

# A Summit Role in the American Revolution

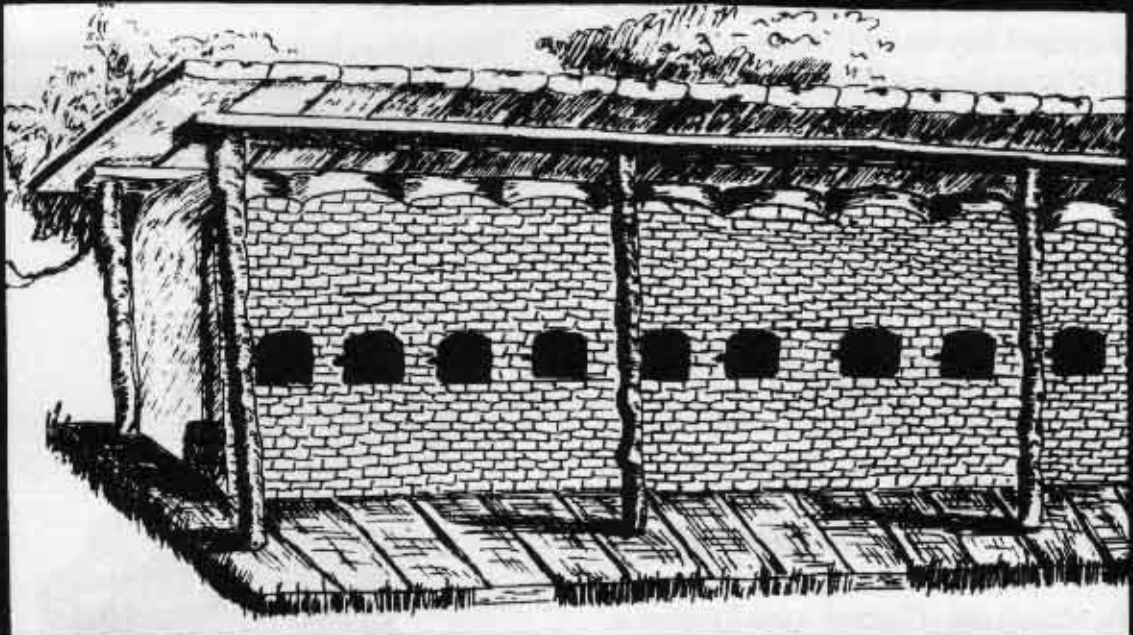
by Arthur Cotterell

While there wasn't an area known as Summit during the American Revolution (Summit was not officially established until 1869) there is an area in present-day Summit which played a very important role in the conclusion of the War For Independence. The action at the area of the present-day Municipal Golf Course was the site of a hoax perpetrated by General George Washington which kept the British commander, General Sir Henry Clinton, headquartered in New York City, fearful of possible moves by Washington.

Clinton had a large force in New York with which he was carefully watching Washington's forces in New Jersey, as well as in New York State and Rhode Island. Meanwhile, the British General Lord Cornwallis was moving his forces into Virginia with the hope of closing out the war in the summer of 1781. In the meantime, Washington and the French General, Comte de Rochambeau, had been planning a joint campaign against Clinton in New York. As Cornwallis moved his troops into Yorktown, Washington decided to make a major change in his plans and make Cornwallis his target, rather than Clinton in New York. Somehow a hoax had to be developed in order to hold Clinton in New York, while Washington and Rochambeau headed South to take on Cornwallis in Virginia. What could be done? It would not be an easy task.

Washington circulated rumors of an imminent siege of New York City, and allowed secret documents and letters portraying this deception to be captured. This was a time when there was a significant number of British spies in New Jersey. To support these misleading reports, Washington had a field near New York City (an area which now holds Summit's Municipal Golf Course) converted into what appeared to be a permanent encampment for a large body of troops. Storehouses and a bakery large enough to supply a daily bread ration for 3,000 men were built in ten days by French troops stationed there. The brick ovens for the bread were housed within a 66 foot shed located 200 feet east

*("Bakery" continued on page 4)*



THE FRENCH BAKERY PLAYED A PART IN THE BRITISH SURRENDER AT YORKTOWN.

of River Road and a short distance from, and parallel to, the highway from Elizabeth to Morristown, known as the Kings Highway. This was an area which the British were familiar with as they had fought in nearby land in the Battle of Springfield the previous summer. The exact site of the bakery, it is believed now, is covered by the present (since 1972) alignment and shoulder of the South Service Road of Interstate 24.

Clinton had become convinced that the camp, with its brick ovens giving a sense of permanence, would become the staging area for an attack by Washington on New York City from New Jersey. Clinton decided to strengthen his position in New York, and not to send any reinforcements to Cornwallis in Yorktown.

When the French navy under Admiral de Grasse was able to block off the British navy from bringing supplies to Cornwallis through the Chesapeake Bay area, Washington and Rochambeau were ready to leave for the South. Interestingly the French troops were not assigned to the campsite in Summit even though the "bakeries were built by French artisans. American troops occupied the Summit site while the bakeries were operated by French bakers and the bread baked in Summit was sent to the French troops on their march to Virginia.

The American and French troops divided into three separate groups until they reached Princeton, then they crossed the Delaware River at Trenton and continued south through Philadelphia. The line of march as the troopers went through Philadelphia was over two miles long. The army reached Williamsburg in 28 days, a distance of 400 miles from the New Jersey/New York area. The siege of Yorktown, which was to begin shortly after, was to bring the American Revolution to a close, although it took two more years before the peace treaty was signed in Paris.

Clinton had been thoroughly misled and failed to take the steps that would have thwarted Washington's plan and helped the British cause. After the war, Clinton in his writings alluded to the "strong camp behind the Pasaick (Passaic) River" with its French bakery (now Summit's Golf Course), which is one of Summit's five Revolutionary War sites. Truly, Washington's hoax had played an important role in concluding the war in 1781.