

Executive Summary

In August 1778, the Siege of Newport took place on opposing hills in Middletown, Rhode Island. It involved Major General John Sullivan's Continental Army units and regional militias against Major General Robert Pigot's British, Hessian and Loyalist forces. The two sides bombarded each other for well over a week to no avail, causing the Americans to retreat north to Portsmouth where they became entangled in the Battle of Rhode Island. Often overshadowed by the battle in Portsmouth - listed on the National Register of Historic Places (ID: 74002054) - little attention is paid to the finer details of the Siege, its battlefield in Middletown, and its impact on the campaign as a whole.

The Siege was part of the larger Rhode Island Campaign, which was an effort to retake the strategic port of Newport from its British occupiers. With help from America's brand new ally - France - American and French forces descended on Narragansett Bay in the hopes that a large scale victory with a powerful ally would end the war. The campaign that ensued involved an army of 10,000 Americans, including some of Washington's top officers and aides, and the Toulon Fleet lent by His Majesty King Louis XVI. The allies expected victory and their morale was high but the operation was fraught with problems from the start. Changing circumstances, a lack of coordination, an unexpected hurricane, and a near diplomatic disaster made an operation with much promise completely unravel. Today, the campaign is at best considered a draw, making it an easily forgotten chapter of the war. It was, however, America's first joint military operation with the French. Lessons were learned the hard way and diplomatic mistakes made here would not be repeated later in the war. The British learned just how vulnerable their position in Newport truly was and would abandon the city in the following year. This vacancy, in turn, unintentionally made way for Lieutenant General Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur,

comte de Rochambeau to use Newport as a staging area for French forces in America before heading south to Yorktown.

In 2015, the Middletown Historical Society (MHS) received a \$67,000 grant from the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) to investigate the Siege of Newport and its battlefield in Middletown. In the *Siege of British Forces in Newport County by Colonial and French in August of 1778*, the MHS sought to not only highlight the town's role in the larger conflict but also to determine how much geography and the available technology affected the campaign's outcome. To accomplish this, an in-depth analysis was conducted of the artillery and earthen fortifications used and their place within the battlefield landscape. In addition, identifying the remaining defenses and their condition has provided meaningful insight for their future preservation and commemoration, and a better understanding of the battlefield as a whole.

To carry out such a large scale, multi-disciplinary project, the Middletown Historical Society Research Team was formed. It primarily involved a collaboration with Salve Regina University, including faculty, students and alumni from both the History Department and the Cultural and Historic Preservation Department. Students conducted research and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) surveys, while faculty and alumni helped research and write portions of the report. Additionally, engineers from Roger Williams University and the University of Rhode Island were brought on to assist with the technical analysis.

The introductory sections of the report provide the proper historical context for the Siege, detailing the lead up, major players, and troop movements prior to the engagement. It is in Chapter One that the landscape of the battlefield and beginning of the Siege are discussed. It provides an understanding of key terrain features, observations on both sides, cover and concealment used, obstacles, dead spaces, and the avenues of approach. Chapter Two takes this

further by delving into the evolution of the Siege, including fields of fire, elevation considerations, and a detailed technical analysis of the artillery used during the engagement. It is in these chapters that the impact of geography and technology on the outcome become apparent.

Chapters Three and Four provide more of a historical background on what happened next, both for the troops and the battlefield. Chapter Three discusses the Americans' decision to abandon the Siege and move north to Portsmouth. Here, after an intense battle, they retreat entirely off the island. The cover and concealment used during their abandonment of both the Siege and the campaign, as well as their mobility corridor used during the retreat, are discussed. Chapter Four builds on this by examining what happened to the landscape after the Americans left. British activities post-August 1778 are detailed including the repair and destruction of their own lines. The later restoration of and addition to the defense lines by the French are also covered. Excerpts from numerous contemporary accounts (British, Hessian, American, and French) have been included to provide depth on the subject. Additionally, the use of historic maps from the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan and the Library of Congress has provided visual evidence of the battlefield's evolution from 1778 to 1780.

Following the Revolution, Middletown returned to the farming community it had been. Like so many of the country's other battlefields, the major changes and threats came in the 20th century. Assessing the location and condition of remaining fortifications and other features during this period was essential. In Chapter Five, the existence, preservation and integrity of the battlefield and its sites were studied and evaluated in three specific time periods including the turn of the 20th century, pre-WWII and the present day. Historic photographs, atlases, written accounts, aerial photographs, and site visits were used to assess changes to the battlefield over time and provide insight into what is left today. For convenience, Table ES.1 below lists all

relevant features still present on the battlefield today, and Figure ES.1 shows a map of the battlefield with important features and movements marked.

Table ES.1: Relevant features on the battlefield today.

FEATURE	TYPE
Card's Redoubt	earthen fortification
Tonomy Hill Fort	earthen fortification
Little Tonomy Hill	site of earthen fortification
Bailey's Brook	natural feature
Easton's Pond	natural feature
Easton's Beach	natural feature
Honeyman Hill	natural feature
Bliss Hill	natural feature
Green End	natural feature
West Main Road	street
East Main Road	street
Bliss Road	street
Green End Ave.	street
John Bliss House	Historic home used as British field headquarters during the Siege.

Evidence beneath the surface was also analyzed in Chapter Five, including the existence of a cannon ball recovered in a yard on Honeyman Hill and through the use of archeological equipment. Ground Penetrating Radar surveys were conducted in three associated sites, each

chosen based on the historical record and access to the property. These include a British outpost located on the Aaron Lopez Farm site (NRHP ID: 80000082, listed as “Greenvale Farm” for a later occupation of the site); the former site of Fort Fanning, and the Redoute de Saintonge (constructed by the French in 1780 but frequently mislabeled as Green End Fort).

Chapter Six is the conclusion of the report, covering a summary of the project and preservation recommendations. New insights on the history of the Siege, its outcome, and the role geography and technology played are discussed in detail. Recommendations are provided for the preservation of the battlefield’s remaining features, and a proposal is offered for a small museum at the center of the battlefield.