

## Chapter 4: Actions that Impacted the Battlefield

The Battlefield saw much activity in the two years immediately following the Siege. British forces destroyed the American trench works, and repaired and expanded their own outer line only to destroy all defenses before evacuating in 1779. The French, who arrived in 1780, then rebuilt the ruined fortifications and added their own. Since the defenses saw no action under the French, they were in excellent condition at war's end. These activities by both sides ultimately determined what would be left for posterity.

### 4.1 Actions by the British

#### 4.1.1 Destruction of the American Fortifications

When the battle ended, on August 31, the British wasted no time in dismantling the American fortifications at Honeyman Hill. Mackenzie noted on September 3 that Brown's Regiment of Provincials had marched to the area "where the Rebels first broke ground" and that they were to be "employed in levelling the Rebel Batteries, and filling up the Trenches there."<sup>145</sup> By early October, the task was complete and Brown's Regiment moved on to another project.<sup>146</sup> A British soldier, Thomas Hughes, also observed this work in his diary when he wrote on October 6, "...[T]heir works though now fill'd up are still visible and were carried on with great regularity."<sup>147</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Expansion and Repairs of British Fortifications

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<sup>145</sup> *DFM*, 2: 391.

<sup>146</sup> *DFM*, 2: 403.

<sup>147</sup> Hughes, 45-46, quoted in Abbass 1: 434.

With the American trenches leveled, the British turned their attention to altering and expanding their own defenses, including the construction of a massive centrally located fort, large enough for 200 men and eight cannon.<sup>148</sup> Built by Colonel Fanning's Regiment of Provincials, the construction took over two months according to Mackenzie, from early October to its completion in mid-December.<sup>149</sup> Fort Fanning, as it was called, was located along West Main Road about half way between One Mile Corner and Two Mile Corner<sup>150</sup> and is visible in several maps from the period, including the one by Lt. Edward Fage produced in the months following the battle (Figure 4.1).<sup>151</sup> Once the project was done, attention turned to strengthening the remaining redoubts as well as the trenches and abbattis along the outer line.<sup>152</sup>



Figure 4.1 Fort Fanning as seen on the 1778 Fage map, which depicted both the defenses in use during the Siege and those built or planned afterwards.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>148</sup> DFM, 2; 403.

<sup>149</sup> DFM, 2: 403, 406.

<sup>150</sup> One Mile Corner is an intersection at the town line, where Broadway in Newport becomes West Main Road in Middletown. Two Mile Corner is the intersection where West Main Road and East Main Road meet.

<sup>151</sup> Fage, *Plan of the Works*, 1778. William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>152</sup> DFM, 2: 431.

<sup>153</sup> Fage, *Plan of the Works*, 1778. William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

### 4.1.3 The Withdrawal Approaches

Mackenzie's diary shows the British remained on edge in the months immediately following the battle. Although trenches were filled and redoubts strengthened, much of the British forces' time was spent keeping an eye on the Americans' activities in Tiverton and positioning themselves appropriately to defend the island if another attack should occur. It was within this anxious atmosphere that Fort Fanning was built. As the months went by and colder weather approached, Mackenzie's entries show less interest in enemy activities and repairing of lines, and instead reflect an increasing concern for the state of their supplies and barracks.

This Garrison is at present very ill supplied with Fuel, Candle and Provisions. There not being more than for 14 days wood, Candles for about 7 days, and about 3 weeks flour. The troops have for a Considerable time past received Rice two days in the week instead of flour. A fleet is now out for wood, but they will not bring above 600 Cord, which is little more than two weeks consumption. Every step is taking to supply fuel: all the timber trees on the Island are cutting down, and the old wharfs will soon be broken up. Oil is to be delivered to the troops in lieu of Candles. Provisions can only be furnished from New York.

Very little attention has been paid at headquarters, New York, to the supplying this Garrison, with any of the above necessities.<sup>154</sup>

By mid-December the wharves had indeed been ripped up for firewood.<sup>155</sup> The weather had turned so cold by Christmas Eve that liquor froze indoors, "poultry died," and soldiers were found dead from exposure.<sup>156</sup> Stephan Popp, a Hessian soldier, recorded similar circumstances.

It began to snow on Christmas night and continued until the 27<sup>th</sup>, the snow lay 3 to 4 feet deep, the cold was very severe, night men of one of our regiments were frozen to death, twenty-three men had their hands and feet badly frost bitten, --a woman with two little children was frozen to death in her house. Even the supply of drinking water was frozen.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *DFM*, 2: 429.

<sup>155</sup> *DFM*, 2: 431.

<sup>156</sup> *DFM*, 2: 435.

<sup>157</sup> Stephan Popp, *Popp's Journal, 1777-1783*, ed. Joseph G. Rosengarten (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 1902), 33.

From their fears over further American attacks in September to their worries over dwindling supplies and frigid temperatures in December, it was clear that the British felt uneasy and vulnerable in Newport by the end of 1778. The New Year was not much better. Supplies of food eventually arrived from New York but it was too little, too late. Both Popp and another Hessian soldier, Johann Conrad Döhla, record a fatal outbreak of scurvy in March 1779, the result of so many months of so little sustenance.<sup>158</sup> This was not a winter the British wished to repeat.

They had survived the battle and the harsh winter but by spring there were signs the British priorities were shifting further south. Twice in 1779, the size of the garrison at Newport was diminished, first in March when the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment left port and again in June when the Landgrave Regiment, British 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and Fanning's Corps of Provincials were transferred.<sup>159</sup> Counting on support of loyal Southerners, the British hoped to gain a strong foothold in the South and eventually work their way up the coast.<sup>160</sup> The need for reinforcements in the South, coupled with the deteriorating state of Newport's resources and the manpower needed to defend it, meant that it was time to move on. Newport as a garrison was becoming obsolete and too hard to maintain, and the British and Hessian forces occupying it were of better use in the Southern theater.<sup>161</sup>

#### 4.1.4 British Abandon Newport

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<sup>158</sup> Popp, 33, March 1778; Johann Conrad Döhla, *A Hessian Diary of the American Revolution By Johann Conrad Döhla*, ed. Bruce E. Burgoyne from the 1913 Bayreuth edition by W. Baron von Waldenfels (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 102-103, March 1779.

<sup>159</sup> Walter K. Schroder, *The Hessian Occupation of Newport and Rhode Island, 1776-1779*, 162-163.

<sup>160</sup> Rockwell Stensrud. *Newport: A Lively Experiment*. (Newport, RI: Redwood Library and Athenaeum and Rockwell Stensrud, 2006), 222.

<sup>161</sup> Stensrud, 222.

The British occupied, and in turn decimated, Newport over the course of their three-year stay. They had bled the island dry of all its resources and now their troops were needed elsewhere. Orders arrived in October 1779 to evacuate the island. This meant all fortifications on the island had to be destroyed before they embarked. “I went on work detail to destroy the defenses. These were all destroyed,” Döhla recorded on October 21.<sup>162</sup> A few days later on October 25, they packed up, set fire to their barracks and sailed away.<sup>163</sup> Döhla described the evacuation as follows,

On our march out of Newport all the houses were locked, and it was on the strictest orders of General Prescott that no inhabitants, and especially no females, permitted themselves to be seen at any window or on the street, and should anyone show themselves, those who were on patrol were ordered to fire at them immediately. Therefore, in Newport it appeared as if the entire city had died.<sup>164</sup>

Early the next morning the Americans arrived, including Providence native Colonel Israel Angell, who had fought in the Battle of Rhode Island and kept a detailed account of his time in the Continental Army. On October 27 he noted, “I Spent this Day in Reconitering the Town, and works which was destroyed by the Enemy.”<sup>165</sup> And a day later, “I road with the General Round all the Enemy Lines where I Saw Some of the Beautifullest works’ that I Ever Saw in my life....”<sup>166</sup> Although the Continental Army had a short stay in Newport, it seems they repaired at least some of the fortifications before moving on. Soldier and native Newporter, Jeremiah Greenman, was among those who came to town after the British withdrawal. In late October, he recorded, “[C]ontinuing in Newport fixing the North battery on the point which the enemy had layed almost level – ordered to hold our Selves in Readyness to march for the Grand army.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Döhla, 113.

<sup>163</sup> Angell, 86.

<sup>164</sup> Döhla, 113.

<sup>165</sup> Angell, 87; See Appendix E to learn more about Col. Israel Angell’s diary and other sources used.

<sup>166</sup> Angell, 87-88.

<sup>167</sup> Jeremiah Greenman, *A Diary of a Common Soilder in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*. ed. Robert C. Bray and Paul E. Bushnell. DeKalb (IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978), 142-143.

## 4.2 Actions by the French

### 4.2.1 Arrival of Rochambeau

Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau was an experienced fifty-five-year-old commander and French noblemen who had spent decades in the army.<sup>168</sup> In the spring of 1780 he was given orders to take command of a French expeditionary force of 4,000 men (later increased to 6,000 at Rochambeau's request) to America.<sup>169</sup> In March, his fleet set sail from Brest bound for Newport, carrying the Bourbonnais, Saintonge, Soissonais, and the Royal Deux-Ponts regiments and the Lauzun Legion (a "proprietary" corps), with more to follow.<sup>170</sup>

On July 11, 1780, Rochambeau and the French Army arrived off Newport Harbor. "War weary" and suspicious of outsiders, Newporters did not come out to greet the general. A day later, when the French came ashore they received a rather cold reception.<sup>171</sup> Luckily, this soon changed. In a letter dated July 16, Rochambeau recounted their arrival and first impressions.

There was no one about in the streets; only a few sad and frightened faces in the windows. I talked to some of the principal citizens, informing them that this was but the vanguard of a much larger force on the way and that the King had decided to uphold them with all his power and strength....this excellent news traveled fast, and on the evening of the following day all the houses were illuminated. The bells rang out, and there were fireworks.<sup>172</sup>

Once their initial greeting and impressions were smoothed over, the French set to work taking care of their sick. A large portion of the men had become ill with scurvy during the crossing and hospitals were set up to treat them, with some soldiers being sent as far away as Bristol,

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<sup>168</sup> Stensrud, 225

<sup>169</sup> Arnold Whitridge, *Rochambeau: America's Neglected Founding Father* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 67.

<sup>170</sup> Whitridge, 76

<sup>171</sup> Allan Forbes and Paul F. Cadman, *France and New England, Vol. I* (Boston: State Street Trust Company, 1925), 104.

<sup>172</sup> Stephen Bosnal, *When the French Were Here*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1945. 22

Providence, and even Boston.<sup>173</sup> With a very limited number of able bodies, the French set to work repairing what coastal fortifications they could.<sup>174</sup> Word soon arrived that the British were planning to attack, hoping to catch the French off guard before they could get settled. An attack under such conditions would have proved disastrous, so Washington authorized Rochambeau “to call up the militia of Boston and Rhode Island to aid his army build the works for the defense of the island.”<sup>175</sup>

A large British fleet was soon spotted off Newport. At this time the French were still in the process of disembarking their artillery.<sup>176</sup> Sub lieutenant Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger, an officer of the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment, recorded the episode in his journal,

On the 21<sup>st</sup>, 22 sails were sighted; they were all large ships, and we learned that Clinton was embarked in them with 6,000 men. Our situation was such that we had great cause to fear that we should be taken by storm. With no fort, with not a gun unloaded, after the grenadiers and chasseurs of our brigade had been detached to march to the Neck [Brenton’s Point], we had left only 400 men in condition to face the enemy. The rest were absolutely tent bound, or else unable to stand up for an hour. The brigade of the Soissonnais Regiment had fared better and still had 1,000 men fit for service; but the artillery and Lauzun’s Legion were very weak. Our sailors as well had suffered terribly from scurvy. The *Conquérant* alone had 400 sick.

Had Clinton been more resolved to attack us it is certain he would have met with but feeble resistance with three landing-points to guard, we owed our safety to his irresolution alone.<sup>177</sup>

Much like the American hesitation during the Battle of Rhode Island, inaction by the British deprived them of an opportunity as well. Verger goes on to explain that by July 25, the French

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<sup>173</sup> Forbes, 108.

<sup>174</sup> Forbes, 110.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Thomas Balch, *The French in America During the War of Independence of the United States, 1777-1783*, ed. by Thomas Willing Balch, (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1891), 115.

<sup>176</sup> Helen Farrell Allen. *Embers Blaze Up A Fresh: Rochambeau’s Campaign in the American Revolution, Newport to Yorktown*, (Wakefield, RI: Tempus Fugit, 2005), 3.

<sup>177</sup> Howard C. Rice and Anne S.K. Brown, *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783*, 2 vol. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 1: 120.

had all their artillery unloaded and ready, and “a fine battery set up for firing hot shot.”<sup>178</sup> The British observed the French for several days but never took action and ultimately left. Years later General Clinton would lament that their failure to destroy the French before they had time to settle in at Newport, gave the Americans the morale boost they had needed.<sup>179</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Repairs and Additions to the Battlefield Defenses

The French, relieved by Clinton’s departure, now had plenty of time to rebuild the defenses at their own pace. General William Heath and 4,000 militiamen had answered Rochambeau’s call for assistance but with the crisis averted, half were sent home to bring in their harvests. The remaining men were put to work under the command of Lafayette building and repairing a series of redoubts throughout Newport and Middletown.<sup>180</sup> They worked on numerous forts along the coast, in defense of the harbor but also made major additions to the outer line in Middletown, used by the British during the Siege. According to several French maps, including the 1780 *Plan de la position de l’armée françoise autour de Newport et du mouillage de l’escadre dans la rade de cette ville*,<sup>181</sup> Card’s Redoubt, Dudley’s Redoubt, Bannister’s Redoubt, and Irish’s Redoubt, along with the Tonomy Hill Fort, and Fort Fanning were all repaired, strengthened and renamed (Figure 4.2, 4.3 red circles). Six additional forts were added to this area (most named for the French regiments occupying them) including

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<sup>178</sup> Rice, 1: 120.

<sup>179</sup> Allen, 3.

<sup>180</sup> Balch, 115.

<sup>181</sup> Translation: Map of the Position of French Army around Newport and the Squadron Moored in the Harbor of this City.



Lunette de Soissonnois, Lunette des Americains, Queue d'hyronde des chasseurs, Lunette de Bourbonnois, Redoute de Saintonge, Redoute de la Queue des'tang (Figure 4.3, blue circles).<sup>182</sup>

Anciens ouvrages construits par les Anglois et reparés par les François	
22 Batterie de la pointe d'yens	
23 Fort de Thomini hill	
24 Redoute à coté du grand chemin	
25 Fort Thessois	26 lunette des deux ponts
27 Redoute du jardin banister	
28 Fleche ruinée par Sullivan	
29 Redoute à gauche du chemin de l'innondation	
30 Redoute d'aston	31 Batterie du parc
32 Redoute abandonnée	33 Redoute abandonnée
34 Perche des signaux	35 Batterie de goat jsland

Figure 4.2 A list of defensive works, built be the British but repaired and renamed by the French, from a 1780 French map.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>182</sup> *Plan de la position de l'armée françoise autour de Newport et du mouillage de l'escadre dans la rade de cette ville (Map of the Position of French Army around Newport and the Squadron Moored in the Harbor of this City)*, 1780, Rochambeau Map Collection, Library of Congress.

<sup>183</sup> Rochambeau Map Collection, 1780, Library of Congress.



Figure 4.3 Map of the position of French Army around Newport and the Squadron moored in the harbor of this City (Plan de la position de L'armée française autour de Newport et du mouillage de l'escadre dans la rade de cette ville), shows defenses throughout the outer line, as they appeared in 1780. Fortifications built by the British and repaired by the French are circled in red. Defenses erected new by the French are circled in blue.<sup>184</sup>

Among those listed as new works was a fort on “Little Tonomy” (also known as Sunset Hill) a smaller summit just north of Tonomy Hill. Although this was a new fort, there had been a British presence at the site previously. It had been used as a “fleche,”<sup>185</sup> a very minor defensive work built to assist the larger fort on Tonomy Hill. It was such a minor work however, that the drastic enlargement was considered a new addition to the lines rather than a restoration.<sup>186</sup> The difference in shape and size of this work, from a fleche to a full redoubt, can be seen in Figure 4.4. Tonomy Hill Fort can also be seen here (to the right of Little Tonomy), and is a good example of the difference in shape and style of the French forts verses the English.

<sup>184</sup> Rochambeau Map Collection, 1780, Library of Congress.

<sup>185</sup> A projecting, arrow or V-shaped outwork in a fortification.

<sup>186</sup> Abbass 3: 405

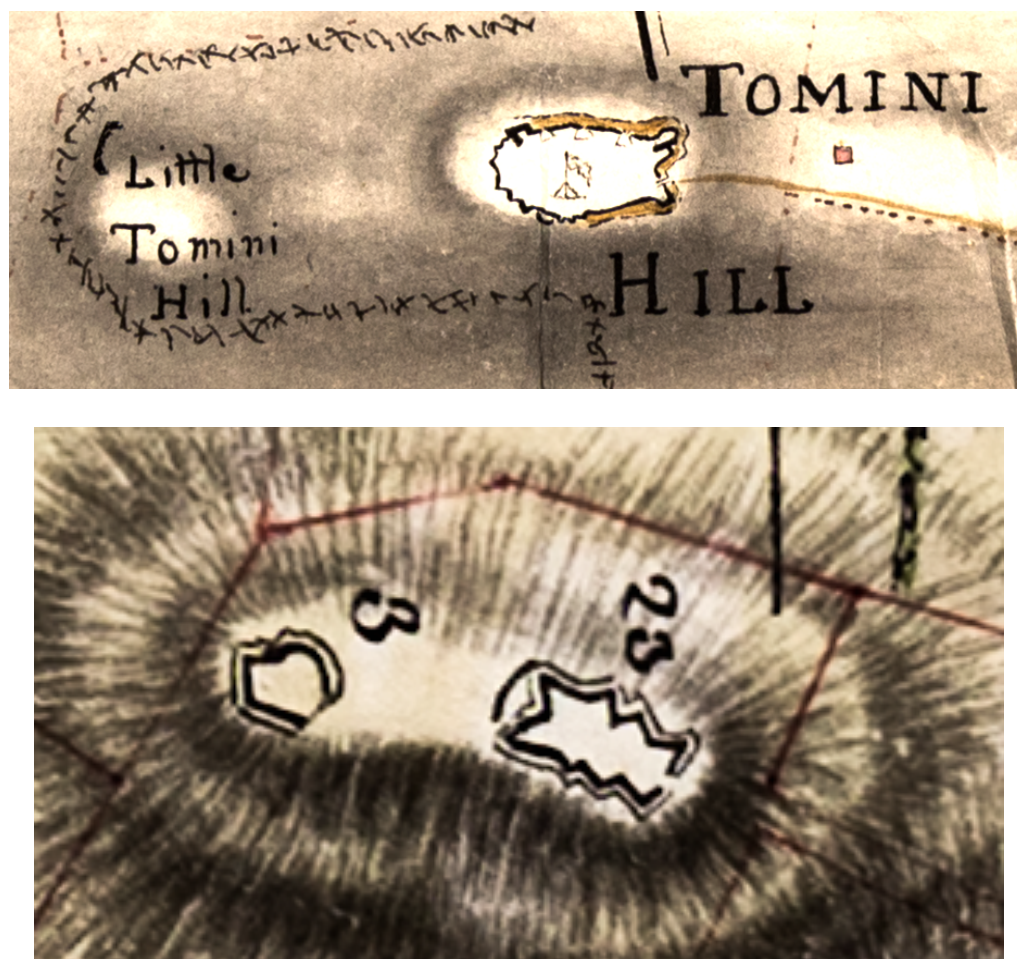


Figure 4.4 Top: The “fleche” on Little Tonomy (top left) and Tonomy Hill Fort (top right) as they appeared during the Siege.<sup>187</sup> Bottom: The same hills in 1780. Little Tonomy (bottom left) and Tonomy Hill Fort (bottom right) with their newly built and restored works carried out by the French.<sup>188</sup>

Work on the defenses would continue until the French moved into their winter quarters at the end of September.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>187</sup> Fage, *Plan of the works*, 1778, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>188</sup> Edouard Charles Victurnien Colbert, comte de Maulevrier, *Plan de la ville, rade, et environs de Newport en Rode Island, avec le campement de l'armée Française près de cette place en 1780. la disposition des ouvrages qu'elle à excuté et le mouillage de l'escadre*. 1783. William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>189</sup> Abbass 1: 456



### 4.2.3 Impact of the French on the Battlefield and Beyond

Although the island was now properly fortified, the French never had to put their defenses to the test, ultimately enjoying a rather peaceful stay from July 1780 to July 1781. The threat of a British attack was always a real concern but they were prepared for it and with the southern theater now the focus of the war, the British never attempted to retake Aquidneck Island. Instead, Rochambeau and the French Army spent their time and money in the city until they were needed elsewhere. During their stay, the French not only fortified the area, let their sick troops rest and their healthy men drill but Rochambeau was also able to plan with and eventually meet Washington. This would prove crucial to the final phase of the war.

The French also helped the city to recover. Unlike the British, the French paid for their lodgings and other needs. Rochambeau even paid (with gold and silver coins) to repair existing dwellings throughout the city to house his troops for winter, spending the modern day equivalent of \$80,000.<sup>190</sup> This was the kind of aid that Newport's devastated economy so desperately needed.

Over the course of their year-long stay, Newport society had fallen in love with the French, hosting balls and dinners in their honor, and even allowing a Roman Catholic funeral mass and burial (for the recently deceased Admiral Charles-Louis d'Arsac, chevalier de Ternay<sup>191</sup>) to be held at the Anglican Trinity Church.<sup>192</sup> To the inhabitants of Newport, the French were charming and polite, making them welcome guests of the city, compared to the British who were now seen more as the occupiers they truly were.

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<sup>190</sup> Stensrud, 227.

<sup>191</sup> Commander of the French Navy who came to Newport with Rochambeau, he attended the first conference with Washington in September 1780 but died in Newport of malignant fever the following December.

<sup>192</sup> Brian Stinson, "Newport Notables," Redwood Library & Athanaeum, 2004. Web. Accessed 15 August 2016. (<http://www.redwoodlibrary.org/research-projects/newport-notables>).

By summer 1781, it was finally time to act. Rochambeau had met with Washington three times over the previous year (twice in Connecticut and once in Newport) and now the General would lead his troops to join Washington in an effort to lay siege to the British in New York.<sup>193</sup> Plans soon changed however when an additional French fleet, promised by the King and commanded by Admiral Francois-Joseph-Paul, comte de Grasse, joined the war. De Grasse was headed for the Chesapeake Bay, and so all French forces set off for Virginia, where they would ultimately play an indispensable role in the surrender of British forces at Yorktown.<sup>194</sup> Having left Aquidneck Island with its newly repaired defenses intact, the battlefield in Middletown was now in far better shape because of the French than it had been at the end of the Siege. This impact on the landscape meant that the works used during the Siege, and repaired under Rochambeau, could survive for posterity should the inhabitants not intervene.

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<sup>193</sup> Stensrud, 228, 230, 233

<sup>194</sup> Stensrud, 233, 234