

Philip Vickers Fithian
The Battle of Long Island

AUGUST 23

All at Alarm-Posts by two. No Approach of the Enemy. About eight we hear heavy firing. We hear the Riffle-Men are distressing them with loose firing. The Hessians, on the other hand, single themselves out & skirmish our Riffle-Men — At twelve we have none yet killed; two wounded, one in the Groyne, the other is shot through the Knee, we hope neither is mortal.

At two o Clock the Alarm Guns were again fired from Cobble Hill — To Arms, to arms, thro' all the Regiments! It is said they gain Ground, & the Officer there has desired a Reinforcement — Col:s Martin's, & Littles Regiments immediately march off with two Field-Pieces. Our People about twelve o Clock with Howitzers set fire to a large elegant House, & a Barn on the hither End of Flat-Bush, said to belong to a Tory, in which many Officers of the Regulars were quartered; one of which, we have Reason to believe, was killed — Thus they have been already compelled to give Way, tho' it is but little yet. Towards Evening we hear one of our Riffle-Men was killed.

Our Battalion is ordered, for the first Time, to take Post in a Wood, by Red-Hook there to stay all Night “sub-jove.” Some of our Lads may think it hard but Hardships are always the Attendants of War.

AUGUST 24

Firing very early this morning. — Webster of Philad: breakfasted with us; he belongs to the third Battalion of Philad: Volunteers, two Companies of which Batt: are on this Island.

Before Noon I walked to the Place of Action, two Miles & a half. Like all earthly things, the Scenes of War are diverse & mixed. Some of our Men were in Companies sitting under the shady Trees and conversing about the Occurrences of the Day: who were killed, or wounded, or taken Prisoners; & which Army, on the Whole, gained Ground or lost; — Others were preparing their Victuals, & eating; — Many were lying

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on the sides of the Hills opposite to the Enemy, & securely sleeping — While others, as it comes in turn, were standing among whistling Bullets, on the other Side of the Hills, taking Trees for their Security & shooting when they can.

The Fire while I staid was nearly constant, & sometimes a Cluster would Rattle off together! two Field-pieces industriously playing also, sometimes with Balls, & sometimes with Canister Shot. But the Enemy are stopped, we hope, in their progress, & we pray that they may lose their Strength & Courage & return to their Ships with Shame.

Col: Martin to Day was wounded in the Breast, the Bullet is not extracted, but the Wound is not thought mortal.

A private had his Leg shot to pieces by a six-pounder, the Limb has been taken off & he is hopefully mending.

AUGUST 25

Another holy Sabbath presents to our View. No social Worship to be performed this Day — Carts & Horses driving every Way among the Army — Men marching out & coming in to & from the front Camp — Small Arms & Field Pieces continually firing; all in Tumult.

Mr. Noble at ten in the Dutch Church gave us a Sermon; about forty straggling Hearers were present.

Afternoon I visited our Battalion — one was fined by a Court-Martial for spend his Amunition, one Dollar — We had Prayers & the Battalion went to the Wood destined for them to guard. I to my Quarters with my kind Family.

AUGUST 26

Much unwell I find myself to Day. Mr. Ludlam & Hudson are here from Cohansie by them I write to my absent Betsey. No very important movement of the Enemy to Day. Our People in Parties annoy them.

Col: Ramsons Battalion is degraded. Fryday night last they left their Post before the Enemy & retreated with the utmost Confusion & Fear! The General gave it out in this Days Order that they shall stay within the Lines & do Fatigue from Day to Day: that they shall not even be allowed to mount a Guard of more than twelve! An Admonition indeed very humbling —

AUGUST 27

O doleful! doleful! doleful!—Blood! Carnage! Fire! Our People drove this Morning within their Lines! The Alarm Guns were fired a little before Day. Many Battalions, of excellent Men, went out into the Woods on the right & left Wing of the Enemy;—Alas! numbers went never to return!—The Enemy surrounded them. Those who could, retreated within the Lines. Those who could not were obliged to fight their Way thro the Enemy at every Hazard—But many, many we fear are Lost. General Lord Sterling's Brigade, in special, excited our tenderest Pity; A Savage would have pitied them—They stood formed in a large Body, on a good Eminence, in our plain View, but where we could give them no Relief!—On three Sides of them were the Enemy—on the other Side was a broad Marsh, & a Creek. There the brave Men stood more than four Hours—they found their Enemies surrounding them more, at last they divided placed a Body to attack the Enemy while a Part crossed over the Water—Here was a desperate Fire. But it was the best they could do. The Officers swam their Horses over, the Men some swam & some passed in Boats, but many stood behind; among these is Lord Sterling. Gen: Sullivan also is yet missing! The daring Britains came up boldly to our Works twice, & twice they were beat off—But such a dreadful Din my Ears never before heard!—And the distressed wounded, came crying into the Lines! We have taken upward of thirty of them.

Towards Evening the Riffle-Men, without Orders stole away & set fire to Houses, Barns &c. which presented a most dismal Scene.

AUGUST 28

Our Enemies enlarge their Appearance; show us more Tents & begin a Breastwork—The Riffle-Men went out in Parties & are perpetually firing; the Balls come buzzing over our Lines. Yet no Execution as we hear of done. Afternoon, at three, a Alarm in the midst of a violent Rain. Drums heavily calling to Arms. Men running promiscuously, & in Columns to the Lines. All the Time the Rain falling with an uncommon Torrent. The Guns of the whole Army are

wetted. And after the Alarm was over, which was occasioned by the Regulars coming in a greater Body than usual to drive our Riffle-Men, our Troops fired off their Guns quite till Evening so that it seemed indeed dangerous to walk within our own Lines—for we could from every Part hear perpetually Firing, & continually hear the Balls pass over us.

We cannot yet learn our Loss by our Retreat; the Generals Sullivan & Sterling are either killed or taken.

THURSDAY AUG: 29

Orders are given that there shall be no firing either out or in the Lines: Last Night the Enemy threw up a Breast-work opposite Fort Putnam at about a half a miles Distance. Our People are a little Alarmed. But yet we fear them not; even in Death we despise them. The weather is most unfavourable, very rainy; yesterday & to day, so much that the Trenches, Forts, Tents, & Camp are overflowed with water, & yet our Men must stand exposed themselves & Firelocks to it all. Twenty four hours at least the Lines are manned by the same Persons, & some Regiments have been on Duty since Monday! Sickness must follow.

Yesterday our Family except one to keep the House together, moved over to New-York, & from thence up the North-River to some Place of greater Security.

Towards Evening our Brigade has Orders to parade this Evening at seven o clock with all the Baggage. Many Conjectures are made of the Cause, none however can be clearly given. Mr. Hunter & I concluding that no Rest can be had if we pass over so late, & that it will be as well to go over in the Morning, & having a good Room & Bed here, agreed & stay the Night on Long-Island.

FRYDAY AUG: 30

As soon as it was well light we were up & preparing to go over. Between twelve & one the Woman who keeps our house, being informed by one from the Camp, came into our Room & told us she had packed up most of her remaining Effects, & wanted the Bed on which we were lying; & at the same time advised us to consult immediately for our own Safety as the Army is leaving the Island!—As an idle Tale we

considered what She said, & unfolded our Blankets & again laid ourselves down, & slept quietly til Day!—

We got down to the Ferry, & happily came over, among the last Boats—those which came next were fired at, & in one of them five were badly wounded!

We brought all off with Deliberation, except two Bottles, one of which with Bitters, an useful Article now.

Once more our Army is in New-York, having fled before our Enemies are full of Anxiety—the prevailing Opinion is we cannot keep this Capital more than two or three Days. The Winds are northerly & have been since they came on Shore but the huge Ships beat up a little nearer every Tide, & we hourly expect them before the Town.