

HIGHLAND FORTRESS:
THE FORTIFICATION OF WEST POINT
DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION,
1775-1783

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A final feature on Constitution Island that continues to remain obscure is the "unfinished" Redoubt located on the first hill due north of Romans' Blockhouse. The style of construction and the unfinished condition almost certainly links it to the early period on the island between 1775 and 1777. Its probable origin was discussed in Chapter III. The remains of this work are nothing more than small sections of wall from six to eight feet in width and approximately 3 feet high. Of interest, however, is one exposed section that shows the bedrock scraped level to establish a sure footing for the scarp or rampart walls, and explains how the walls of the various fortifications have been able to withstand two centuries of deterioration.³²

North and South Redoubts were constructed on the east side of the river. The former was located on the northern end of the ridge overlooking the plain at Garrison. Guarding Nelson's Point, it was very similar in construction to Fort Wyllys and Redoubts #1, #2, and #3. There were no re-entrant angles and all the guns were placed in external batteries. The parapet wall on the south facing South Redoubt was considerably higher than the others, today about an eight foot difference. The high parapet would provide protection in the event South Redoubt fell to the enemy. There is some evidence of a platform in the northwest corner of the redoubt, but its use is unknown. If it were for guns, they would have had to fire "en barbette" because there is no evidence of embrasures. A bombproof existed in the redoubt, but there is no evidence of it now. There is a ditch along the south parapet with two small stone walls in it that probably were part of the entranceway that is still visible in that wall. Villefranche had indicated that there was a powder magazine at the redoubt in 1782.³³

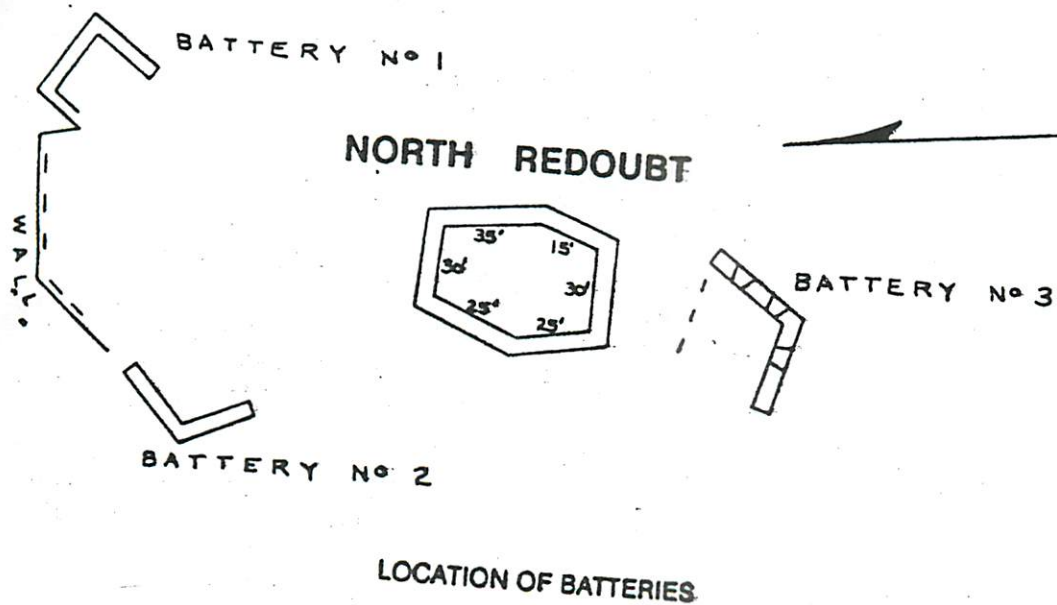
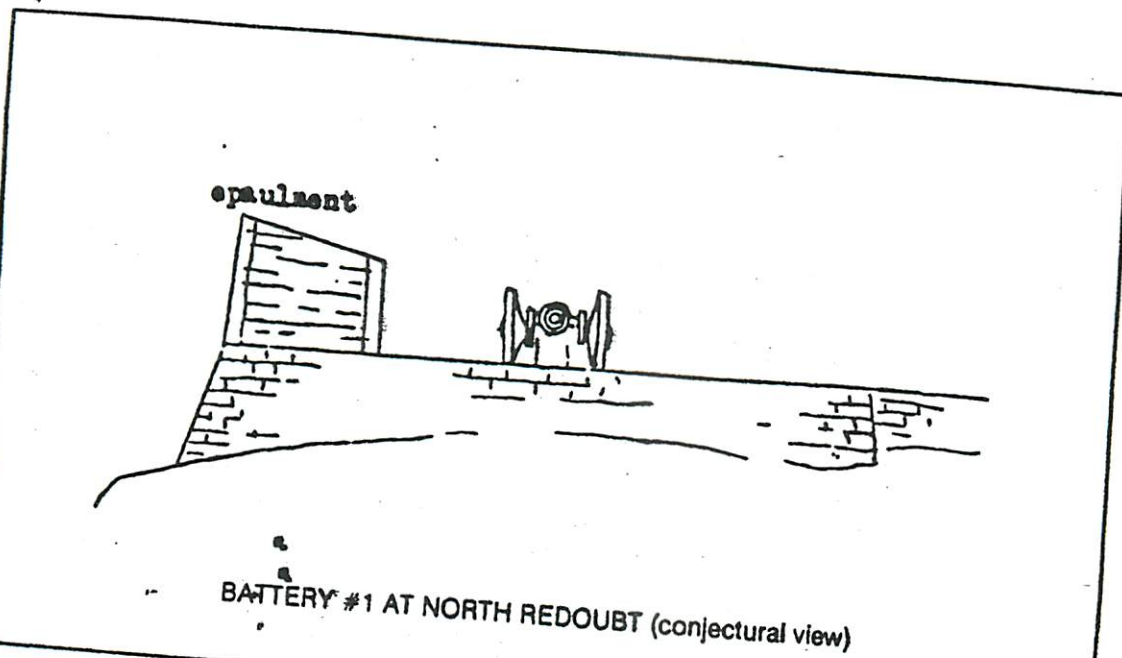
The three batteries at North Redoubt were typical of all batteries at West Point. Battery #1 slightly to the northeast of the redoubt has a stone scarp wall approximately six and a half feet high in front with no evidence of embrasures. An epaulment on the east flank protected the battery from the higher ground to the east. A small stone wall, probably the base for a palisade of logs, extended from Battery #1 to Battery #2. Built slightly to the northwest of the redoubt, Battery #2 has a low scarp wall in front and a high epaulment (eight feet) on the southwestern flank. This battery would prevent the enemy from controlling Nelson's Point, while the epaulment protected the cannoners from fire from the river and from the plain at Garrison. The battery apparently would fire "en barbette." Battery #3, located on the south side of the redoubt would prevent assault from the direction of South Redoubt. Embrasures are still evident.³⁴

John H. Mead, consulting archaeologist for the West Point Museum in 1968-69, concluded that the batteries at North Redoubt

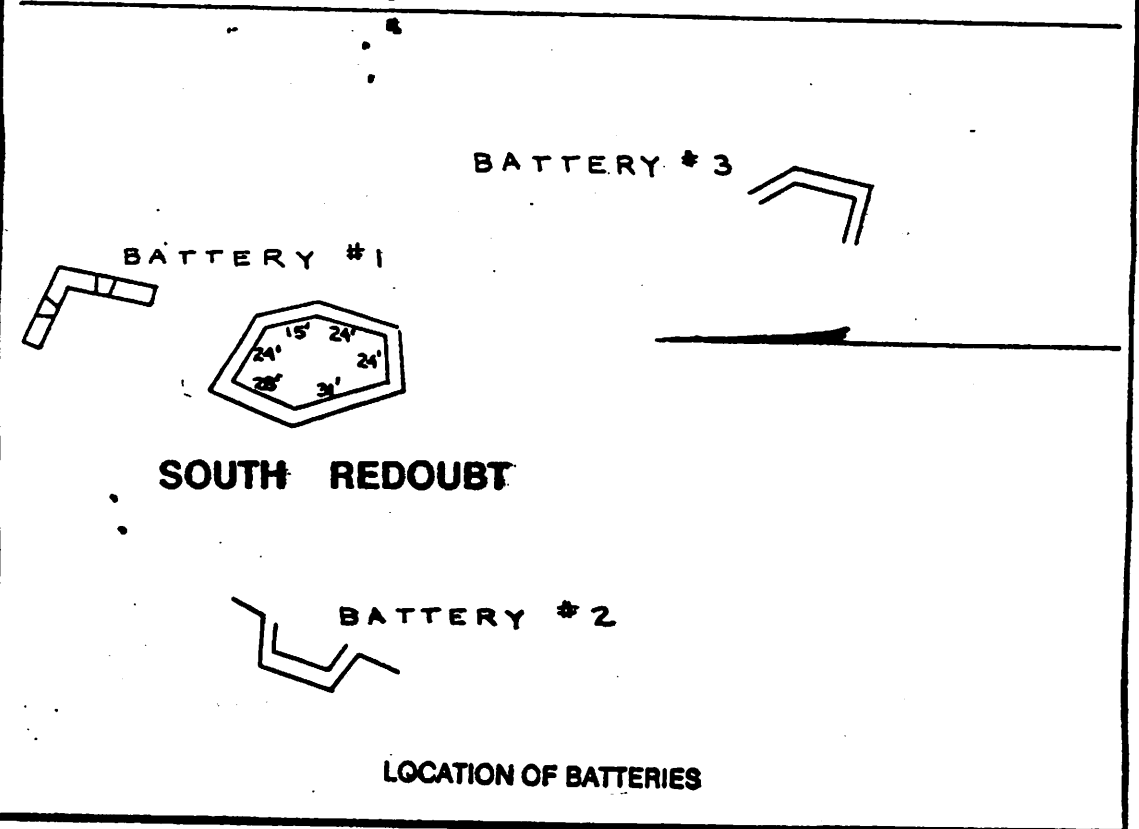
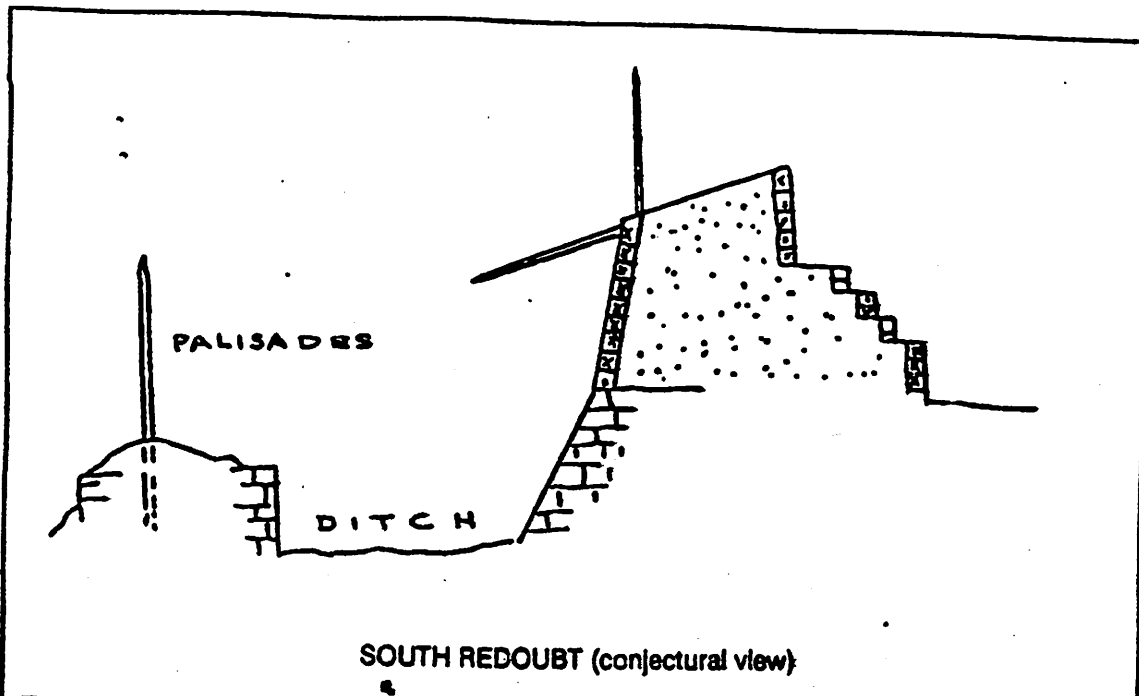
offer what I believe to be excellent evidence of the various construction principles in use at West Point during the Revolutionary War.

1. *Embrasures were used when a battery was vulnerable to assault by troops or close fire.*
2. *Guns were more likely to be placed en-barbette when assault or direct fire from nearby vessels was unlikely, to gain the benefit of a greater sweep of fire and maneuverability.*³⁵

South Redoubt, located on the high point of the same ridge as North Redoubt, is approximately one-half mile to the south of the latter. The comparison made between North Redoubt and other works at West Point holds true for South Redoubt also. The remaining parapets on the south and west walls measure about four to five feet high, while on the east and northeast faces the parapet today measures eight and a half feet high. Again, the raised parapets would protect the inside of the redoubt from the slightly higher ground to the east. A possible entranceway appears in the northwest wall, although this might have been an embrasure. According to Villefranche the redoubt contained a bombproof or powder magazine, but there is no indication of one in the ruins. The most significant feature, however, is the ditch that was constructed around the entire redoubt. Along the east and northeast sides it measures 13 1/2 feet between its floor and the top of the remaining parapet wall, and four feet below the surround-



10-15 John H. Mead, *Archaeological Survey of Constitution Island and Adjoining Fortifications*, p. 29.



10-16 John H. Mead, *Archaeological Survey of Constitution Island and Adjoining Fortifications*, p. 37.

ing ground. A stone counterscarp or stone retaining wall is on the far side of the ditch approximately 10 feet away.³⁶

Battery #1 slightly northeast of the redoubt has a stone rampart and an embrasure in each of its two walls. One faces the level ground to the north, while the other is oriented toward the higher ground to the east. Battery #2, if the feature investigated was in fact a battery, had a stone rampart that is barely recognizable today. The absence of any parapet soil would imply that the guns had to fire "en barbette." The feature is located generally where Villefranche's 1780 map places a battery. Although his map locations for the batteries at both North and South Redoubts do not accurately reflect the positions of the ruins as surveyed today, we should not be too critical since his map is one of the best from the period. Battery #3 is very similar in construction to #1, although it has only one embrasure in its southern face and an epaulment on its northern flank that is approximately six feet high, once again to protect from the high ground to the east. Villefranche's map shows a fourth battery which should lie between #2 and #3, but there are no remains of this battery except for the possibility of some indistinct mounds of soil to the west of Battery #3. The same comments concerning the design and use of the batteries at North Redoubt apply to those at South Redoubt.³⁷

Even though a great deal of attention was devoted to construction during 1779, there was still time to insure proper discipline. The British returned to Stony Point after the Americans abandoned it following the battle in July, with the result that tensions remained at a peak. No one knew whether the British would attempt retaliation. A carelessly discharged musket could send the entire garrison into a panic. Instructions on the 24th of July directed that any soldier who fired his weapon without permission was to receive 15 lashes on the spot and pay one-sixth of a dollar.³⁸ Later on, with ladies visiting the post, the troops were further admonished concerning off-duty activities:

There is to be no bathing between the hours of 8 and 5, and the custom of remaining long in the water is to be discontinued, as it is too relaxing and injurious to the health. It is also expected that the soldiers in this kind of recreation will observe more decency than they usually practice. These orders to be read to and impressed upon them by their officers.³⁹