

WHO WAS THE CAPTAIN SCOTT ON THE 1775 EXPEDITION TO QUEBEC?

One of the most surprising facts about the historic Benedict Arnold expedition to Quebec through the wilderness of Maine in 1775 is that in the two hundred thirty-five years since it took place the first name of one of its company commanders has never been identified. Until now, he has been referred to in all of the expedition journals and histories only as Captain Scott and no first name has been identified. The two most recent books written about the Arnold expedition refer to Scott only as Captain Scott.¹

While the names of all of the other Arnold expedition company commanders and the majority of the other officers have been known, the identity of Captain Scott has remained a mystery. This is probably the case for three reasons. First, none of the more than thirty journals of the Arnold expedition mention his first name. Only his last name is given. Second, there are a number of men who served in the Revolution with the same first name as Captain Scott. The fact that there were a number of men with the same name serving in the Revolutionary army inevitably causes confusion that prevents positive identification. Third, is the fact that Captain Scott and his company was in the 4th Division under Lieutenant Colonel Roger Enos, which returned to Cambridge without permission of the commander, Colonel Benedict Arnold, while the expedition was in the middle of the Maine wilderness and suffering from really bad weather and a declining food supply. The unauthorized return caused Commander-in-Chief George Washington to immediately arrest its commander, Colonel Enos, when the division reached Cambridge. Although Enos was subsequently cleared of any wrong doing by a court-martial board, that incident has remained the subject of controversy and the actions of the Enos Division, including Captain Scott's company, have been criticized by almost every writer who has examined its conduct.²

In the early twentieth century, Charles E. Banks tried to verify the identity of Captain Scott. In an article in the *Magazine of History*, written in 1914, Banks requested the assistance of all of its readers in his effort, saying that "His Christian name has eluded every effort I have made to fix it unmistakably". In that article, Banks goes on to focus his attention on a reference in the *History of Northampton* which describes Scott as Captain William Scott of Londonderry, New Hampshire. For some reason, Banks uses the name of Peterborough in his article but the book he cited actually refers to Londonderry. In any event, the Northampton history does provide the first name as William. What Banks apparently did not realize is that the Northampton history was quoting from a pension application filed by Ebenezer Gee of Northampton, who was on the Arnold expedition and refers in his application to his company commander as Captain William Scott of Londonderry, New Hampshire.

Banks goes on to point out that there were two William Scotts from Peterborough, New Hampshire, in the Revolutionary War. Banks then explains why neither one of the two William Scotts from Peterborough is the right man leaving him with the question still unanswered. He eliminated one of the William Scotts because the family descendants denied any knowledge of their ancestor being on the Arnold expedition. The other William Scott was eliminated because he was in a British prison when the expedition left Cambridge and was on its way toward Quebec. Banks was frustrated by the results of his research because it left Scott's identity still unresolved.³

WILLIAM SCOTT OF PETERBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

There is clear and convincing evidence from three relevant sources that the Captain Scott who was on the expedition to Quebec was Captain William Scott of Peterborough, New Hampshire. Until now, every researcher, including Charles Banks, has overlooked the first and most important source that reveals his full name. That source is an original document written by the commander of the expedition, Colonel Benedict Arnold. In his Day Book and Ledger, which was seized by an order of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania on September 27, 1780, Arnold has entries that are dated in 1777 and 1778 where he lists cash and "sundry disbursements" that he made to the officers in the Quebec expedition. Among the officers from the expedition who are listed in his Day Book is Wm. Scott.⁴ This entry from Arnold's Day Book serves as primary evidence from the commander of the expedition to establish the identity of the Captain Scott in his expedition as Captain William Scott.

The second source is a list of officers found in the National Archives and Records Administration which contains miscellaneous Revolutionary War muster rolls, payrolls, strength returns and other miscellaneous personnel, pay and supply records of American units. The record is a one-page report with a heading on the previous page that identifies

the list as Commissions Granted on Recommendation of General Court. The one-page list is undated but it must be from the fall of 1775 or the winter of 1775-1776. The page shows a list of twenty-two officers that were in the Quebec expedition ranging from Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Greene to Adjutant Christian Febiger. One of the officers on the list is Captain William Scott and he is the only Scott listed.⁵

The third source is four pension applications from men serving under Captain Scott in the expedition each of who list their commander's name as William Scott. Of the four, James Moore identifies him as Captain William Scott from Peterborough, and Ebenezer Gee says he was Captain Scott of Londonderry, New Hampshire. Since there is no Captain Scott who served in the Revolutionary War from Londonderry, this is obviously a mistake. Londonderry is in the State of New Hampshire and located near Peterborough. Therefore, it appears to be a mistake as to his residence and there was only one Captain Scott from Peterborough in 1775. The other two pension applicants simply describe their commander as Captain William Scott, and do not identify his hometown.⁶ There was no other Captain William Scott serving in the Revolutionary army in Boston in the summer of 1775, except for William Scott from Peterborough. Therefore, these pension applications confirm that the Captain Scott serving with the Arnold expedition was Captain William Scott of Peterborough.

Captain William Scott of Peterborough's name appears in at least seven historical publications relating to his involvement in the Revolutionary War, but in all seven his service in the Arnold expedition is not mentioned at all. It is no wonder that Banks was thwarted in his efforts to confirm the real identity of Captain Scott. The only historical publication that did correctly identify William Scott of Peterborough as the Captain Scott in the Arnold expedition is the *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity*, which has an article regarding the Arnold expedition written in 1912.⁷ Banks did not cite this source in his 1914 article so it is not likely that he had seen it. The inaccurate and confusing information on Captain William Scott cited by Banks and the difficulty he had at that time of obtaining a list of the Scott company privates and their pension applications offers a significant contrast from the means of research and identification used today via the computer.

The name of Captain Scott need no longer remain a mystery. There is no doubt that it was Captain William Scott of Peterborough, New Hampshire who commanded one of the companies in the Enos Division.

One of the surprising results of this author's research on Captain William Scott is that there is a family history of the William Scott family of Peterborough, New Hampshire and Greenfield, New York that was published in 1967 by Mary Edith Harrell of Cincinnati, Ohio. This is the William Scott that was on the Arnold expedition. This family history offers information about William Scott's family and his descendants. However, there is no mention in this history of William Scott being on the Arnold expedition. It appears that there is no family tradition or family remembrance which has identified their ancestor, Lieutenant Colonel William Scott, serving as a captain on the 1775 expedition. Therefore, a significant piece of William Scott's history is now missing from his family history. This missing history should be recognized and accepted so that his family understands his role in an important Revolutionary War campaign.

WHICH WILLIAM SCOTT FROM PETERBOROUGH?

Because there are two William Scotts from Peterborough who became Captains in the Revolutionary Army, it makes sense to clarify which William Scott was on the Arnold expedition as a company commander. The Banks' article correctly identifies two William Scotts from Peterborough but does not clarify who each one was. The distinction between the two is clarified in two publications by the same author, Jonathan Smith. First is his article in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* of 1911 and second is the extensive information on the two men contained in his *The History of Peterborough in the Revolution*.

Both of these accounts point out that these two William Scotts were first cousins and were both Peterborough residents.

In all local, regimental and other histories the records of these men both during and subsequent to the war are very much mixed; the services of the one being often accredited to the other, and vice versa. Both were in the army through the entire war and rendered honorable and even brilliant service. In the interest of historical truth the tangle should be straightened out.

This is obviously a realistic statement about the confusion in terms of correctly identifying the two William Scotts and was the reason the article appeared. Based on the information in these accounts and other genealogical information, the distinction between the two William Scotts can be made.

Captain William Scott of 1775

The Captain William Scott who was on the Arnold expedition, also known as Short Bill, was born in County Derry in Ireland and was the son of Archibald Scott. His father was a brother to Alexander, the father of the other William Scott. He was born in 1743 or 44, married Rosanna Tait (Tate), also of County Derry, in 1760 and came to America shortly thereafter and settled in Peterborough. He served in the French and Indian War in Captain Silas Brown's company soon after moving to America. By the time the Revolutionary War broke out, this William Scott is identified in the Revolutionary War history of Peterborough as the proprietor of the only store in Peterborough.

He responded to the Lexington Alarm by organizing a group of Peterborough men who marched off to join the army assembling in Cambridge. At some point prior to the Battle of Bunker Hill, he raised a new company consisting of most of the men in his original company and was appointed Captain, probably by brevet, with his first cousin, the other William Scott, as his lieutenant. His company is listed in the *History of Peterborough* and *Peterborough in the Revolution* as being in the Bunker Hill battle. In that battle, the other William Scott, his lieutenant, was wounded and left lying on the battlefield.

Surprisingly, both the genealogical book and the two local history accounts of our Captain William Scott pass over the period of his company's service, which was from Bunker Hill through December 31, 1775, without any mention of Arnold's expedition, thus giving rise to the confusion about the identity of Captain Scott. On July 7, 1776, he was commissioned as a Captain in Colonel Sargent's Regiment where he served until November of 1776. At that time, he was appointed a captain in Colonel John Stark's, afterward Colonel Cilley's regiment of the Continental Line, 1st New Hampshire Battalion. He was present in the retreat from Ticonderoga and in the Battle of Saratoga, where he was wounded in the hand. He was subsequently promoted to major and was in the Battle of Monmouth. During that battle, he was wounded by a bayonet thrust in his back when he tried to squash a mutiny in the American lines.

Our William Scott was in the Sullivan expedition in 1779 as Major of the 1st New Hampshire Regiment and became acting commander of his brigade in 1782 and 1783. In October of 1783, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel by brevet and then retired when the Continental Army was disbanded in late 1783. He never returned to Peterborough. After the war he moved to Greenfield, New York, where he was the first supervisor of the town, a Justice of the Peace and a promoter of the Society for the Promotion of Useful Learning. He died in Greenfield in 1815 at age seventy-one and is buried in the Bailey Cemetery.

In *The History of Peterborough in the Revolution*, he is described as earning the title of The Fighting Major and his grandson described his hands as being "so drawn and misshapen by wounds, that they resemble bird claws rather than human hands."

Lieutenant William Scott of 1775

Lieutenant William Scott, the cousin, also known as Long Bill, was born in Townsend, Massachusetts in 1742, the son of Alexander Scott. At some time prior to the war, probably around 1750, he moved to Peterborough with his father and mother and later purchased his own farm. According to the MHS article and *The History of Peterborough in the Revolution*, he also served in the French and Indian War with his cousin. Lieutenant Scott was in another town when he learned about the fight at Lexington and went immediately to the scene of the British retreat, where he was able to get a couple of shots off as the British crossed the Charlestown Ferry.

He assisted his cousin, Captain Scott, in recruiting the original company and was appointed its first lieutenant. This is confirmed by pension applications from company members. The company of which the two William Scotts were commander and first lieutenant was in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Lieutenant Scott was wounded early in the battle with a musket ball below the knee and then when an attack occurred as he was retreating "he received in his thigh and the lower part of his body four additional balls, and bleeding at nine orifices, fainted upon the field." When the Americans finally retreated he was left on the field and was taken prisoner by the British and placed in a Boston

prison. He was subsequently taken to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and put into prison there when the British evacuated Boston. In July of 1776, Lieutenant Scott and some fellow prisoners escaped and reached Boston, where he recuperated enough to join Colonel Sargent's regiment. His regiment was in the Battle for New York and in November of 1776, Lieutenant Scott was again taken prisoner, this time at Fort Washington. However, before the British could send him back to prison, he escaped by swimming the Hudson River.

Lieutenant Scott was commissioned as a Captain in January of 1777 and served until the spring of 1781. As his wounds were too severe to continue in a foot company, he resigned and entered the naval service where he served until May of 1782. After the war, this William Scott moved to Groton, Massachusetts, and then to Litchfield, New York. He was appointed as deputy storekeeper at West Point in 1784 and then went on a mission to Detroit. In 1796, he was surveying land near Lake Erie and caught a fever and died at his home in Litchfield on September 19, 1796. It is obvious that this Lieutenant Scott cannot be the Captain Scott on the Arnold expedition because he was in jail in Boston recovering from serious wounds when the Quebec expedition left Cambridge. Moreover, he was not a captain during 1775.⁸

END NOTES

¹ Thomas Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness, Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec in 1775*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006; Arthur S. Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army: The 1775 American Invasion of Canada during the Revolutionary War*. New York: Savas Beattie, 2008.

² See Richard G. Bell. The Court-Martial of Roger Enos. Connecticut Bar Journal, vols 73 & 74, 1999 & 2000: 428-461; 299-312. Also Justin H. Smith. *Arnold's March from Cambridge to Quebec*. New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1903.

³ Charles E. Banks, *Magazine of History with Notes & Queries*, vol. 18, January-June 1914, 271-273.

⁴ Benedict Arnold Day Book and Ledger, 1777-1779. *American Historical Record*, vol. 3, May 1874: 220-222.

⁵ List of Arnold Officers. Misc. Revolutionary War Rolls. M346. NARA.

⁶ The four pension applications that mention Captain Scott being their company commander on the Quebec expedition are: Ebenezer Gee of South Hampton, MA, W4679, who does not give Scott's first name; James Moore of Sharon, New Hampshire, W17158, who gives Scott's first name as William; David Emery of New Hampshire, W24123, who gives his first name as William; Robert Stewart, S43185, also mentions William Scott's first name.

⁷ *Proceedings of Worcester Soc of Antiquity*, vol. 25, 1912: 87.

⁸ Charles E. Banks. *Magazine of History*, 271-273; Mary E. Harrell. *The Scot Family: An Account of Lieutenant Colonel William Scott of Peterborough, N.H. and His Descendants*. Cincinnati: M.E. Harrell, 1967; Albert Smith. *History of the Town of Peterborough, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire*. Boston: George H. Ellis, 1876: 155-158, 244-250; Jonathan Smith. *Peterborough New Hampshire in the American Revolution*, 316-324; Jonathan Smith. Two William Scotts of Peterborough. N.H. *Proceedings of MHS*, vol. 45, 1911: 495-502.