with some subsequently taking part in

**The Stockbridges
requested that they 'be
considered as Rangers'
and 'to be allowed to fight
in their own Indian way.'**

Patriot cause:

Far from desiring to remain neuter in the dispute between Great-Britain and America, they have made themselves acquainted with the merits of the controversy, and have taken an active part in our favor, enlisting their young men in our Army, while their counsellors and sachems have carefully sent belts of wampum by their messengers to the Six Nations, to the Canada Indians, and to the Shawnees, on the Ohio, addressing them in such terms as they judged would have the greatest tendency to attach them to the interests of the United States.

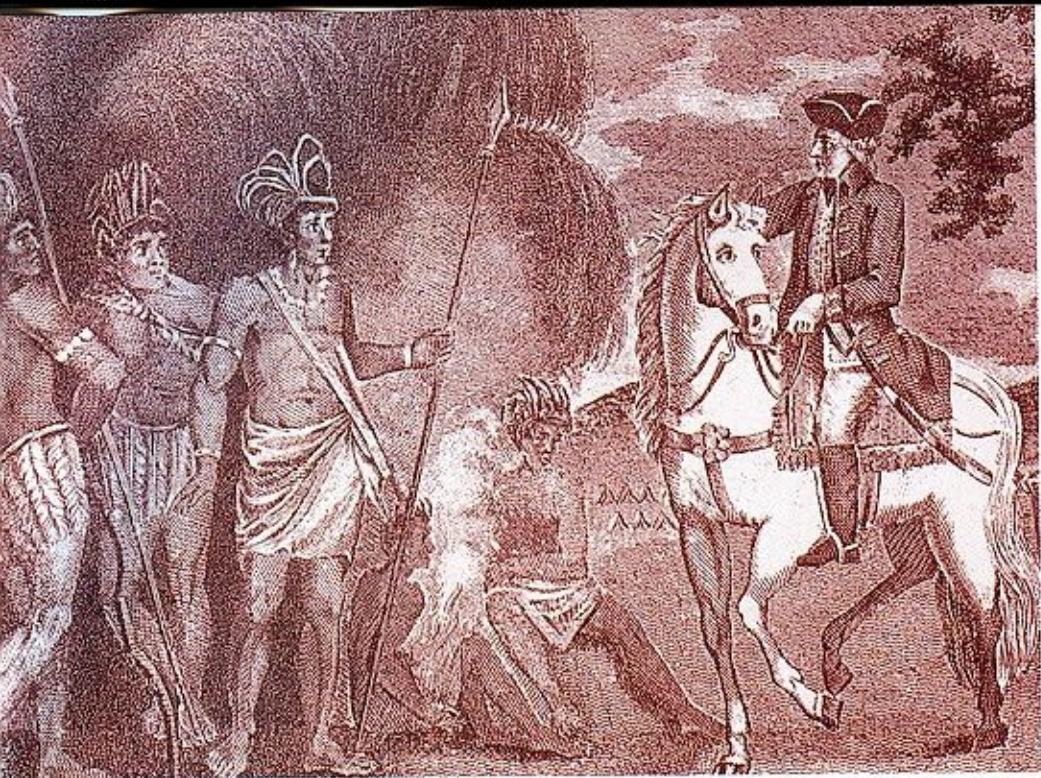
Foremost among these "counsellors and sachems" were Daniel Nimham (also spelled Ninham) and his son Abraham. The Nimhams were Wappingers who, like the rest of their people, had resettled in Stockbridge. Daniel Nimham had traveled to England to protest the colonists' illegal land-grab; the suit was still hung up in the courts at the time war broke out. Fol-



At the Battle of Oriskany, members of the now-divided Iroquois Confederacy fought against each other. Heavily outnumbered Oneidas and militia under American General Nicholas Herkheimer walked into a clever ambush by Mohawks, Senecas, Cayugas, and Loyalists. Although casualties were high on both sides, the Americans withdrew.

Benedict Arnold's arduous expedition over the mountains of Maine into Canada. In recognition of their service to the colony, the Stockbridges were promised "a Blanket and a Red Ribbon."

In November 1776, John Sergeant Jr., son of the first Stockbridge missionary, wrote a letter to Congress testifying to the services the Stockbridges had rendered to the



ANNE S.K. BIRTWELL MILITARY COLLECTION

British Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne, addressing some four hundred Iroquois who were joining his army at St. John's in June 1777, instructed them to avoid shedding blood except in combat; not to harm old men, women, children, or prisoners; to only take scalps from those dying in battle; to spare the wounded; and not to ravage the countryside. The Indians ignored his instructions.

Following the outbreak of hostilities, the younger Nimham traveled to Philadelphia to petition Congress to supply his men with clothing during their term of service. In 1777 Congress came up with a \$200 payment and assigned the Stockbridges to General Horatio Gates' army. They saw service in the operations around Saratoga but headed home to help with the harvest before British Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered in mid-October of that year.

It was in the summer of 1778 that the Stockbridges paid a terrible price for their loyalty to the Patriot cause. By this time, the British had control of the island of Manhattan; the Americans were encamped to the north, with headquarters at White Plains. The area between—a mix of woodland and farmland, with a scattering of houses—was a no man's land through which each side sent out scouts and patrols, and in which both practiced the art of the ambuscade.

On the British side were the Queen's Rangers, the same unit—although now, of course, with a new complement of officers and men—as that with which the Stockbridges had fought a generation before, in the French and Indian War. The Rangers were Loyalist Americans; their British commanding officer was Lt. Col. John Simcoe. Unlike the British infantry, easily spotted in their bright red coats, the Queen's Rangers—cavalry and foot soldiers alike—wore short green jackets. A regiment of Hessian troops, comprising both foot and cavalry, was stationed nearby. The German riflemen, many of whom were experienced hunters, had a reputation as expert marksmen.

During July, a group of about sixty Stockbridges arrived to serve under Gates at White Plains. During the winter, Abraham Nimham, who, like his father, had been commissioned captain, had written to General Gates requesting that all the Stock-

bridge volunteers be allowed to serve together:

Brothers—I come ask you a question hope you will help us....I had some brothers enlisted into the Continental service in several Regiments. Now Brothers I should be very glad if you will discharge them from their Regiments. We always want to be in one body...when we are in service...do not think that I want get these Indians away from their soldiery...but we want be together always & we will be always ready to go any where you want us to go long as this war stands....

Among the soldiers listed as being "on command" with Gates that summer was John Nimham, presumably Abraham's brother, as well as their now elderly father, Daniel. As Colin G. Calloway notes in *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, Abraham Nimham was actually the commander of the Stockbridge contingent;

his father joined the command before the battle.

On August 8, orders were issued for the formation of a corps of light infantry "to be in greater readiness to attack or repel the Enemy." It was to be "composed of the best, most hardy and active Marksmen and commanded by good Partizan Officers." The man picked for the job, Captain Allen McLane, had commanded Oneida warriors and had served during the Monmouth campaign. His orders were to take charge of the Indians "annex'd to the Light [Infantry] Corps...and proceed with them to such place as you may think most opportune for the purpose in annoying the enemy and preventing their Landing or making incursion into the Country...."

The corps was detached southward to the no man's land above British-held Kingsbridge, strategically situated in a twist of the Harlem River before it joins the Hudson. Several forts in the area had recently changed names: The Americans' Fort Independence, at Kingsbridge, was now the British Fort Number 4, while Fort Washington, near the tip of Manhattan, was now Fort Knyphausen, named after Lt. Gen. Wilhelm von Knyphausen, who had taken the fort two years earlier. He was there now, in command of a force of some twenty-five hundred men quartered at the two forts. Most of the non-German troops were American Loyalists led by officers such as Colonel Simcoe, Lt. Col. Andreas Emmerich, and Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, who had gained fame early in the war by his capture of General Charles Lee, and who later was to gain notoriety as the officer who reputedly ordered the slaughter of surrendered Americans in South Carolina.

Simcoe, twenty-six at the time, was an ambitious soldier. As Bronx historian Gary Zaboly has noted, since taking command of the Queen's Rangers in October 1777, he had "augmented its fighting strength by adding to its versatility, until it could boast

companies of riflemen, light infantry, grenadiers, Highlanders, dragoons, hussars (light cavalry after the type first developed in Hungary), and light artillery."

In late August 1778, Emmerich's Chasseurs narrowly escaped an ambush in which a large body of war-whooping Indians had taken part. Colonel Simcoe, determined to make the enemy pay for having made the chasseurs run for their lives, set about organizing a counter ambuscade. First, he gathered intelligence from spies within the enemy camp; from them he learned, as he later wrote, that "Nimham, an Indian chief, and some of his tribe, were with the enemy" and that "they were highly elated at the retreat of Emmerich's troops, and applied it to the whole of the light troops at Kingsbridge."

His spies also informed him that, just a few days before, Simcoe himself had narrowly escaped being ambushed when on patrol on the Mile Square Road, near where Emmerich and his men were surprised. This, no doubt, made him even more eager for revenge.

Simcoe told his spies to encourage the Indians to believe that they had indeed routed the entire body of the light troops at Kingsbridge. Then, on August 31, he set out with five hundred men, both foot and horse, amply provisioned. Among them were Tarleton's Legion Dragoons, Emmerich's men, and several German *Jägers*. After proceeding up the Mile Square Road, Simcoe ordered Emmerich to conceal his troops in woods near the farmhouse of Frederick Devoe, while he himself led the main force around to a concealed position on the opposite side of the open field through which the road ran. When the rebels appeared, Emmerich was to send out a decoy detachment to lure them on until they were between the hidden units, which then would

rush out and surround the Americans and their Indian allies. Emmerich, unaware that two Devoes lived in the area, settled his troops close to the farm of Daniel's half-brother, Frederick.

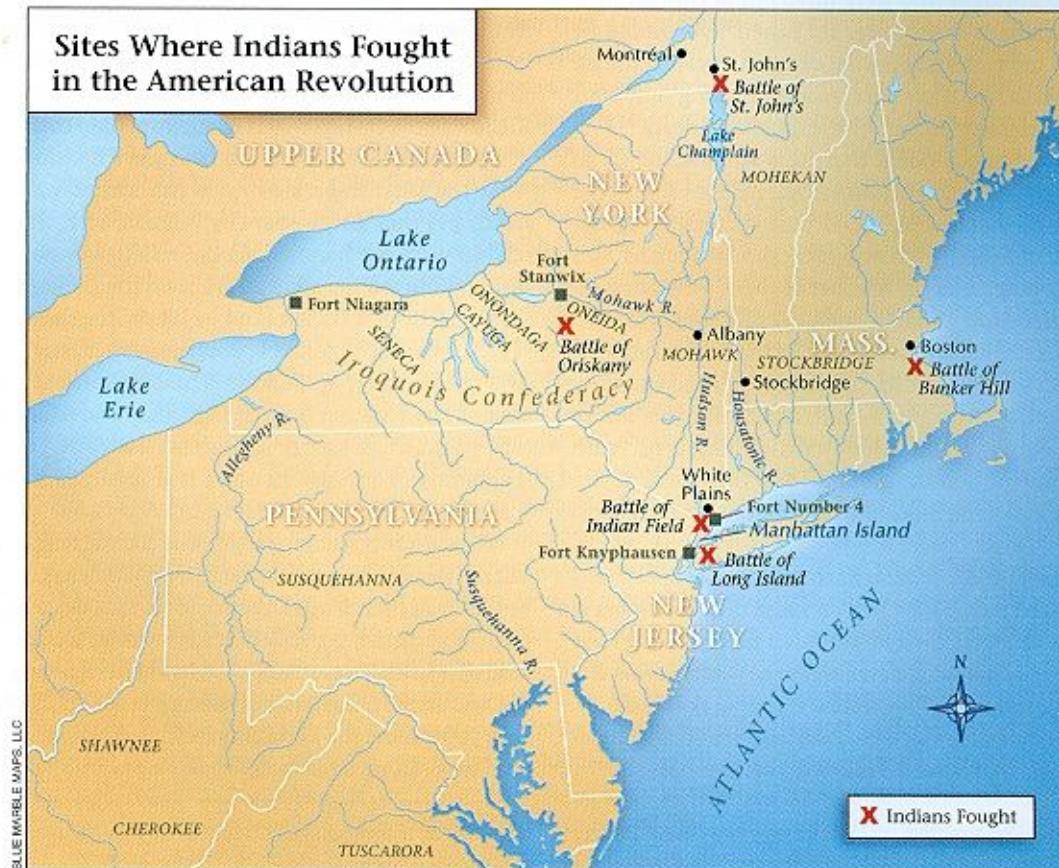
At about noon, an advance guard composed of American light infantry and Indians began moving down from an eminence known as Husted's Heights, a starting point for forays into no man's land. Simcoe wrote later that he was "determined to wait there the whole day, in hopes of betraying the enemy into an ambuscade: the country was most favorable to it." He did not have to wait long.

Simcoe had sent a drummer boy up a tall tree to keep an eye on the enemy's movements, and he himself had climbed halfway up, the better to hear the boy's reports. A party of Indians, led by the elder Nimham and his son, catching sight of Emmerich's decoy troops, rushed down Mile Square Road in hot pursuit. While the Stockbridges, using the stone walls on either side of the road as cover, concentrated their fire on Emmerich's men, Simcoe ordered Tarleton to come around them from behind; he himself would lead the main body of the Queen's Rangers up onto Husted's Heights to cut off the remaining rebel force of some sixty men commanded by Colonel Christopher Gist.

As it turned out, Simcoe found himself drawn into the action along the road. In his memoir, Simcoe, who refers to himself in the third person, possibly following Caesar's example, described what happened next:

He [Simcoe] broke from the column of the Rangers, with the Grenadier Company, and...advanced to the road without being perceived within ten yards of the Indians, who had been intent upon the

Sites Where Indians Fought in the American Revolution



attack of Emmerich's Corps and the Legion [Tarleton's Legion Dragoons]. The Indians now gave a yell, and fired upon the Grenadier Company wounding four of them and Lieut.-Col Simcoe. They were driven from the fences [the stone walls], and Lieut. Col. Tartleton with the Cavalry got among them and pursued them rapidly down Cortlandt's ridge; that active officer had a narrow escape; in striking at one of the fugitives he lost his balance and fell from his horse. Luckily, the Indian had no bayonet and his musket had been discharged.

The Indians fought most gallantly; they pulled more than one of the Cavalry from their horses.

It was Daniel Nimham, the old sachem who had brought his people to Stockbridge, who shot Simcoe, wounding him in the hand. Simcoe's orderly hussar shot Nimham, mortally wounding him. Daniel's son Abraham was also killed. Running through open fields, the Indians were chased and cut down by the cavalry, while up around Husted's Heights, Colonel Gist's men were driven off. Some were killed—a September 2 report to headquarters in White Plains stated that the Americans lost a captain and six soldiers in the engagement—several were wounded and some were captured. Casualty figures for the Stockbridges ranged from an American officer's unrealistically low count of nineteen "missing, six of who have been found dead on the field of action," to Simcoe's unrealistically high count of sixty. Three Stockbridges who were lured out of concealment following the chase with promises that their lives would be spared were put to the sword on what came to be called Indian Bridge. The British, for their part, reported losing only four men, although a Hessian officer set the number at forty.

In his *Journal*, Simcoe noted that "this ambuscade, in its greater part, failed"—most of the Americans having escaped the attempted encirclement—but added that "it was of consequence," because the death of so many Stockbridge Indians "was reported to have stopt a larger number of them, who were excellent marksmen, from joining General Washington's army."

Lieutenant General Johann von Ewald, of the Schleswig *Jäger* Corps, the officer who estimated that the British had lost forty men, noted that the "strong, well-built, and healthy bodies" of the Indians stood out among those of the Europeans "with whom they lay mingled on the ground." Von Ewald also gave a detailed description of the Stockbridges' clothing and weapons:

Their costume was a shirt of coarse linen down to the knees, long trousers also of linen down to the feet, on which they wore shoes of deerskin, and the head was covered with a hat made of bast. Their weapons were a rifle or musket, a quiver with some twenty arrows, and a short battle-axe which they knew how to throw very skillfully. Through the nose and in the ears they wore rings, and on their heads only the hair of the crown remained standing in a circle....

A cairn of boulders, erected in 1906 in the northeast corner of Van Cortlandt Park, commemorates the Stockbridges who

'The Revolution inflicted the coup de grâce on the Indian town at Stockbridge. The last Indian land in West Stockbridge was sold in 1783....'

served "as allies of the patriots" and who on August 31, 1778, "upon this field...gave their lives for liberty." The cairn had a macabre beginning. Several days after the battle it was noticed that farmer Husted's dogs were behaving strangely and looked gorged. It was then discovered that the dogs had almost completely consumed the bodies of Daniel Nimham, who, severely wounded, had crawled down to die by a brook, and those of two or three other Indians. The remains were taken up to the field and buried, along with the other Stockbridge dead, and covered with stones—"not as a monument to their memories," as historian Richard S. Walling points out, "but to prevent further desecration by animals."

Even after the devastating losses suffered by the Stockbridges at what came to be called the Battle of Indian Field or the Indian Field Massacre, their young men continued to volunteer for service under a new leader, Captain Hendrick Aupamut. It was under Aupamut's command, in 1779, that thirty-two Stockbridges took part in General John Sullivan's scorched-earth campaign against the Iroquois, a campaign undertaken to secure western New York from attacks by Indian-Tory war parties, such as those led by Joseph Brant.

By 1782, the loyalty of the Stockbridges to the Patriot cause had been severely tested. Returning veterans received minimal compensation, if any at all; veterans' widows—left with children to support—were forced to sell their property to pay debts. In the summer of 1782, the British secretary for Indian affairs was informed that the Stockbridges, having returned to their homes, would pledge to "have nothing more to do with the Rebels" if the British would officially pardon their past behavior.

They had served well, but now were no longer needed. All that the soon-to-be victorious Americans wanted was their land, and they got it—acre by valuable acre. Stockbridge land claims were not honored. As Colin Calloway notes: "The Revolution inflicted the coup de grâce on the Indian town at Stockbridge. The last Indian land in West Stockbridge was sold in 1783.... Only a handful of people remained, engulfed by a soaring non-Indian population." The Stockbridge people had accepted an invitation from the Oneidas, who offered them a tract of land six miles square in upstate New York. This was just the beginning of a westward move that finally brought the Stockbridges to their current home, in Wisconsin.

Thus, in the years following the Revolution, even those Indians who had sided with the Patriots were inexorably deprived not only of their lands but also, to various degrees, of their sovereignty, their independence. Meanwhile, those who had sided with the British were compelled to forfeit whatever of their lands lay within the boundaries of the new republic. For America's native population, the Revolution, which divided tribe against tribe and brought rewards to none, was an unmitigated disaster.

JON SWAN, a frequent contributor to *MHQ*, lives in Southfield, Massachusetts.