He Never Missed His Aim

by

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Just as World War I produced its Sergeant Alvin York and World War II its Lieutenant Audie Murphy, the American Revolution had its preeminently outstanding hero in the ranks. No more than Alvin York or Audie Murphy could he be considered to be a typical American soldier. But, like them, he represented the epitome of many of the virtues associated with the fighting man of his day.

His name was Timothy Murphy, and his services included not only conventional operations against the British and Hessian Regulars but frontier fighting as well, at first with the Continentals and later as a militiaman. Like many of his fellow soldiers, he was illiterate. But he was noted for muscular strength and physical endurance and fleetness of foot. He was also noted for quick thinking and for craftiness matching that of the Indians themselves. Above all—and in the tradition of American popular military heroes—he was noted for superb marksmanship.

All of this made him into something of a legend. One authority, indeed, has called him the "most romantic figure of adventure during the whole war."[1] Some of the stories about him strain credulity, and some of them bear suspicious resemblance to tales told of other frontier folk heroes. But enough of Murphy's exploits are verified by valid records to make it clear that he was an exceptional man and, for the type of combat in which he was chiefly involved, an ideal soldier.

Timothy Murphy was born to Irish immigrant parents in 1751, on the New Jersey side of the Delaware Water Gap. While he was still a child, he moved with his family to the neighborhood of Easton, Pennsylvania. When his parents moved again, this time to the vicinity of Sunbury, in the frontier area where the Susquehanna River forks into its West and North Branches, he stayed behind as a "bound boy" to the neighboring Van Campen family. But when he was 21, he took a job as an axe-man with a surveying crew working to chart what was still the largely unknown wilderness of Northumberland County.[2]

Although that county was remote, it was not too isolated for its inhabitants to be aware of what was taking place in the rest of the country. And when word arrived that on 14 June 1775 the Continental Congress had authorized Pennsylvania to form six rifle companies (almost immediately expanded to nine) for twelve months' service with the force assembled near Boston,[3] one of the companies was promptly recruited among the men of Northumberland. Indeed, considering the slow communication of the time, its formation was incredibly fast, for under John Lowdon as captain and James Parr as first lieutenant, it was mustered into service no later than 29 June. Among the recruits who rallied so quickly was Timothy Murphy.[4]

Each man brought his own rifle,[5] which saved time; but white hunting shirts and "round" hats were to be issued, and these had to be procured. Also, the company had to make its way to the combat zone on foot. It was 1 September, therefore, before Lowdon's company reached Massachusetts. There it

joined the other elements of what was now Colonel William Thompson's Pennsylvania Rifle Battalion.[6]

Because the main army was armed chiefly with muskets, Thompson's riflemen (less two companies detached for service against Quebec) were assigned to outpost duty, guarding the front of Washington's position and, as opportunity presented, sniping at British soldiers who incautiously let themselves be seen. However, except for a brisk skirmish at Lechmere's Point on 9 November, when a British landing party was driven off, the battalion's service was relatively uneventful.

Only one episode during this period is specifically attributed to Murphy. According to the story, some British soldiers in a boat had moved toward the American-held shore to mark a channel with buoys. Being "a good long mile" offshore, they felt safe enough. But Murphy, perched on high ground, is said to have begun laying rounds among them, picking off one after another until the panic-stricken survivors pulled hastily back to Boston.[7]

Reputedly, Murphy was using conical bullets. Even so, it seems unlikely that his rifle could even reach targets at such a range, let alone reach them with any accuracy. All the same, the fact that this story was told at all suggests that Murphy had already acquired a name as an outstanding marksman even among men who had a reputation for exceptional marksmanship.

Be that as it may, in March 1776 Murphy's battalion moved from Boston to Long Island. On 30 June, the twelve-month enlistments expired and the organization was reconstituted as the 1st Pennsylvania Continental Regiment, enlisted for three years. More than half of the veterans signed on for further service, one of them being Timothy Murphy, now serving under James Parr, who had replaced John Lowdon as captain of the Northumberland County company.[8]

The 1st Pennsylvania fought at the Battle of Long Island on 27 August and helped cover the withdrawal of the defeated Americans from Brooklyn to Manhattan. It took part in the retreat through New Jersey to Pennsylvania, the 26 December crossing of the Delaware, and the surprise assault on the Hessian garrison at Trenton, New Jersey. With one other regiment, it played a crucial role in an all-day delaying action on 2 January 1777, slowing the advance of the British attacking force under Lord Charles Cornwallis which moved out of Princeton to try to crush Washington at Trenton. And it fought again on the following day when Washington eluded Cornwallis to strike a daring blow against the reduced British force that had been left behind at Princeton.[9] With the rest of the army, the regiment then moved into winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey.

In these operations, Murphy presumably played an appropriate role, but as just another private in the ranks. The records fail to mention him at all. He probably was a capable enough soldier, but such conventional campaigning was not the type in which he particularly shone. Changes, however, were in the offing.

With the approach of spring and a new campaign season, Washington faced serious problems. General William Howe, with the principal enemy army, held New York City and northeastern New Jersey. At the same

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time, General John Burgoyne was pushing south from Ticonderoga with a force of British and Hessian troops and Indian allies. Left alone, Burgoyne might win control of the whole length of the Hudson. But if Washington moved against Burgoyne, Howe would be free to strike unopposed at some other area of the country.

Although Washington's first priority was to continue watching Howe, he was determined to send help to the Americans under General Horatio Gates who were trying to block Burgoyne. Accordingly, in mid-June he organized a special task force, made up exclusively of riflemen, and placed it under Colonel Daniel Morgan. Called "Morgan's Rifle Corps," it consisted of 500 picked men (Timothy Murphy being one of them), formed into eight provisional companies.[10] One of the company commanders was Murphy's own captain, James Parr; but Murphy himself was assigned to a company commanded by Captain Hawkins Boone, detached from the 12th Pennsylvania, who was also from Northumberland County.[11]

The men of Morgan's task force were a rugged, weather-beaten, hard-bitten group. A contemporary description says that in addition to his rifle, each of them carried in his belt both a long knife and a tomahawk. They wore buckskin or brown linen hunting shirts, and breeches or leggings, with moccasins instead of shoes. Many of them had the words "Liberty or Death" lettered across their chests, while others flaunted the slogan on the fronts of their caps.[12]

Their performance matched their rugged appearance. On 19 September they took part with the rest of Gates' army in the First Battle of Freeman's Farm. The battle was indecisive and the riflemen suffered heavy losses, but Gates himself gave Morgan's men the principal credit for the qualified success that was achieved that day.[13]

For the next two weeks, although the two armies remained stationary, watching each other, patrol action was continuous. In the scouting and skirmishing which took place, Murphy and a Virginia rifleman named David Elerson, who became Murphy's constant companion, distinguished themselves several times, waylaying enemy foraging parties and bringing in prisoners and welcome supplies.[14] Once they captured a British sentry and terrorized him into revealing the password and countersign. Masked by darkness, Murphy used the information that night to make his way into the enemy camp, where he found a British officer alone in his tent, writing. Creeping inside, Murphy put his knife to the unsuspecting officer's throat and ordered him, if he wanted to live, to come along without raising an alarm. Again using the password and countersign, Murphy brought his prisoner successfully through the enemy lines to the American camp.[15]

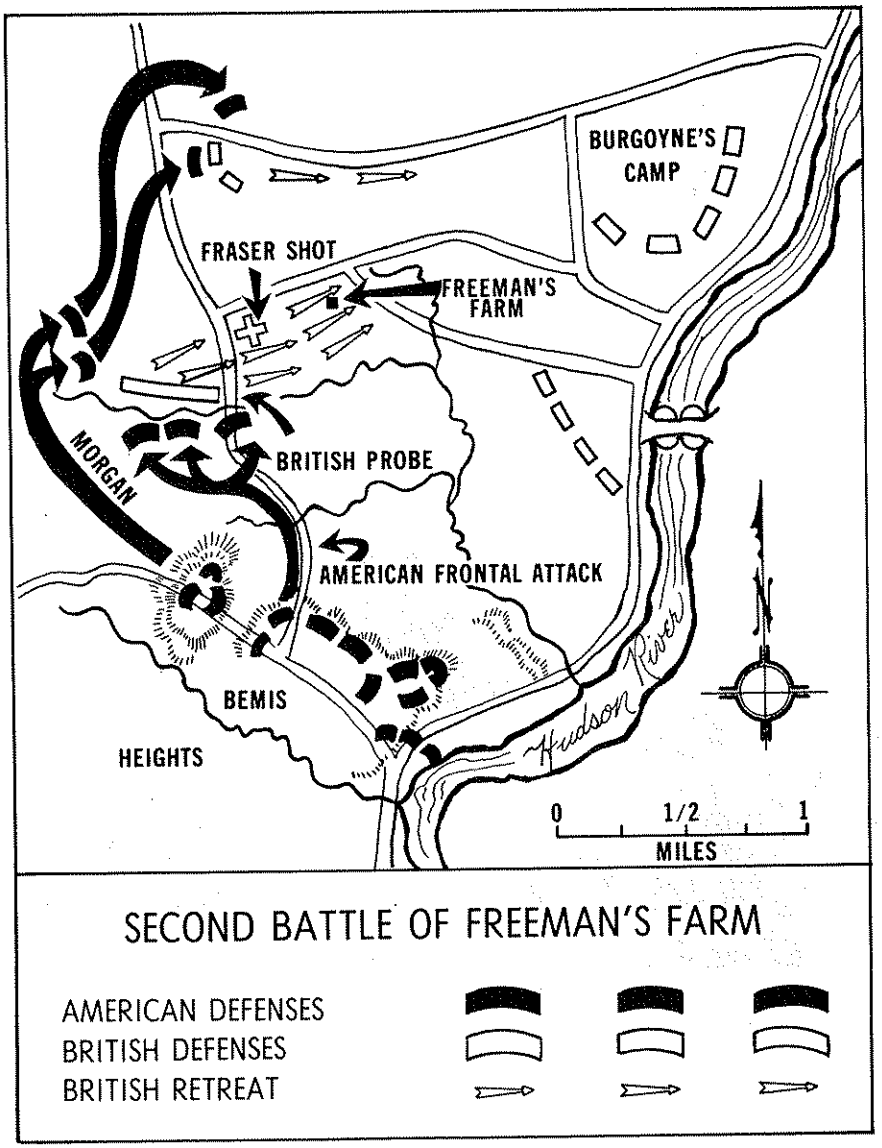
Whether or not the captured officer supplied any useful information is not recorded, but Murphy's exploit made him known throughout the American force. A few days later, however, he was to perform a service which completely overshadowed his previous feat and very possibly represents one of the most significant individual actions by a private soldier during the entire war.

This took place on 7 October, in the Second Battle of Freeman's Farm.

The course of events began when Burgoyne sent General Simon Fraser from the British camp on the west bank of the Hudson to make a reconnaissance in force, probing the left flank of the American position at Bemis Heights, two miles to the south. For the British, the operation began to go wrong when some of the Americans attacked Fraser's troops head-on, pushing them backward. Meanwhile, Morgan's men swung westward by a concealed route and hit Fraser's right flank. At this, the enemy line broke and the men began falling back toward their base camp.

Even so, all was not lost, for under General Fraser's urging the redcoats were soon rallying. If a new line could be formed, it should be possible to beat back the advancing Americans, and perhaps even to cut some of them off now that they were becoming overextended. The issue was still definitely in the balance.

What was happening was obvious to General Benedict Arnold, who without



authority had ridden out from Bemis Heights and taken active charge of the American assault. He pointed to Fraser, conspicuous on "a splendid iron-gray gelding" not more than 300 yards away, and told Morgan to have his riflemen pick off the enemy commander.[16]

Two men fired. Although the range was extreme even for a rifle, one bullet struck the crupper of Fraser's saddle and the other passed harmlessly through the gelding's mane. An aide urged Fraser to take cover, but he refused. Meanwhile, Murphy had climbed into a small tree. Now he squeezed off a round and the British general fell from his horse, shot mortally through the body. The instant before Murphy fired, Fraser saw him in the tree and, before he died, told an aide where the shot had come from.[17]

With Fraser out of action, the British rally promptly collapsed and the troops broke for their camp in disorder. That night, Burgoyne moved his army northward toward prepared defenses at the Heights of Saratoga. There he found himself harassed by snipers, hemmed in by American forces on three sides and by the Hudson on the fourth, and bombarded by American cannon from across the river. On 13 October he opened the negotiations which ended in his surrender four days later.

Burgoyne's surrender has been labelled as the turning point of the Revolution. Certainly, it provided a striking indication that the rebellious colonists might actually make good their claim to independence; and as such, it has been generally considered a major factor in the French government's decision to risk open military alliance with the infant United States.

Burgoyne's army was defeated by the cumulative impact of a succession of setbacks and unexpected difficulties, a lack of coordinated support by other British forces, and eventually an acute shortage of supplies. But the event which brought Burgoyne to the point that he saw no alternative to

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In this painting, British General Simon Fraser is shown at the right being carried from the field, the victim of sharpshooter Timothy Murphy, visible as he continues firing from the tree at upper left. On a white horse in the center is General Benedict Arnold leading the American charge.

capitulation was clearly his defeat at the Second Battle of Freeman's Farm. Of course, it would be grossly simplistic to attribute this defeat—hence the surrender at Saratoga, hence the French alliance, hence the ultimate American victory and establishment of independence—to the one rifle shot that killed General Fraser. However, this one action must be conceded to have been somewhat more than ordinarily significant. The principal credit for the victory properly belongs to such men as Arnold and Morgan and even Gates, but it seems only fitting that Murphy should receive today some measure of the recognition that was accorded him during his own lifetime.[18]

After Burgoyne's surrender, Morgan's "Corps" returned to the main army under Washington. While they had been away, Howe had moved by sea into Chesapeake Bay and overland into Pennsylvania; he had defeated the Americans at Brandywine, outmaneuvered them to slip part of his force into Philadelphia, and then by sheer luck had barely escaped a defeat at Germantown. Morgan's men now found the army in a defensive position at Whitemarsh, just north of Philadelphia. After helping to beat back a tentative British probe early in December, in the middle of the month they moved with the rest of the army to Valley Forge.

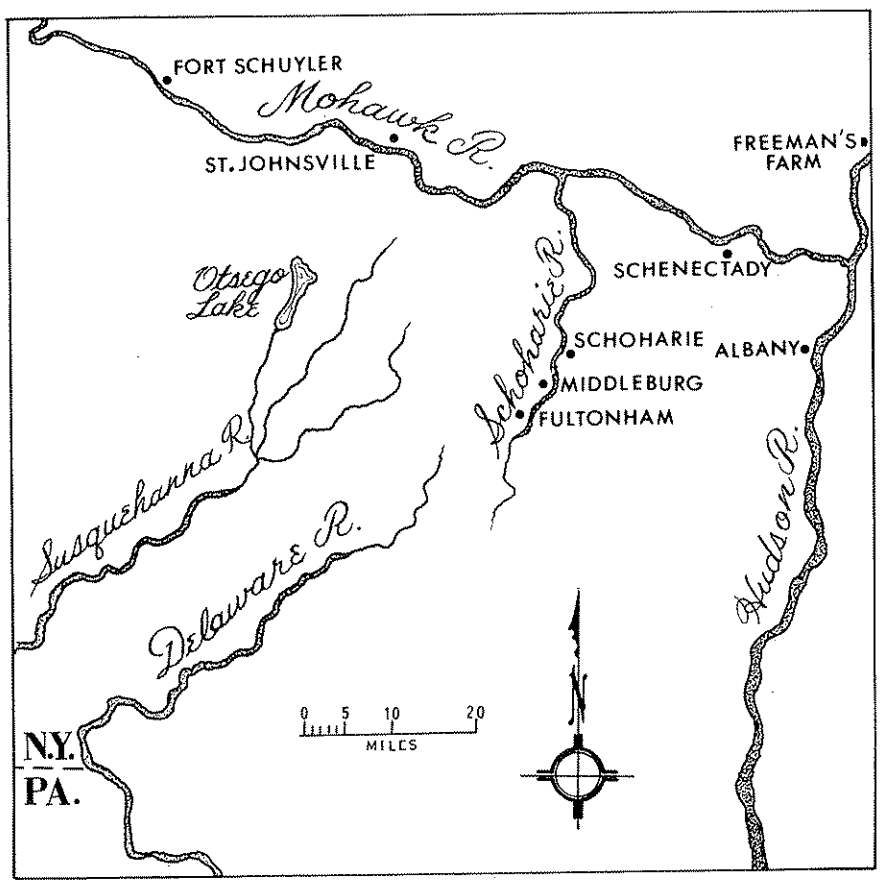
The rifle corps was held more or less intact

throughout that dreadful winter. It was part of the force which took up the pursuit when the enemy evacuated Philadelphia in mid-June 1778 and started across New Jersey to Sandy Hook, there to take ship for New York. American advance elements caught up on 28 June and fought the Battle of Monmouth. This was a confused engagement, carried out in a piecemeal fashion, and Morgan's men did not get into action. However, they followed close on the retreating enemy's heels the next day. Detailed to lead the pursuing force as its advance scouts, the records show, were Murphy, Elerson, and two other riflemen.[19]

With the British safely in New York City and the Americans watching closely from New Jersey and the area just above Manhattan, the war in that area entered a phase of relative quiet. North and west along the frontiers, however, a series of bloody activities was just about to explode. Tories, supported by Indian allies and with constant encouragement and occasional assistance from British Regulars, were beginning a succession of raids, burning houses, killing livestock, and destroying crops throughout the scattered settlements in the outlying areas of Pennsylvania and New York State. The aim was not only to terrorize the inhabitants but also to deny to the American army the provisions which these regions supplied.

Early in July, a group of Tories and Indians under Major John Butler hit and devastated the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania, killing approximately 300 American militiamen. Attacks on a smaller but almost continuous scale were beginning to be launched in New York within as little as 25 miles west of Albany. Before the end of July, Washington felt compelled to detach troops to reinforce the local militia in New York's Schoharie and Mohawk valleys. Among these reinforcements was a detachment of men from Morgan's Corps under Captain Parr, with Captain Gabriel Long of the 7th Virginia attached. With them were Murphy and Elerson.[20]

The principal defenses of the Schoharie Valley were three forts. On the south, at Fultonham, was the "Upper Fort." About five miles to the north, at Middleburg (then called Weiser's Dorf), was the "Middle Fort." Still another five miles northward, at Schoharie, was the "Lower Fort." Murphy, in a detachment under Captain Long, was stationed at the Middle Fort, while the



remaining elements of Parr's command were posted at other outlying areas.[21]

In late September, an opportunity arose to strike a blow at one of the principal sources of trouble. A notorious local Tory leader named Christopher Servass[22] (whose name is usually rendered as "Service") had escaped from imprisonment. It was reported that he had returned to his home, which he was operating as a supply point for roving bands of Loyalist raiders. On 1 October, Long led his men out to stop Servass' activities, issuing orders that the Tory was to be taken alive or dead.

On the way, the riflemen intercepted a courier, on his way to alert Servass to be ready with supplies for an approaching Tory band. Long laid an ambush, killed a number of the Tories and drove off the rest, then resumed the march toward Servass' house. When he arrived, he threw a cordon around the building and sent Murphy and Elerson inside to take Servass into custody.

According to Elerson, Servass agreed to come along without resistance, but when he thought the attention of the two riflemen was diverted for an instant he snatched up an axe and swung wildly at Murphy's head. But Murphy, with instant reflexes and a loaded rifle, fired before the blow could strike, killing Servass instantly. Apparently, in what seems to have been his usual practice, Murphy then scalped his victim.[23]

This was only a beginning. From that time until winter put a stop to all operations, Murphy seems to have been almost constantly in the field, ranging well into the territory dominated by the Indians, keeping an eye on their movements and occasionally having to fight his way out of desperate situations. Taking advantage of his dark, weather-beaten complexion and the knowledge of Iroquois dialects he had picked up, he frequently disguised himself as an Indian and stole into the enemy camps to learn of projected raids. These particular forays appear to have been consistently successful, although once he came close to disaster when, returning to camp still in disguise, he was almost shot by a suspicious sentry before he could identify himself.[24] A contemporary describing Murphy said that he was "passionate and often rough-tongued,"[25] and it can be imagined that this episode may have provided the basis for that description.

During this period he scouted as far north as the area along the Mohawk between Schenectady and Fort Schuyler (modern Utica), narrowly escaping death or capture when his detachment was jumped by a large war party, and only Murphy and two companions succeeded in getting away. He also ranged as far to the west as the region between the North Branch of the Susquehanna and the Delaware where it veers northeastward into New York.[26] But he also spent some time in the Schoharie area itself. There he met a young woman named Peggy Fleeck. During the winter, despite her parents' opposition, he began an energetic courtship.[27]

Romance had to give way to the well known exigencies of the military service, however, when April 1779 brought orders for the riflemen in the Schoharie Valley to join a punitive expedition under Colonel Goose Van Schaick, of the 2d New York Continentals, which moved up the Mohawk into the Onandaga country west of Fort Schuyler. The operation involved little or no combat, but Indian towns throughout a wide area were burned and crops were destroyed.[28]

This proved to be a prelude to a much more ambitious operation. In May 1779, General John Sullivan was directed to take the offensive and put a permanent stop to the Indian and Tory depredations. By late August, five regiments, plus Parr's detachment of riflemen, had moved down the Susquehanna to rendezvous with eleven regiments under Sullivan at Tioga Point, just below the New York-Pennsylvania border. From there, the entire force struck north into New York State, destroying Indian towns and fields as the column moved. The only serious combat took place on 29 August, when the troops smashed through a group of Indians and Tories under Butler near the site of modern Elmira, New York.

The force continued its destructive course up the east bank of Seneca Lake, then turned

westward toward the Iroquois town of Genesee, beyond the Genesee River and some miles west of the present-day Geneseo, New York. Although there had been no further opposition, Sullivan expected an attack. On 12 September, therefore, he sent a party ahead to scout the route. In charge was First Lieutenant Thomas Boyd, 1st Pennsylvania, with 25 men, among whom were Murphy and Elerson.

This group pushed westward through the night and, just at dawn, came to an abandoned Indian town. Boyd sent two men to report to Sullivan that he had encountered no enemy. With the rest of his detachment, he took cover in some nearby woods to wait for the troops to come up.

As the morning wore on and the scouts still waited, they saw four Indians come into the village. On Boyd's orders, Murphy and four other riflemen left their concealment and crept into the village. When they were close enough, they fired. Murphy killed his man, and one of the other Indians was wounded. According to the journal of Lieutenant Colonel Adam Hubley, commanding the 11th Pennsylvania, in which he described Murphy as "a noted marksman and a great soldier," this made "the three and thirtieth man of the enemy he has killed, as is well known to his officers, this war."[29]

But for the moment, Murphy and his companions were in deep trouble, for the other riflemen had missed and the two surviving Indians had fled. Obviously, any warriors in the area would soon be alerted. Lieutenant Boyd decided to hold his force in hiding, but sent two more men to Sullivan to warn that the army might now run into resistance.

These two got only a short distance before they hurried back to tell Boyd that they had seen a party of four or five Indians on the trail leading to the main body of the army. Probably these were waiting, unaware of Boyd's scouts, to snipe at the army's vanguard. Boyd was confident that with his numerical strength, not to mention the surprise he counted on, he could round up the Indians with no trouble. Immediately, therefore, he started his detachment back toward the main army.

It was not long before contact with the Indians was made, but the four redskins proved elusive, never getting completely out of sight but never letting themselves lag far enough behind to be within rifle range. Very successfully, they were using the classic Indian tactic of decoying a pursuing force into an ambush. And, experienced frontier fighter though he was, Boyd fell for it.

Disaster struck when the scouts stumbled into a ravine which they found alive with Indians—waiting, it developed, to surprise Sullivan's force. Boyd's men, vastly outnumbered, were immediately fighting for their lives. Murphy, Elerson, and seven others succeeded in cutting their way through and outrunning the enemy to reach the American army, less than two miles away. Except for Boyd and a rifleman named Michael Parker, whom Murphy saw being seized and carried off, the rest of the scouts were cut down.

As soon as Murphy raced up and told what had happened, General Sullivan sent out a force to pursue, but the Indians had already gone. The pursuit force found nothing but the bodies of the dead scouts whom, Colonel Hubley noted, "the Indians [had] killed, and, in the most inhuman manner, tomahawked and scalped."[30] Worse lay ahead. On the following day, the army reached the town of Genesee. There they found dogs gnawing on what was left of the mutilated bodies of Boyd and Parker.

After destroying the town and the crops in the fields surrounding it, Sullivan's force started back. The return to Tioga Point, down the Susquehanna to Wyoming, and then overland to Easton, Pennsylvania, took until 15 October, but proved to be uneventful. The expeditionary force had been highly effective. It did not bring Indian raiding to a halt, but the Iroquois had suffered a grievous blow and the Tory-Indian combination in the New York-Pennsylvania area was never again the major military threat which it had been.

Murphy's three-year enlistment had expired early in the expedition, but General Sullivan had issued orders that no men would be discharged until the campaign was completed. Murphy, therefore, was not mustered out until the force was

broken up. Many of his companions signed on once again, but for Murphy the attraction of Peggy Fleeck apparently was too strong, and he made his way back to New York. He was not done with soldiering, however; local security in the Schoharie Valley was a continuing problem, and to provide it, the 15th Regiment of Albany County Militia, under Colonel Peter Vrooman, had been formed. Murphy promptly joined this organization, serving in the company commanded by Captain Jacob Hager.[31]

The regiment was based on the Valley's three forts, but Murphy spent much of the time in far-ranging scouting expeditions, similar to those he had carried out during the previous autumn. His name became so notorious among the Indians that Joseph Brant, the Iroquois leader, put out word that if Murphy should ever be captured he must be brought to Brant, who would personally deal with him.[32] And, in the winter of 1780, Murphy's luck finally ran out.

While on reconnaissance some miles to the west of his base of operations, he and Captain Alexander Harper were taken prisoner by a party of eleven Indians, scouting for a large raiding force. The two were trussed securely and loaded into canoes, which moved down the Delaware River, pulling in to the bank at night to camp.

Not until the second night after the capture, when the party and its prisoners had traveled some sixty miles downstream, almost to the Pennsylvania border, did a chance arrive for the two prisoners to make their escape. When all the Indians except a single sentry had gone to sleep, and the sentry had gone off for water, the two white men managed to free each other. Moving silently, each carefully relieved an Indian of his tomahawk and quickly killed all ten while they still slept. Then they hid all the firearms except two, collected the available ammunition, and in one of the canoes started back up the river. Moving as fast as they could, they reached a settlement about ten miles from the Schoharie. They helped organize it for defense, and then Murphy headed for the Schoharie to bring reinforcements from the forts while Harper started for Albany to arrange for units from other parts of the State to be dispatched. With a company from Schoharie, Murphy was back in time to hit the enemy in a smart little battle in which some thirty Indians were killed, as against four militiamen.[33]

Meanwhile, Murphy's courtship of Peggy Fleeck had run into a powerful roadblock from her father, who forbade her to see anything more of a man he regarded as an irresponsible adventurer.[34] Stung, Murphy left the militia and joined the New York Levies for a stint with Captain Isaac Bogart's company of Colonel John Harper's regiment.[35] By September, however, he got back to Schoharie, reenlisted in the militia, and took up with Peggy Fleeck where he had left off. By this time, both he and the young woman had decided to defy parental authority, and late in the month they eloped. Peggy's father gave chase, following to the Lower Fort. The local garrison commander, apparently sympathetic to the runaways, held the angry parent in custody overnight on grounds that as he did not know the password he could not be released until he had been identified. In the meantime, Murphy and Peggy made their way to Schenectady, where they were married, returning immediately to Murphy's duty station at the Middle Fort.[36]

There was no time for a honeymoon, for word had already been received that a large enemy force under Sir John Johnson was on its way to attack the Schoharie settlement. This force consisted of some 400 to 500 Tories, an equal number of Indians, and two companies of Regulars—one British, one Hessian—and included some light fieldpieces. To meet such a formidable threat, the New York authorities had sent some reinforcements, but these amounted to only 150 men of the Levies. Commanding them was Major Melancthon Lloyd Woolsey. As his appointment gave him seniority over local militia commissions, he superseded Colonel Vrooman as commander of the over-all defense.

Starting westward to reconnoiter as soon as he had returned from Schenectady, Murphy

learned from some Oneidas that Johnson's force had already left Otsego Lake. He immediately hurried back, spreading the alarm, and settlers quickly gathered in the three forts.

The attacking column approached the Valley from the southern end, arriving after dark on 15 October. Johnson's plan was to bypass the Upper Fort and hit the Middle Fort by surprise early the next morning. But his movement, scheduled for 4 a.m. on 16 October, was delayed for some reason. Before the men could start, a settler named Peter Feeck came out of the Upper Fort to bring in the cows he had taken to pasture the night before and, undiscovered, found the enemy camp. He hurried back to the fort and a few moments later an alarm gun was booming out a prearranged signal, warning the Middle Fort.

Johnson realized that surprise was lost, so he unleashed his Indians to loot and destroy. Houses and barns were set afire and livestock was butchered or driven off. The property of known Tory sympathizers was spared (but the Patriots saw to its destruction as soon as the enemy left). During the morning, over 300 buildings went up in smoke. Not until about noon did Johnson mass his troops before the Middle Fort.

According to a number of sources, Major Woolsey wanted to surrender without any resistance, trusting that Johnson would be able to protect the lives of prisoners, but the militia officers protested so strongly that he reluctantly agreed to fight. Before long there was a brisk exchange of fire between the garrison and the attackers. Then the Indians began shooting fire arrows, and flames blazed up among a number of the huts inside the fort's walls, but the women soon had these extinguished. Spirits were high until a rumor flew along the ramparts that the stocks of gunpowder were almost exhausted, and a cry went up that the defense was hopeless. Colonel Vrooman bellowed for attention and rolled out a spare keg of powder that he had sent for from the Lower Fort the night before, and the panic died.

Apparently, the slackening in the fire from the palisades made Johnson think that the defense was weakening, and he sent Captain Andrew Thompson of the Tory Rangers forward with a flag of truce. Murphy, seeing this and mistrusting Major Woolsey's determination, sent a bullet to kick up the dirt immediately in front of Captain Thompson, who dropped his flag and raced back out of range. Murphy had shot to deter, not to kill. Major Moses Van Campen, who knew Murphy all his life, stated flatly that "He never missed his aim."

Woolsey was furious. He ordered the nearest troops to place Murphy under arrest. Murphy protested that the flag had been a trick to let the enemy get a man inside the fort and find out its weaknesses. No doubt, too, he realized that whatever terms might be granted the garrison, he himself could be sure of receiving no quarter from the Indians. In any case, no one would obey Woolsey's order, and Murphy returned to his post.

Before long, Johnson sent forward another flag, and once again Murphy drove its bearer back with a well placed shot. Woolsey, losing control completely, called for someone to run up a white flag over the fort, but Murphy announced coldly that he would shoot the first man who tried to do so. Still a third time, Johnson sent a man toward the fort with a flag, and again a bullet from Murphy's rifle answered him.

Now, sword in hand, Woolsey advanced on Murphy and threatened to run him through. Murphy swung his rifle on the major and waited. The other men burst into a clamor of shouting and argument, but the bulk of them were determined to go on fighting. Faced down, Woolsey abandoned the command to Colonel Vrooman and went off to sulk in his quarters.

While this was going on, Johnson was having his own troubles. Seldom capable of sustained operations, his Indians refused to continue the attack and were already drifting away to resume their burning and looting. Johnson soon called off the assault and moved his whole force northward. Although depredations continued, only a token attack was made against the Lower Fort, which in any case was a strong stone structure. From the Lower Fort,

Johnson continued to the Mohawk River, where on 19 October he suffered a substantial defeat by a large militia force at Klock's Field, near modern St. Johnsville, and then retreated back to Canada.[37]

In the Schoharie Valley, sporadic attacks from other Indian groups continued over the next several months. The records show that Timothy Murphy was paid for periods of militia duty as late as 2 February 1781. It has been claimed, rather improbably, that not long after this he returned to Pennsylvania to reenlist in one of the three provisional battalions formed after the 1 January mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line at Morristown. If so, he would have marched with them to Virginia in late May and seen service in the bloody fight at Green Spring on 6 July and been present for the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown on 19 October. It seems more likely that he remained in New York, however, for after Yorktown the Pennsylvania battalions moved to South Carolina, returning north only in June 1783; yet the records show that Murphy was with the Schoharie Valley militia in an operation of early November 1781, unsuccessfully pursuing a raiding party led by Joseph Brant and a Tory named Adam Crysler. Murphy's name appears once more on a Schoharie militia roll in August 1782.

With peace established, Murphy settled at Fultonham, acquiring several farms and a grain and grist mill. He was active in local politics but because of his lack of education refused election to any office. He had gone through years of rugged campaigning without ever being wounded. As he reached his sixties, however, he developed what was described as a cancer on the neck. Eventually, this proved fatal, bringing his death on 27 June 1818.[38]

Timothy Murphy was not a typical Continental enlisted man. Indeed, if he had been he could hardly have been considered a hero, for by definition a hero transcends the virtues of ordinary men.

The shot he fired at Freeman's Farm, although certainly his most conspicuously significant service, is almost incidental to his over-all image. It was not merely his skill with a rifle which made him a popular hero, but his hardihood, his guile, and above all his fierce independence. This latter trait in particular was a vital asset in irregular wilderness warfare, but could have proved a liability in conventional operations.

However, it was in wilderness warfare, where individual was pitted against individual, that Timothy Murphy made his principal mark. The anonymous soldier in disciplined ranks made an indispensable and ultimately decisive contribution to the final military success, but because he *was* anonymous he could not be singled out for adulation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Revolution's enlisted hero was a frontiersman. Yet, lest the role of the frontiersman be underrated, it must be remembered that the Revolution was fought against a diversity of opponents on many fronts and under a variety of tactical circumstances. If the fighting on the frontiers was not decisive in itself, it was an important part of the struggle as a whole. And as the popular ideal of the frontier fighter, Timothy Murphy not only reveals a great deal about American values and attitudes of his day, but epitomizes a type of soldier whose services were an essential ingredient of the ultimate victory.

NOTES

1. Peter Guilday, *John Carroll* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1922), p. 86.
2. William Sigsby, *Life and Adventures of Timothy Murphy, The Benefactor of Schoharie* (Schoharie C.H., New York: W. H. Gallup, 1839), p. 6; Michael J. O'Brien, *Timothy Murphy, Hero of the American Revolution* (New York: Eire Publishing Company, 1941), pp. 116-17, 126.
3. Worthington Chauncey Ford (ed.), *Journals of the Continental Congress* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1908), II, 90.
4. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Fifth Series, Vol. II, pp. 29-33. Hereafter abbreviated *PA*, followed by series, volume, and page numbers: in this example, *PA* (5), II, 29-33.
5. Ford, II, 90.
6. Henry J. Young, "The Spirit of 1775," *John & Mary's Journal*, March 1975, p. 24.
7. Roy C. McHenry, "The Rifle in the Revolution," *The American Rifleman*, April 1926, pp. 13-14; Charles Winthrop Sawyer, *Firearms in American History* (Boston: The Author, 1910), I, 81.
8. *PA* (5), II, 609, 648, 732.
9. Richard M. Ketchum, *The Winter Soldiers* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), pp. 342-43, 361-62.
10. Frederick Anderson Berg, *Encyclopedia of*

Continental Army Units (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1972), p. 77; *PA* (5), II, 616.

11. *PA* (5), II, 618, 620; III, 672. This is one of the factors which have caused confusion regarding the regiment to which Murphy belonged. Because he served for a time under Hawkins Boone, he is sometimes listed as a member of the 12th Pennsylvania. Because that regiment was ultimately absorbed into the 3d Pennsylvania, Murphy's name also appears on some of the rolls of that organization. A year later, when Parr was put in charge of a smaller task force of which Murphy was a member, and promoted to major, being transferred—on paper—to the 7th Pennsylvania, some regimental clerk assumed that this transfer applied equally to all the men in Parr's command, and Murphy was duly picked up on the rolls of the 7th Pennsylvania as well. The fact is that, while often detached for protracted periods in distant areas, Timothy Murphy was throughout his Continental service a member of Thompson's Rifle Battalion and its successor unit, the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment. See also *PA* (5), II, 1008; III, 244; O'Brien, pp. 12-13.

12. Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1859), I, 565; Charles Neilson, *Burgoyne's Campaign* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1844), quoted by O'Brien p. 17.

13. Quoted, O'Brien, p. 19.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

15. Mark Mayo Boatner III, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1966), p. 754.

16. Lossing, I, 62, 267 (n. 1).

17. *Ibid.*, I, 62 and n. 2; Charles H. Metzger, *Catholics and the American Revolution* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962), p. 155; Christopher Ward, *The War of the Revolution* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), II, 529.

18. Not surprisingly, no accounts written in the immediate aftermath of the battle identify Murphy (or anyone else) as the man who shot General Fraser. However, during early postwar years Murphy's claim, verified by fellow-riflemen, was extensively publicized and, while many of the veterans of the battle of all ranks were still living, was never challenged.

19. Cited, O'Brien, p. 35.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37; *PA* (5), II, 1026.

21. O'Brien, p. 37.

22. Marjorie Barnum Hinman, *Onaquaga: Hub of the Border Wars of the American Revolution in New York State* (N.P.: The Author, 1975), p. 49.

23. Sigsby, pp. 6-7; O'Brien, pp. 40-41.

24. Sigsby, p. 7; O'Brien, p. 44.

25. Quoted, O'Brien, p. 109.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29; Lossing, I, 62, n. 2.

28. *PA* (2), XV, 221-24.

29. *PA* (2), XI, 38.

30. *PA* (2), XI, 38. For the most complete account of this engagement, see the "Journal of Lieutenant Erkuries Beatty," *PA* (2), XV, 244-45.

31. O'Brien, p. 96.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-76.

34. Sigsby, p. 14; Lossing, I, 62, n. 2.

35. O'Brien, p. 98. Unlike the militia, who were available on call but normally followed their civilian pursuits, the Levies were on full-time duty, but for abbreviated lengths of time. See Berg, p. 83.

36. Lossing, I, 62, n. 2.

37. This account is drawn from the following sources collectively: Lossing, I, 279-80; Ward, II, 647-50; O'Brien, pp. 78-93; Sigsby, pp. 16-19.

38. O'Brien, p. 148.