Defense of West Point on the Hudson, 1775 – 1783
PURPOSE

To inform students how possession of the Hudson River Valley and fortifications at West Point were vital to defense of the American Colonies during the Revolutionary War.
OUTLINE

• Background/Orientation
• Brief Chronology of Events
• Military Implications
• Major Fortifications
• Summary
• Conclusion
References


Background/Orientation

- Located in the Hudson Highlands, 50mi North of New York City.
- 16000 acres of Orange County, NY.
- Located along the Hudson River’s “S” Curve.
Background/Orientation

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The Hudson River and West Point
Background/Orientation

The Hudson River and West Point
Chronology of Events

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• Bernard Romans begins to develop a plan for the defense of the Hudson Valley on Constitution Island, beginning in August 1775
• This become Fort Constitution
• It is opposite West Point and 200 feet lower
October 1777, British forces march up the Hudson Valley, engaging and conquering Forts Montgomery and Clinton(south)

They also succeed in breaking Thomas Machin’s floating chain across the Hudson at Ft. Montgomery.

Fort Clinton(Arnold) is built on West Point 12 March 1778; Louis Radiere and Thaddeus Kosciuszko feud on design of defenses for West Point.

April 1778, construction begins on Forts Putnam, Webb, Willys, and Meigs on West Point side of Hudson.
Chronology of Events

• Thomas Machin emplaces the improved, thicker “Great Chain” across the Hudson, 30 April 1778.
• 1 June 1779 British capture Stony Point, the Americans recapture, then abandon it in July. Washington renews his commitment to West Point – maintenance performed and additional redoubts built to the south and west.
• Fall 1779, plans for defense of West Point were complete.
Chronology of Events

1. George Washington establishes his headquarters at West Point in 1779.

2. West Point opened as the U.S. Army Engineer school on July 4, 1802.

3. April 29, 1812, an act of Congress reorganizes the Academy and increases its strength to 250 officers.
Physical Geography

- Topography & The Hudson River Valley
Military Implications

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The Hudson River and West Point
Military Implications

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Military Implications

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The Hudson River and West Point
Military Implications
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Physical Geography

• Topography & The Hudson River Valley
• Vegetation
Military Implications

Vegetation, as viewed from Constitution Island
Military Implications
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Physical Geography

• Topography & The Hudson River Valley
• Vegetation
• Weather
Military Implications
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Strategic Analysis

• Geopolitics
• Strategic Mobility
Military Implications
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The Hudson River and West Point
Military Implications
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Tactical Analysis

• Avenues of Approach
• Observation of Fields of Fire
• Key Terrain
• Obstacles
• Cover and Concealment
Logistical Analysis

- Supply
- Transportation
- Construction Materials
Major Fortifications
Major Fortifications

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The Hudson River and West Point
Major Fortifications

Constitution Island

- Original plan created by Bernard Romans
- East side of Hudson, excellent Southeast Fields of Fire
- Surrounded by water on three sides and Marsh on its east side
- Not the highest terrain in the area
Major Fortifications

Fields of Fire from Fort Constitution
Major Fortifications
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Fort Putnam

The Hudson River and West Point

Redoubt 4
Major Fortifications

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Fort Arnold/Clinton on West Point

The Hudson River and West Point
Major Fortifications
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View of Hudson River from Fort Arnold/Clinton

The Hudson River and West Point
Major Fortifications

The Great Chain

Approximate location of Great Chain
Major Fortifications

The Great Chain

The Hudson River and West Point
Major Fortifications
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The Great Chain

Arrangement of the great Boom and Chain at West Point.

Note: Undocumented sketch of the chain at West Point in Boynton, History of West Point, and a sketch of a portion of the log boom.
• The colonial army successfully applied its surveyed geographical/geological information about West Point to aid in its defense of the Hudson Highlands during the Revolutionary War.

• No British naval vessels ever attempted to cross the Great Chain.

• Many of West Point’s former fortresses still stand today; rebuilt for bicentennial in 1976.
Conclusion

“In late April 1975 the first wild tales of Lexington and Concord reached the banks of the Hudson. The lofty, granite summits of the Highlands had survived the wear of half a billion years to reach that moment. Where the Hudson and Highlands cross would become a key location – maybe the key location – during the War of Independence. In fact, it would be called the ‘Key to the Continent.’”

LTC Dave Palmer
The River and The Rock
New York: 1969