

Northmen in The Revolutionary War

"OLD DENMARK" was the name by which Colonel Hans Christian Fibiger was known in the Continental army in which he served from the beginning until the close of the war of American independence.

He was engaged in trading between the Island of St. Thomas and Boston when the war began and the young Dane, then under 30 years of age, offered his services to the committee of safety in Boston, and having previously seen military service, was commissioned lieutenant April 28, 1775, a few days after the battle of Lexington.

He participated in the battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17th following, being in command of a portion of Gerrish's regiment. He "did eminent service in protecting the shattered forces on their retreat toward Cambridge." He later served as adjutant of Gerrish's regiment.

Frothingham, in his "History of the Siege of Boston," makes special mention of Fibiger for his valuable service at Bunker's Hill.

In the fall of 1775, having been promoted to the rank of major, Fibiger accompanied the force under Colonel Benedict Arnold, which set out to join Montgomery in the invasion of Canada.

Of this historic movement Lossing has said:

It was an effort in the cause of freedom worthy of its divine character, and the men who thus periled life and endured pain, deserve the highest praise from the hearts and lips of posterity.

Finally, in November, 1775, came their unsuccessful attack on Quebec. Then, Montgomery having arrived, followed, on the last day of the year, the second and even more disastrous assault on that city, in which the American commander lost his life, but won unperishable glory for his name.

Fibiger survived the desperate battle, but was captured by the British and remained a prisoner until late in the following year.

In his history of this memorable campaign, Judge Henry, who was a member of the expedition, describes Fibiger as "a real and well instructed soldier and an engineer."

Fibiger was commissioned a lieutenant colonel November 13, 1776, and placed in command of the Eleventh regiment, Virginia line. He participated in the battles around New York and in the engagements at Trenton, Princeton, etc., took part in the struggle at Brandywine in the fall of 1777, spent the winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge, and had a share in the victorious affairs at Monmouth in the following June, where he commanded 1770 men and four pieces of artillery.

Fibiger was the bright, particular star in the historic capture of Stony Point June 16, 1779, General Washington having personally selected and recommended him to General Wayne for this hazardous undertaking. As colonel of the Second Virginia, he had charge of the right wing, which had the most desperate fighting to do. General Wayne himself led the charge, but was wounded between the abattis. The column proceeded under the direction of Colonel Fibiger.

In a letter to his wife of the date just

COLONEL FIBIGER, "OLD DENMARK," WHO FOUGHT EIGHT YEARS FOR OUR INDEPENDENCE.

WAS WITH "MAD ANTHONY" WAYNE IN THE FAMOUS CAPTURE OF STONY POINT

indicated, before the smoke of battle had rolled away, he said:

My Dear Girl: I have just borrowed pen, ink and paper to inform you that yesterday we marched from Fort Montgomery, and at 12 o'clock last night we stormed this confounded place, and, with the loss of about 14 killed and 40 or 50 wounded, we carried it.

I can give you no particulars as yet. A musquetball scraped my nose. No other damage to "OLD DENMARK!"

God bless you. Farewell.

FIBIGER.

From Fibiger's own letters we can best learn the truth of this engagement. Extract from a letter to his Excellency Governor Jefferson of Virginia, written in camp near Fort Montgomery, on July 21, 1779, viz:

I have the happiness to say that every officer and soldier behaved with a fortitude and bravery peculiar to men who are determined to be free, and overcame every danger and difficulty without confusion or delay, far surpassing any enterprise in which I have had an active part.

I request neither reward or thanks, but am happy in having done my duty and shared the dangers and honor of the day; but could wish, if not inconsistent, that the citizens of Virginia might know from your authority that their troops deserve their thanks and support. I am, etc.

CH. FIBIGER, Colonel.

Again on July 27th, 1779, he wrote his wife at Philadelphia from Fort Montgomery:

My Dear Girl: I'll now give you the particulars of our enterprise. After having reconnoitered Stony Point well, we saw that by a secret and bold stroke it might perhaps be carried; and our officers being in a critical situation induced his Excellency to risk it, and on the 15th instant we marched very secretly, securing all passes and preventing county-people from going in, and at dark were within one mile of the Fort where we lay until 12 o'clock at night, when my regiment at the head of the right column, and Colonel Butler's at the head of the left, with proper "forlorn hope" and advance-guards marched and attacked the works, which received us pretty warmly.

But the bravery of our men soon overcame all dangers, and about 1 o'clock we were in full possession of the Fort, where I had the pleasure of taking Colonel Johnson, who commanded, myself, and ordered him to his tent.

At daybreak we found we had taken 1 lieutenant colonel, 25 captains and lieutenants, and 544 non-commissioned officers and privates, exclusive of the killed and some that drowned in endeavoring to get to their shipping.

We took 15 pieces of artillery, with fixed ammunition for a three months' siege, 2 standards and 1 flag, 10 marquees and a large quantity of tents, quartermaster stores, baggage, etc., etc.

His Excellency joined us in the afternoon when an attack was to be made on the other side, but through some difficulties it was delayed.

We remained there three days, which were employed in cannonading the enemy, and removing the stores, and on the evening of the 18th we evacuated and destroyed the works and set fire to the remains.

This obliged General Clinton to come up with his whole army to King's Ferry, where he now is.

What may be his next move we cannot as yet ascertain.

If he intends for our Fort I think he will be damnably drubbed, as this most glorious affair has given double vigor and spirit to our men.

Farewell.

CH. FIBIGER.

The question being raised in Virginia as to who entered Stony Point first, Fibiger wrote to Dr. Heth in Virginia from camp near Fort Montgomery on Sept. 13, 1779, viz:

I will assure you that my regiment which composed the front of the right column, was in the works, and the commandant, Colonel Johnson, had surrendered to me at least 10 minutes before the left column entered.

The gallant Posey, a most valuable Posey, helped Major Stewart, who commanded the advance of the left, into the works.

Lieutenant Knox, who is a Pennsylvanian and deserves credit, commanding Virginians, and Lieutenant Colonel Fleury likewise; they both belong to my regiment which is composed of 6 companies Virginians and two Pennsylvanians.

Yours etc.,

FIBIGER.

Without dwelling upon the details of Fibiger's subsequent career during the revolution, it may be stated that he was constantly engaged in the performance of his military duty. He commanded the Virginia Continental regiment under General Lafayette at the siege of Yorktown, and was present at the surrender of Cornwallis, and thus participated in the closing demonstrations of the War of Independence.

He resigned from the army January 1 1783, and settled in Philadelphia where he thereafter resided.

Congress by a special act retired him as Brigadier General for his eight years of meritorious service. Writing to his brother-in-law, Colonel O'Hara, on the subject he says:

Congress was pleased to confer on me the rank of Brigadier General; however, this title I have never, and do not now wish to make use of, as that of Colonel in this country is familiar and more becoming to a merchant.

He was elected a member of the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry April 24, 1786, and was chosen captain in 1792. His name was placed upon the honorary roll in 1794.

In 1789 Fibiger was elected treasurer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which post, by successive annual elections, he held until his death September 20, 1796.

Colonel Fibiger was one of the founders of the Society of the Cincinnati. He was also identified with many public enterprises of his day.

It remains an honor for Scandinavians to behold his portrait among the heroes of American history in Independence Hall, Philadelphia.

Colonel Fibiger was the son of Jørgen Mathiasen Fibiger, organist at Faaborg, and was born at that place October 19, 1746. His uncle, Henrik Jacob Fibiger, settled on the Island of St. Croix, in the West Indies. Thither went young Fibiger on graduating from the University of Copenhagen, and engaged in trade which brought him to the Colonies.

Colonel Fibiger while a guest of William Carson at his inn, "The Harp and Crown," met there his host's daughter, Elizabeth.

They were married August 14, 1777. She survived her husband and died January 5, 1817, without issue.

THE SIMPLE THINGS

To what extreme simplicity may man's existence be reduced without impeding either the body's functions or the expansion of the mind. A loaf and a cup of drink are necessary, to which may be added by way of luxury a book and a fire that will supply light and heat. When these are provided nothing is wanting that is indispensable to the development of a great soul.