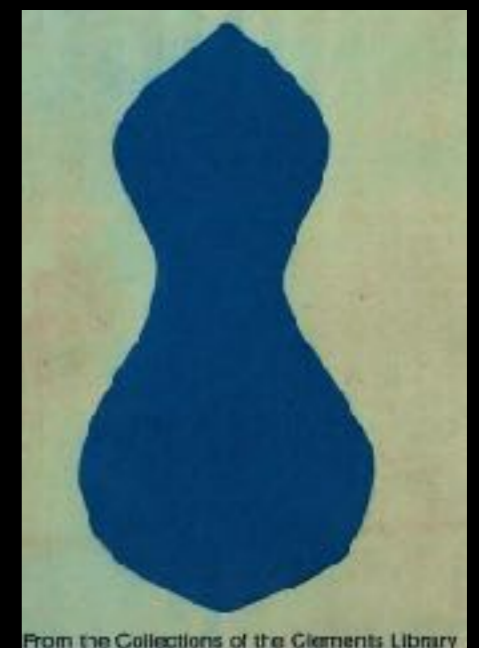




Spy Messages



The Technical Art of Deception



Bob Ulrich

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What we'll be discussing here:

What were some of the tools, the mechanics, used by spies on both sides of this conflict ?

**How did they keep messages
out of the hands of their
adversaries ?**

What were the methods, the mechanics, of sending and receiving secret messages during the War ?

“Quill Letters”

looks harmless, yes ?



Spy Letters of the American Revolution

From the Collections of the Clements Library

Secret Methods and Techniques

Quill Letter

Quill Letter

July 17, 1777 -- William Howe to John Burgoyne



British spies took precautions to conceal the messages they carried. Letters were inserted into the hollow quills of large feathers, sewn into buttons*, and stuck into small silver balls. One message, located in [Sir Henry Clinton's](#) manuscripts at the Clements Library, was cut into two long, narrow strips in order to make insertion into a quill easier. The idea seems to have been that, if in danger, a courier could get rid of the papers more easily.

* (wait 'till we talk about the brave Lydia Darragh)

**Gen. Howe decides it's time
to implement HIS plan**

The “Quill letter” from General Howe to General Burgoyne (7/17/1777) alerting Burgoyne that he had decided, instead, to invade PA.....

Spy Letters of the American Revolution
From the Collections of the Clements Library

July 17, 1777 -- William Howe to John Burgoyne
From the Gold Star Collection

At 2. { Dear Sir, I have received yours of the 2^d inst. on the 10th. I have since heard from the Rebel Army of your being in possession of
New York July 17th 1777. I shall observe the contents. There is a Report of a messenger of yours to me having been taken & the letter discovered on a double wooden
in writing to you, as you propose in your letters to me. Washington is marching our Indians here, & has detached Sullivan with about 2000 Men, as I learn, to Albany. My Intent

From the Collections of the Clements Library

At 2. { I am, Sir, as I am at New York, & as you shall soon be after him, I shall relieve you. After your arrival at Albany, all movements of the Army will guide yourself by my wishes are that
I shall be ever with you. Yours &c. W. Howe

From the Collections of the Clements Library

..... instead of heading north with his 15,000 men, Howe heads to PA, sending Henry Clinton north in his place, with a much smaller force....

**this particular message held great
importance to the outcome of the War,
which
was to last another 6 years.**

Why ?

**It was from General Lord Howe to Gen.
John Burgoyne, with bad news for him**

[] Gen! Burgoyne / New York, July 17th, 1777 Dear Sir, I have received yours of the 2.d ins.+ on the 15th, have since heard from the Rebel Army of your being in possession of Ticonderoga, which is a great Event carried without loss. I have rec.d your two letters viz.+ from / &Quebec your last of the 14th of May, & shall observe the contents. There is a report of a messenger of yours to me having been taken, & **the letter discover.d in a double wooded canteen**, you will know of any consequence; nothing of it has [] to us. I will observe y/ in writing to you, as you propose in your letters to me. Washington is waiting our motions here, & has detached Sullivan with about 2500 men, as I learn, to Albany.- My intention is for Pensilvania where I expect to meet Washington,

but if he goes to the Northw.d and you can keep him at Bay, be assured I shall soon be after him to relieve you. After your arrival in Albany, yo movements of the Enemy will guide yours; but my / wishes are that the Enemy be drove out of this Province before any operation takes place in Conecticut. S.r Hen.y Clinton / remains in the command here, & will act as occurrences may direct. Putnam is in the Highlands with about 4000 men.-

Success be ever with you.

Yours. O. / WHowe

so now we can add a **“Double Wooded Canteen”**
to our list of secret devices to hide messages

then as for that last line,

**“Putnam is in the Highlands with about 4000
men”**

**Israel Putnam, from CT,
cousin of
Rufus Putnam, the
namesake of
Ft Putnam at West Point**

**let's go back to the content
of that Quill Letter.....**

Howe's plan:

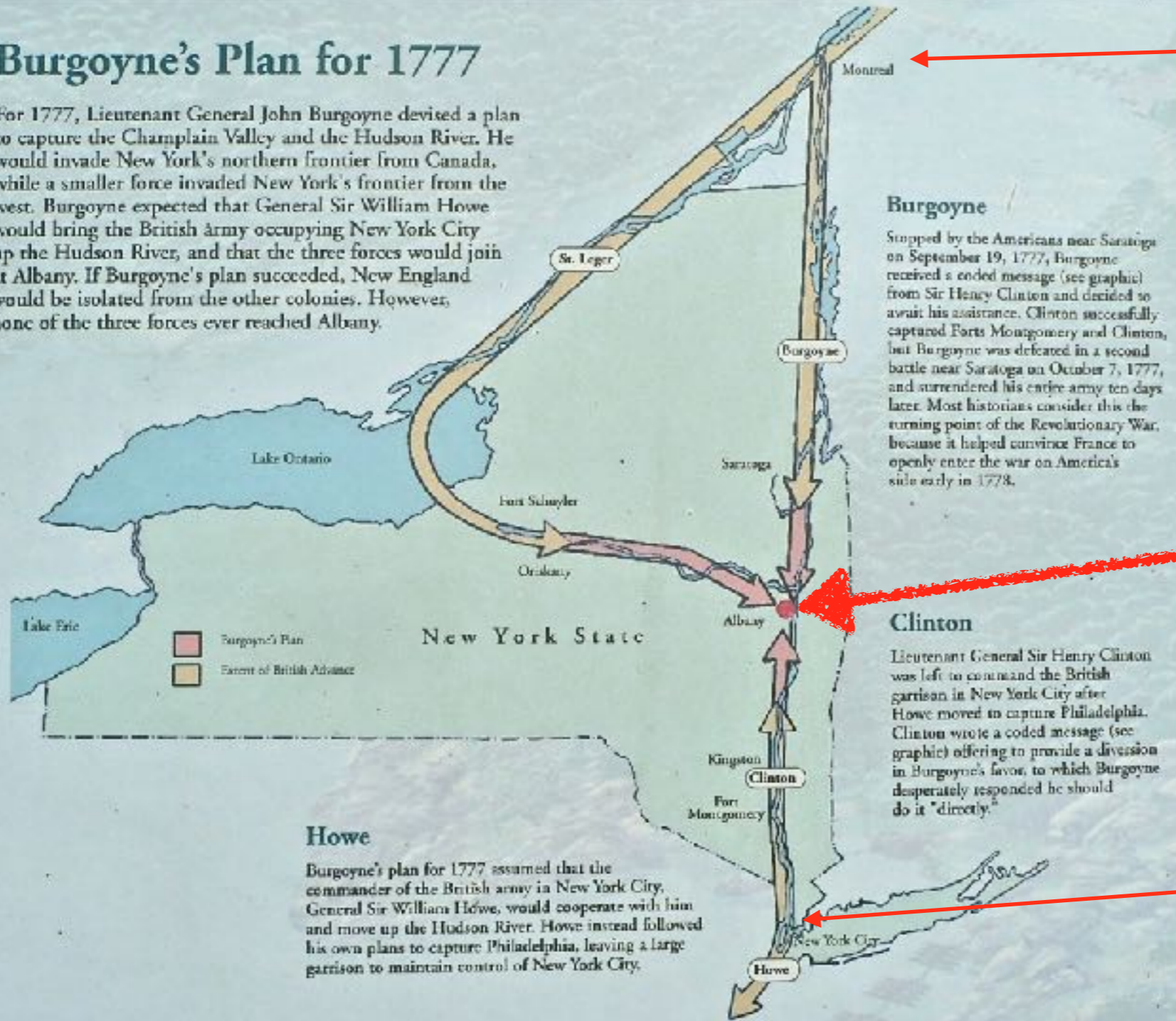
**Attack and defeat the Colonial capital at
Philadelphia;**

Burgoyne's plan:

**More involved; required three converging
armies (including his own)**

Burgoyne's Plan for 1777

For 1777, Lieutenant General John Burgoyne devised a plan to capture the Champlain Valley and the Hudson River. He would invade New York's northern frontier from Canada, while a smaller force invaded New York's frontier from the west. Burgoyne expected that General Sir William Howe would bring the British army occupying New York City up the Hudson River, and that the three forces would join at Albany. If Burgoyne's plan succeeded, New England would be isolated from the other colonies. However, none of the three forces ever reached Albany.



Burgoyne

Stopped by the Americans near Saratoga on September 19, 1777, Burgoyne received a coded message (see graphic) from Sir Henry Clinton and decided to await his assistance. Clinton successfully captured Forts Montgomery and Clinton, but Burgoyne was defeated in a second battle near Saratoga on October 7, 1777, and surrendered his entire army ten days later. Most historians consider this the turning point of the Revolutionary War, because it helped convince France to openly enter the war on America's side early in 1778.

Clinton

Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton was left to command the British garrison in New York City after Howe moved to capture Philadelphia. Clinton wrote a coded message (see graphic) offering to provide a diversion in Burgoyne's favor, to which Burgoyne desperately responded he should do it "directly."

Howe

Burgoyne's plan for 1777 assumed that the commander of the British army in New York City, General Sir William Howe, would cooperate with him and move up the Hudson River. Howe instead followed his own plans to capture Philadelphia, leaving a large garrison to maintain control of New York City.

Montreal

Albany

New York City



Howe

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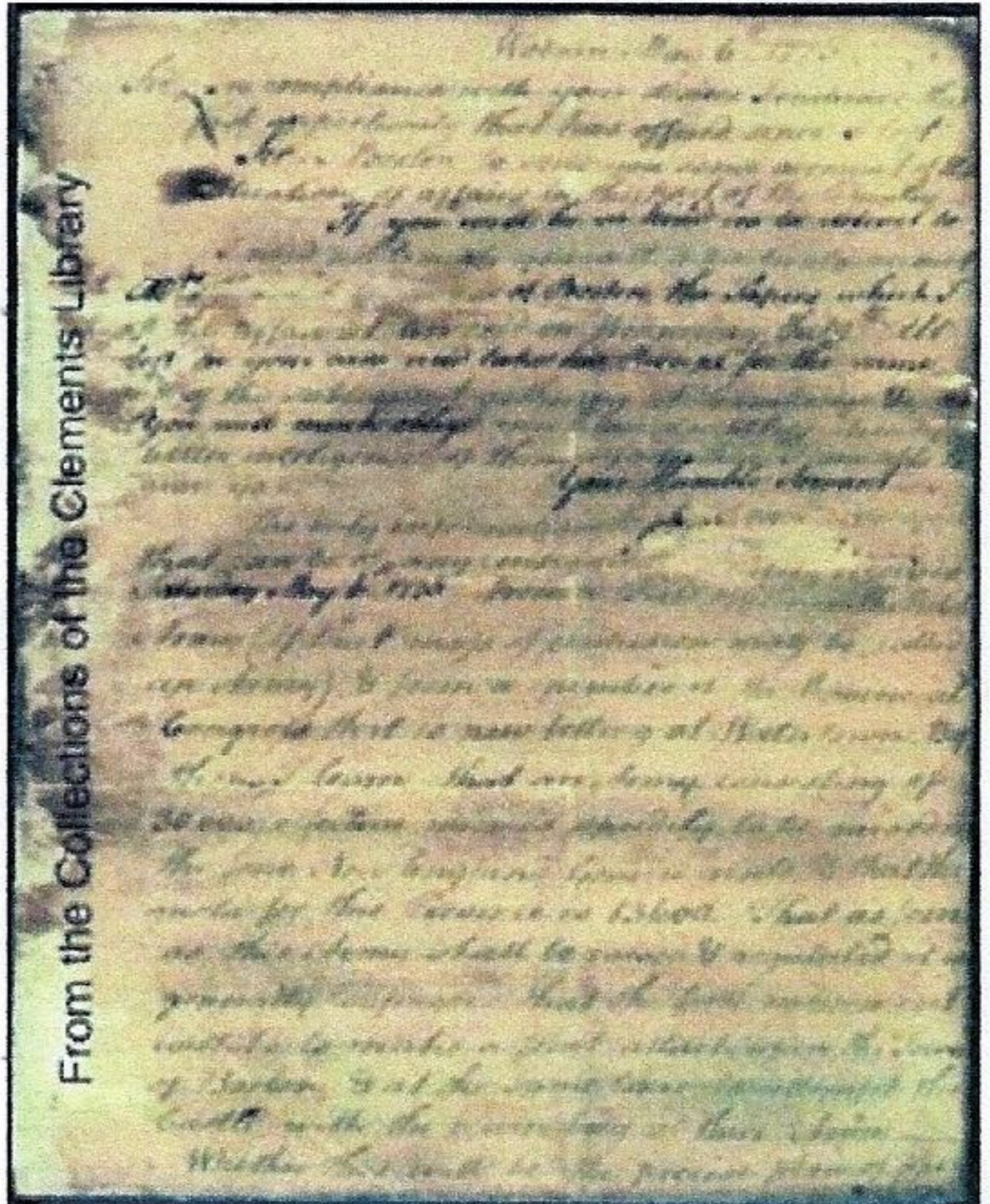
**Burgoyne decides to continue
his move south anyway, with
what will now be a MUCH
smaller attack force...**

**He was left w/o the forces he
needed**

His entire Army was defeated and taken prisoner at Saratoga, making it the most important American victory of the War

Invisible Ink

Used to write
between
lines of an otherwise
harmless letter....



One form of secret writing used by both the British and American armies was invisible ink. Invisible ink, at the time of the Revolutionary War, usually consisted of a mixture of ferrous sulfate and water. The secret writing was placed between the lines of an innocent letter, in case they were intercepted by the enemy army, and could be discerned by treating the letter with heat by placing the paper over the flame of a candle or by treating it with a chemical reagent such as sodium carbonate. John André gave instructions to British spies to mark their letters written in invisible ink with a **◆F◆** for fire and **◆A◆** for acid, so that the reader knew whether to use heat or a chemical solution to read the letter.

Invisible Ink

Messages written in *onion juice* , when exposed to heat, would disclose the secret writings.

The patriots used invisible ink frequently to report to General Washington

**Then, one more writing trick,
from **John Jay's brother,**
*Sir James Jay,.....***

the use of “Gallic Acid”

No “F” or “A”. This required the
application of
brushed on iron sulfate to disclose
the otherwise secret message

Mask Letters

(and more about Saratoga)

This method, a letter intended to be read through a mask or grill, was unknown to the Americans.

Henry Clinton writes to Gen Burgoyne

August 10, 1777: Henry Clinton to John Burgoyne

You will have heard, dear Sir I doubt not long before this can have reached you that Sir W. Howe is gone from hence. The

Rebels imagine that he is gone to the Eastward. By this time however he has filled Chesapeake Bay with surprise and terror.

Washington marched the greatest part of the Rebels to Philadelphia in order to oppose Sir Wm's. army. I hear he is now returned upon

finding none of our troops landed but am not sure of this, great part of his troops are returned for certain. I am sure this countermarching must be ruin to them. I am left to command here, half of my force may

I am sure defend everything here with much safety. I shall therefore send Sir W. 4 or 5 Bat(talion)s. I have too small a force to invade the New England.

provinces; they are too weak to make any effectual efforts against me and

you do not want any diversion in your favor. I can therefore very well

spare him 1500 men. I shall try something certainly towards the close of the year, not till then at any rate. It may be of use to inform you that

report says all yields to you. I owe to you that I think the business will quickly be over now. Sr W's move just at this time has been capital.

Washingtons have been the worst he could take in every respect.

sincerely give you much joy on your success and am with

great Sincerity your

HC

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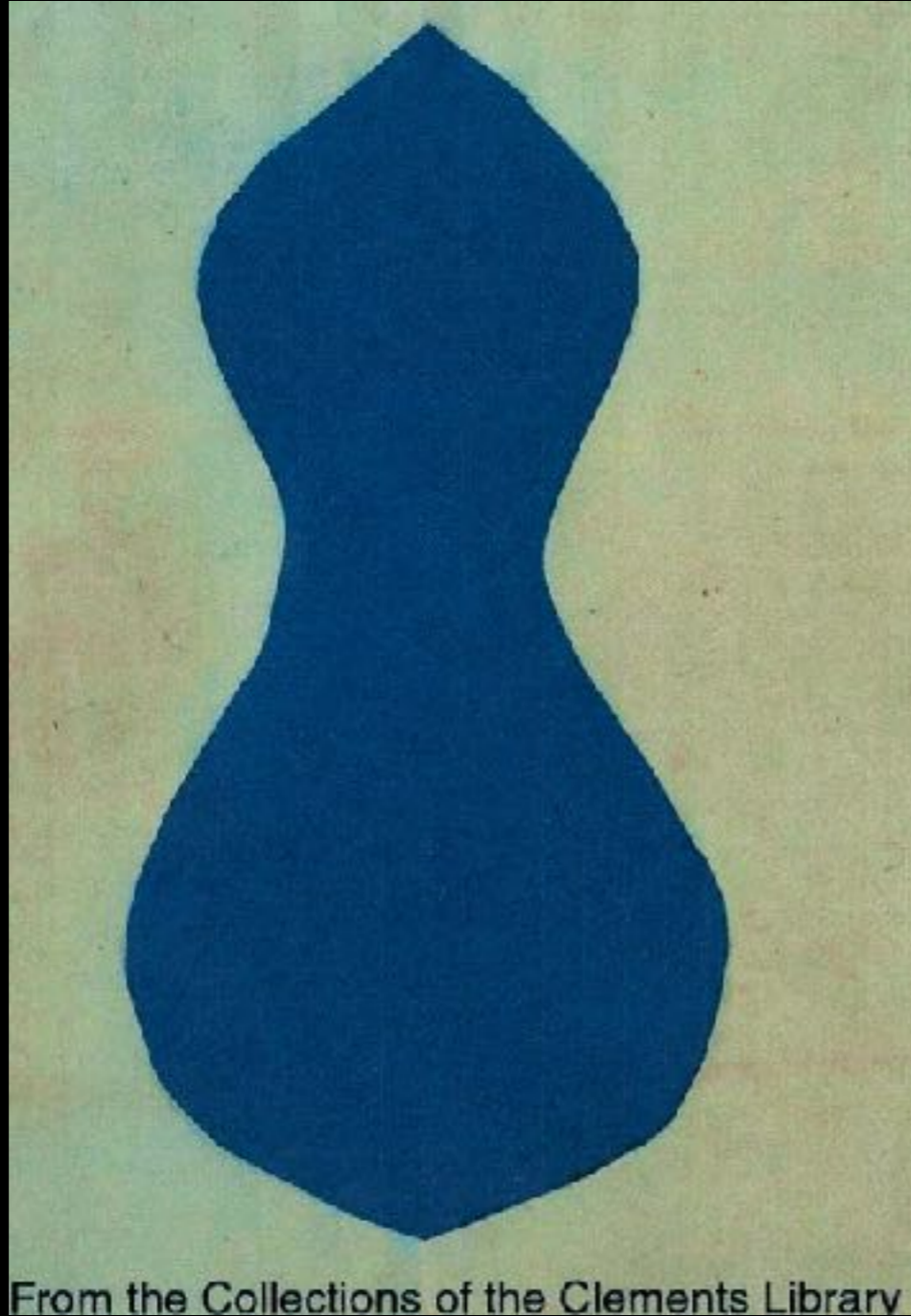
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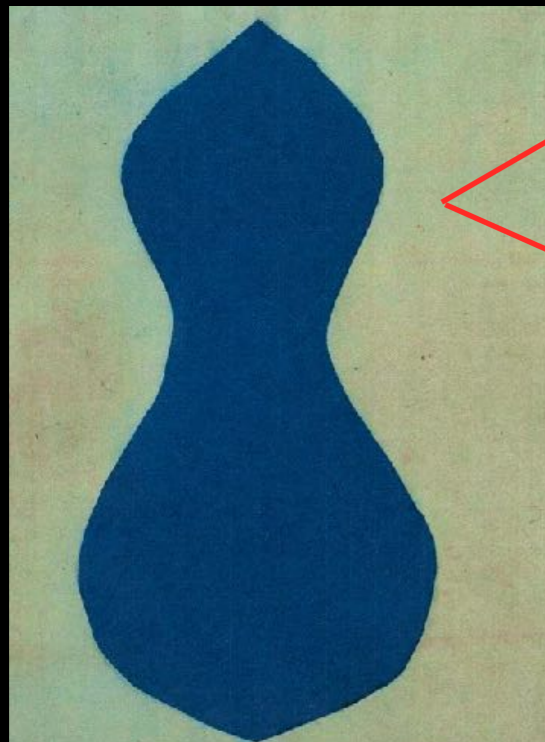
HC



From the Collections of the Clements Library

The Hour-Glass Mask

That same letter with
the
masked portion
now highlighted:



From the Collections of the Clements Library

August 10, 1777: Henry Clinton to John Burgoyne

You will have heard, dear Sir I doubt not long before this can have reached you that Sir W. Howe is gone from hence. The Rebels imagine that he is gone to the Eastward. By this time however he has filled Chesapeake Bay with surprise and terror. Washington marched the greatest part of the Rebels to Philadelphia in order to oppose Sir Wm's army. I hear he is now returned upon finding none of our troops landed but am not sure of this, great part of his troops are returned for certain. I am sure this countermarching must be ruin to them. I am left to command here, half of my force may I am sure defend everything here with much safety. I shall therefore send Sir W. 4 or 5 Bal(talion)s. I have too small a force to invade the New England provinces; they are too weak to make any effectual efforts against me and you do not want any diversion in your favor. I can therefore very well spare him 1500 men. I shall try something certainly towards the close of the year, not till then at any rate. It may be of use to inform you that report says all yields to you. I owe to you that I think the business will quickly be over now. Sr W's move just at this time has been capital. Washingtons have been the worst he could take in every respect. sincerely give you much joy on your success and am with

great Sincerity your

HC

**“Sir W. Howe is gone to the
Chesapeake Bay with the greatest part of the
army.**

**I hear he is landed but am not certain.
I am left to command here with too
small a force to make any effectual
diversion in your favor.**

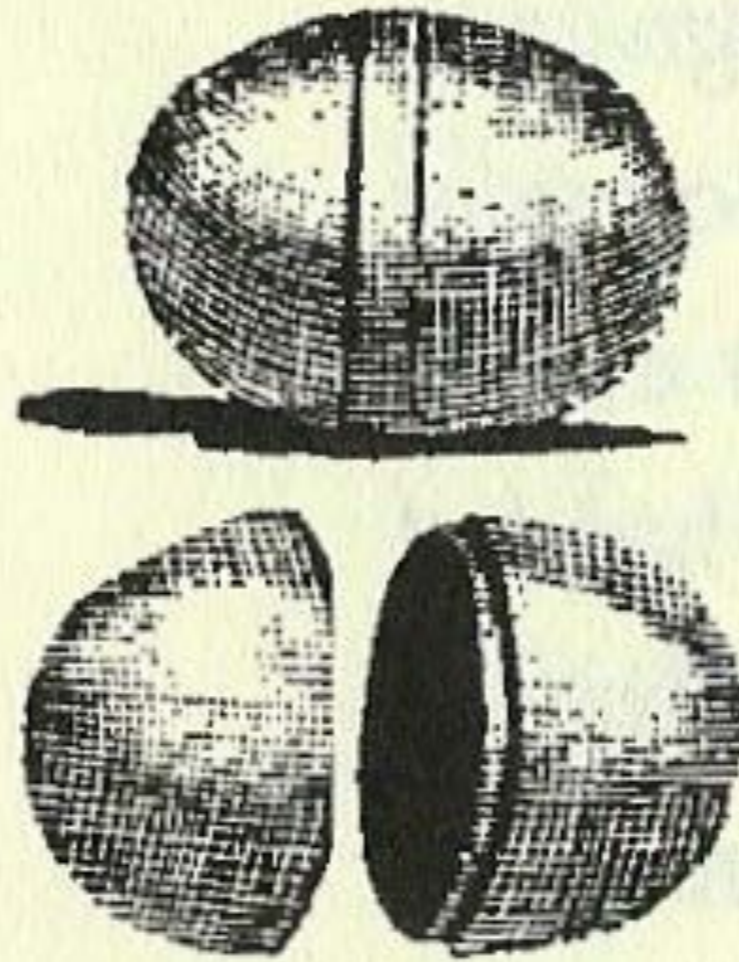
**I shall try something at any rate
It may be of use to you.**

**I owe to you that I think
Sir W’s move just at this time
the worst he could take.**

Much joy on your success.”

**... giving the recipient a very
different view of things.....**

Hidden in “bullets”



A SILVER BALL
hides a message. If caught
messenger could swallow
the whole thing.

David Taylor, a British officer, held one with a message heading to Burgoyne from Sir Henry Clinton. He was stopped in *New Windsor* by several soldiers wearing red uniforms, not realizing they were patriots.

Why were these Patriots in RED uniforms ?

Taylor swallowed the ball, but was forced to drink an emetic to gag it up.

He quickly swallowed it again, and once more was forced to throw it up, until a General threatened

***“once more, and we will hang you,
then CUT it out of your stomach”.***

The message, from Sir Henry Clinton, was harmless;

let's hear it

No secret plans; just a good luck wish....

David Taylor's timing could not have been worse;

the British army had just burned Kingston to the ground !

Worse yet: Burgoyne no longer needed assistance;

Taylor was moved north to Hurley, NY for trial.

Hurley, the town adjoining the just burned out Kingston

His harmless note notwithstanding,

Taylor was a spy !

He was tried then, hanged, Oct 18, 1777

Back in Hurly, NY...



The “Old Guard House”



Hurley, NY
....the Du Mond house



Secret Communications

via a **“Book Code”**

The Plan: Select a book known to both Benedict Arnold and Major John Andre:

they chose to use Blackstone's:

“Commentaries on the Laws of England”

**then, use 3 numbers to
define each word:**

ex.: “293.9.7”

Where:

293 = the page number to look up

Where:

9 = the 9th line on that page to go to, and

and finally:

7 = the 7th word on that line

**Here is the actual letter where Benedict
Arnold
sold out America, first in code,
and then deciphered !**

In Code:

[Handwritten notes in cursive script, partially legible]

the Clements Library

129.8.7 .46.9.22'd no 19.8.29 to 175.9.17 . 158.8.8 - or any 177.8.13 . 168.9.13 . ----- / I 105.9.5. soon to 57.9.7 .
198.9.26, and most . 230.8.12. by -- / 291.8.27 an 149.8.27 with ---255.9.11 . 148.8.22, 182.4.28 in whom a 175.9
could be .196.9.16 --- the 177.8.8 is .103.8.19 to 22.9.3, and / to 66.8.15 -- are 182.8.28, 169.8.25 be . 260.8.5 , 2
that 209.9.18. --- and 192.9.9'd to 224.9.9 on ,188.8.13 or some ---- / 182.8.28 on 188.8.13 sent 185.6.24 to 95.9.1

120.9.7, W----- 105.9.5's on the .22.9.14.---- / of 163.8.19 F----- 172.8.7s to 56.9.8 |30.000| 172.8.70 to 11.94. in
179.8.25, 84.8.9'd, 177.9.28. N---- is 111.9.27'd on / 23.8.10. the 111.9.13, 180.9.19 if his 180.8.21 an .179.8.25.,
that, 180.9.19, 44.8.9 --a-- is the 234.8.14 of 189.8.17. I --- / 44.8.9, 145.8.17, 294.9.12, in 266.8.17 as well as, 10
184.9.15.---- / 80.4.20. ---- I149.8.7, 10.8.22'd the 57.9.71 at 288.9.9, 198.9.26, as, a / 100.4.18 in 189.8.19-- I ca
173.8.19, 102.8.26, 236.8.21's--- / and 289.8.17 will be in 175.9.7, 87.8.7--- the 166.8.11, of the .191.9.16 / are .12
266.9.14 of the .286.8.20, and 291.8.27 to be an ---163.9.4 / 115.8.16 -'a .114.8.25ing --- 263.9.14. are 207.8.17ed,
103.8.60--- / from this 294.8.50, 104.9.26 -- If 84.8.9ed -- 294.9.12, 129.8.7. only / to 193.8.3 and the 64.9.5, 290.
at an, 99.8.14 . / the .204.8.2, 253.8.7s are 159.8.10 the 187.8.11 of a 94.9.9ing / 164.8.24, 279.8.16, but of a .238.



As 158.9.25 and 115.9.12 are 226.9.3'd by. / 236.8.20ing , 131.9.21, 163.9.6 -- it is 177.8.6 that the 156.8.11'z / 23
234.9.3ed as well as the .98.8.22s I 128.9.25 up, / and a 159.8.5 for 236.8.21's 149.27 'on, and a 255.9.11.-- / 13.8
211.8.14 ----- which I have 168.8.20ed, in / a 158.8.8, 189.6.17, 10.9.9. This .189.8.17 Sir .300.8.4 / 290.9.20 7 n
think 282.9.12. / 152.12.12th.80--- / I am Sir, / Your Humble Servant,

Mr. John Anderson / 172.9.12---- / P.S. I have 125.8.15, 61.8.28. in the 30.8.8er, but / 30.8.8. S. 300.8.4 will 264.9
231.9.27 / 223.8.1 in 116.8.19 He 14.8.9's the 61.8.28, 196.9.16. in / him 189.8.17, 294.9.29, 39.4.24, 48.8.19, 228
me. The 30.8.8'er .290.9.20 .39.9.24 / me |200| 126.9.141s, and .190.8.11 the .220.8.50. to 45.8.10 / A----- s, who

then decoded:

July 12, 1780 -- Benedict Arnold to John André (Decoded)

From the Clinton Collection



[Decoded letter in Jonathan Odell's hand]

I wrote to Captn B[ackwith] on the 7th of June, that a F[rench]--- fleet and army / were expected to act in conjunction with the A[merican]--- army. At the same time / I gave Mr. S[tansbury] a manifesto intended to be published in C[anad]---a, and have / from time to time communicated to him such intelligence as I thought / interesting, which he assures me he has transmitted to you. I have / received no answer from my Letter, or any verbal Message - I expect soon / to command W[est] P[oin]t; and most seriously wish an interview with some / intelligent officer in whom a mutual confidence could be placed. The / necessity is evident to arrange and to cooperate - An officer might / be taken Prisoner near that Post and permitted to return on parole, / or some officer on Parole sent out to effect an exchange.

General W[ashington]--- expects on the arrival of the F[rench]--- Troops to collect / 30,000 Troops to act in conjunction; if not disappointed, N[ew] York is fixed / on as the first Object, if his numbers are not sufficient for that Object, / Can-a- is the second; of which I can inform you in time, as well as of / every other design. I have accepted the command at W[est] P[oint]. As a Post in which / I can render the most essential Services, and which will be in my disposal. / The mass of the People are heartily tired of the War, and wish to be on / their former footing - They are promised great events from this / year's exertion - If - disappointed - you have only to persevere / and the contest will soon be at an end. The present Struggles are / like the pangs of a dying man, violent but of a short duration---

As Life and fortune are risked by serving His Majesty, it is / Necessary that the latter shall be secured as well as the emoluments / I give up, and a compensation for Services agreed on and a Sum / advanced for that purpose - which I have mentioned in a letter / which accompanies this, which Sir Henry will not, I believe, think / unreasonable. I am Sir, your humble Servant. / July 12, 1780 J. Moore / Mr. Jn Anderson / P.S. I have great confidence in the Bearer, but beg Sir Henry / will threaten him with his resentment in case he abuses the con- / fidence placed in him, which will bring ruin on me. / The Bearer will bring me 200 Guineas, and pay the remainder to / Captn A----- who us requested to receive the deposit for Mr. Moore

John André (Decoded)

[Decoded letter in Jonathan Odell's hand]

I wrote to Captn B[eckwith]-on the 7th of June, that a F[rench]--- fleet and army / were expected to act in conjunction with the A[merican]--- army. At the same time / I gave Mr. S[tansbury]-a manifesto intended to be published in C[anad]---a, and have / from time to time communicated to him such intelligence as I thought / interesting, which he assures me he has transmitted to you. I have / received no answer from my Letter, or any verbal Message - I expect soon / to command W[est] P[oin]t and most seriously wish an interview with some / intelligent officer in whom a mutual confidence could be placed. The / necessity is evident to arrange and to cooperate - An officer might / be taken Prisoner near that Post and permitted to return on parole, / or some officer on Parole sent out to effect an exchange.

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Via this system, Arnold told Andre:

- ***where, when and how many French troops were landing***

Via this system, Arnold told Andre:

- ***the (later cancelled) American deception to reinvade Canada***

Via this system, Arnold told Andre:

- ***his being granted the command of West Point !***

The rest is history:

Arnold sold the plans of West Point to the British, and they were turned over to Major John Andre, chief British spy.

**Andre was captured before delivering the
prized plans,**

**and Arnold was forced to flee into the
British Army for the remainder of the
War...**

These were some of the techniques used;

**What we now will get into is
“who” were the people
tasked with providing, then delivering this
war-winning information ?**

How did the spies and spy networks operate ?

The Secret Decoder Cypher Wheel



Invented by **Thomas Jefferson** in the 1790's -

too late for the Rev. War, but needed as the country was growing in world influence and commerce when mail was commonly read before final delivery

It WAS used during the Civil War...

Wheel counts varied up to 20

Set the wheels : (here it's 8 7 10 4 6 11 9 3 2 5 12 1

Set your message; Record what it is on a DIFFERENT line up:

This becomes the “meaningless” message you’re sending:

MYOACICJPIDM

Tell the recipient the wheel set up to use on his machine, and the meaningless message from that different line

When dialed in, a quick inspection of other lines shows only one line makes sense; that is your transmitted message

Thomas Jefferson's “Cypher Code Wheel”



(used from 24 - 36 wheels)



wheels are numbered and interchangeable