

in Boston had anticipated. This made it necessary for the English commander, Sir William Howe, and the king's men to retire to their ships and sail off to the more amiable atmosphere of Halifax to replenish their supplies of food, ammunition and personnel. This gave the American commander a chance to move on the Tory stronghold of New York, which he reached without incident in the middle of April.

And for once, no time was lost in promoting the strategic importance of Governors Island. In fact, although he knew little of New York, Washington had been thoroughly briefed concerning the combat possibilities of the island, by a report of an inspection of the premises made by Benjamin Franklin to Lieutenant General Charles Lee, as far back as February:

"There is Nutten (Governor's Island) well situated to place Guns and I imagine 300 or 400 men would be sufficient to complete all the works in one night; the greatest difficulty would be to get cannon to Nutten Island. Six Guns would be sufficient upon Nutten Island and 12 pdrs would be heavy enough."

B. Franklin

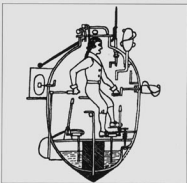
General Israel Putnam, who preceded Washington to Manhattan, shared Franklin's views and on April 4, 1776 announced: "After getting the works in such forwardness as will be prudent to leave, I propose immediately to take possession of Governors Island which I think is a very important post."

Putnam was as good as his word. Within a week, he had arranged for the Continental troops already in town to furnish him with a total of 1,000 officers and men to work on the island fortifications. On April 8, these levies gathered at dusk in lower New York, and laden with entrenching tools, embarked in a fleet of rowboats that ferried them quickly across the channel to the island. Remembering the redoubt he had built at night on the summit of Bunker Hill almost a year before, "Old Put" kept his men feverishly at work with pick and shovel straight through the midnight hours and until dawn began to lighten the eastern sky over Brooklyn. By that time an excellent breastwork had been erected that would afford ample protection to its defenders from any naval bombardment.

When Washington reached town from Boston 10 days later, he approved the work, and on April 16, ordered Colonel William Prescott's regiment, of Bunker Hill fame, to encamp on Governors Island and assist in the completion of its defenses. Both the date and the regiment are important because they jointly mark the installation of the

first garrison of purely American Continental troops to be stationed on the island.

A few days later, Prescott's men were temporarily joined by Colonel Nixon's 4th Continental Infantry, and with their combined efforts the finishing touches were soon put on the fortifications. The exact plan of these is no longer available, but the known armament included four 32-pounders and four 18-pounders, with thirty additional cannon of assorted caliber. It is reasonable to suppose these were mounted in a series of redoubts, so located that they commanded Buttermilk Channel, the New York Channel and the approaches from the Hudson River and the bay. To further discourage hostile forces the Americans sank old hulks in the neighboring channels and placed rows of sharpened stakes at intervals along the island's shore line. To house the headquarters of the island's defense system, there was erected a log-sheathed blockhouse called the "citadel." Twenty-six thousand musket cartridges were also ordered for the island garrison and lines of brush were set to encircle each redoubt to mark the limits of effective musket range against landing parties. Finally, to afford an unobstructed field of fire and at the same time to remove all aids of concealment from possible enemy use, the island's farmhouse and barn were burned to the ground.



The first submarine Turtle