

Defense of West Point on the Hudson, 1775 – 1783



The Hudson River and West Point

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

- Walker, Paul. Engineers of Independence: A documentary of the Army Engineers in the American Revolution, 1775-1783. Washington, DC: Historical Division, Office of Administrative Services, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1981.
- Diamant, Lincoln. Chaining the Hudson. New York: Carol, 1989.
- LTC Dave Palmer. The River and The Rock: A History of Fortress West Point, 1775-1783. New York: Greenwood, 1969.
- U.S. Military Academy Department of History. "West Point Fortifications Staff Ride Notecards."
<http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/pdfs/> Second Edition (1998).



Background/Orientation

1 of 3

- **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**



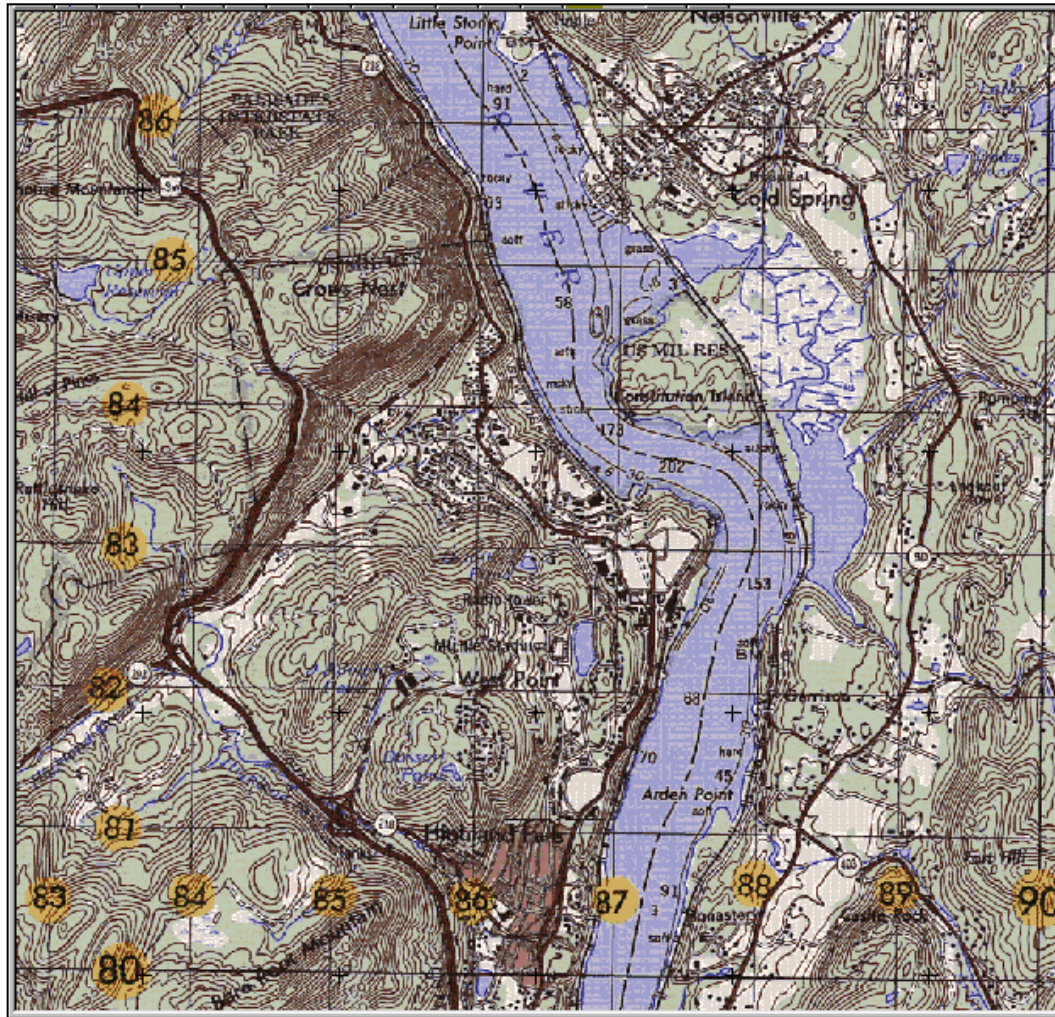
Background/Orientation

2 of 3



Background/Orientation

3 of 3

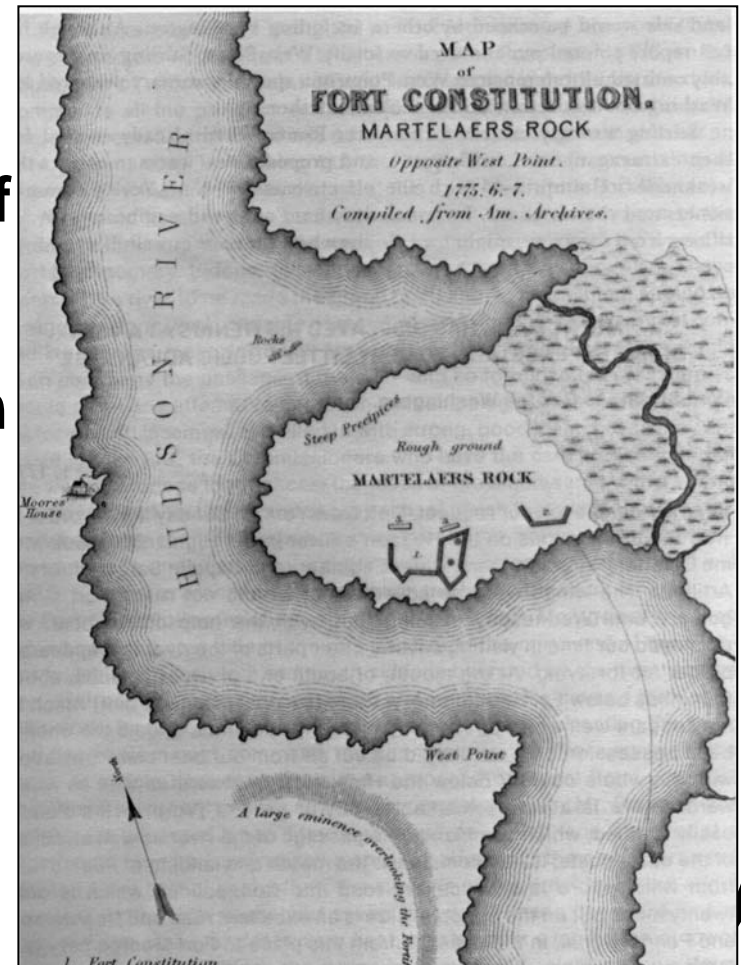


The Hudson River and West Point

Chronology of Events

1 of 4

- **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**



Chronology of Events

2 of 4

- **October 1777, British forces march up the Hudson Valley, engaging and conquering Forts Montgomery and Clinton(south)**
- **They also succeed in breaking Thomas Mifflin'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, Mifflin, and Mifflin on West Point side of Hudson.**



Chronology of Events

3 of 4

- **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

4 of 4

- **George Washington establishes his headquarters at West Point in 1779.**
- **West Point opened as the U.S. Army Engineer school on July 4, 1802.**
- **April 29, 1812, an act of Congress reorganizes the Academy and increases its strength to 250 officers.**



Military Implications

1 of 11

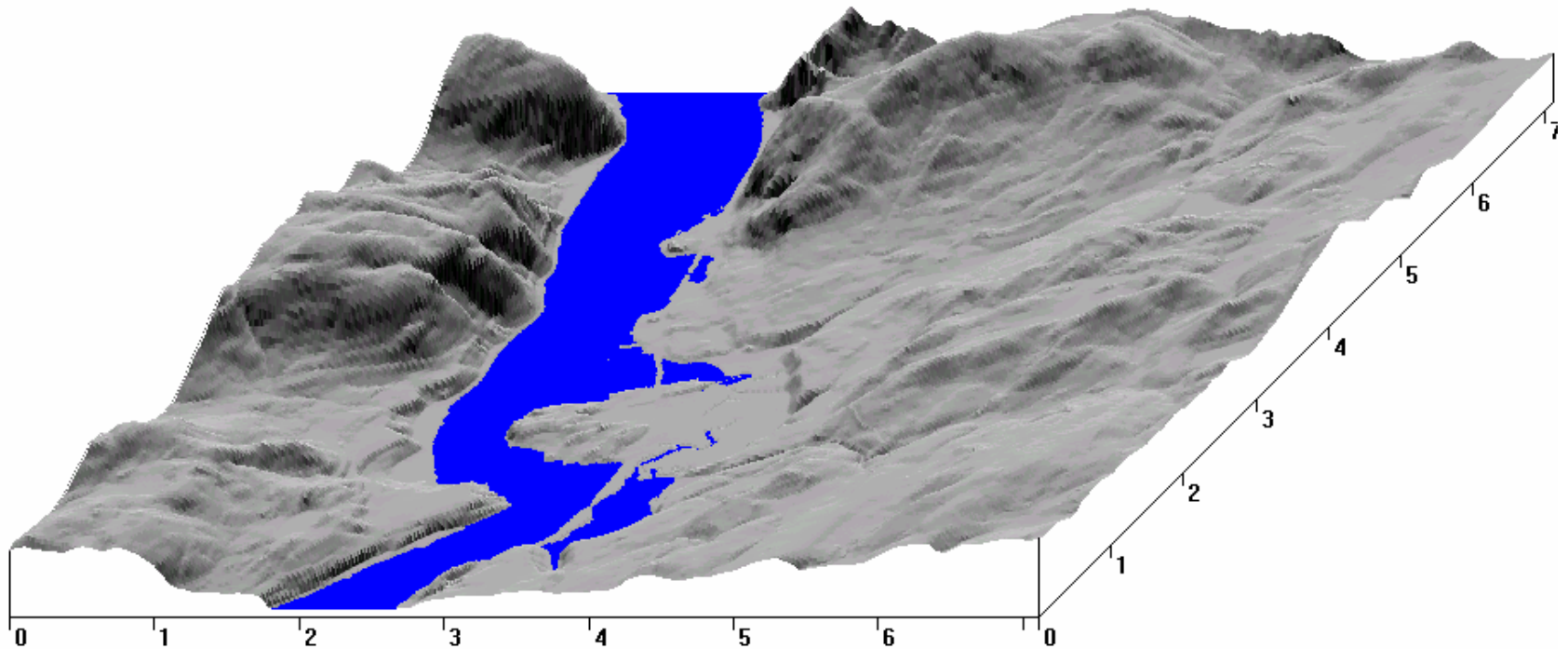
Physical Geography

- **Topography & The Hudson River Valley**



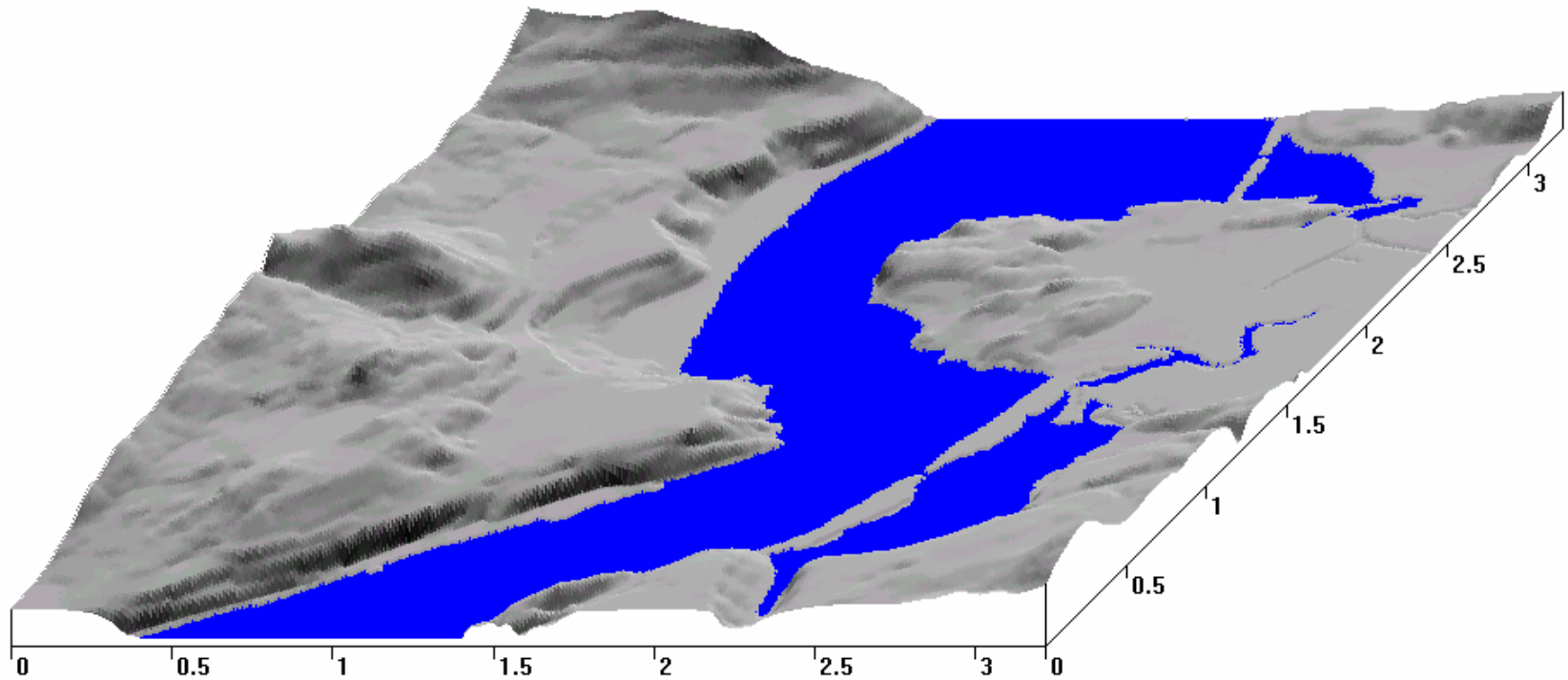
Military Implications

2 of 11



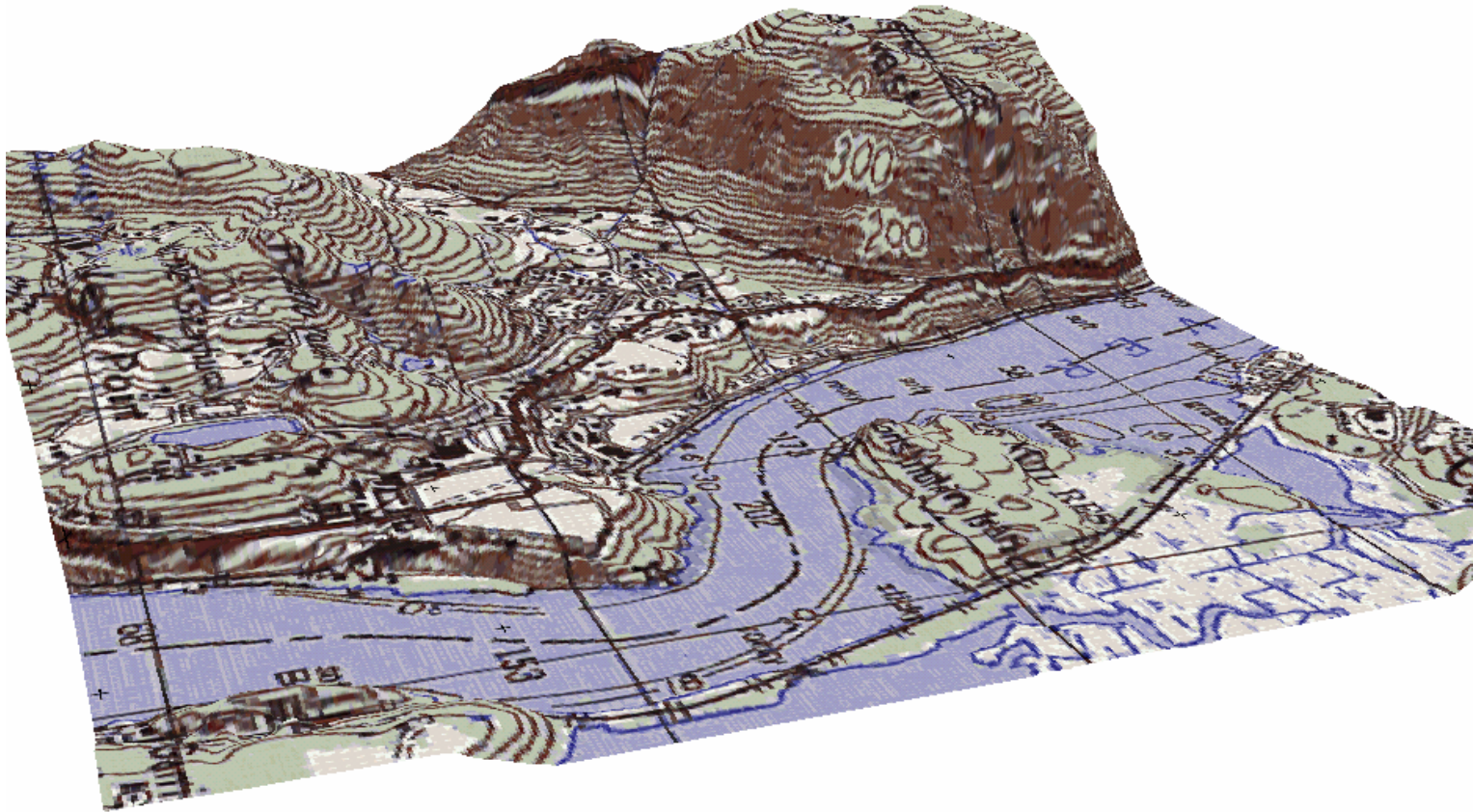
Military Implications

3 of 11



Military Implications

4 of 11



Military Implications

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Physical Geography

- **Topography & The Hudson River Valley**
- **Vegetation**



Military Implications

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**Vegetation, as viewed from
Constitution Island**



Military Implications

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Physical Geography

- **Topography & The Hudson River Valley**
- **Vegetation**
- **Weather**



Military Implications

8 of 11

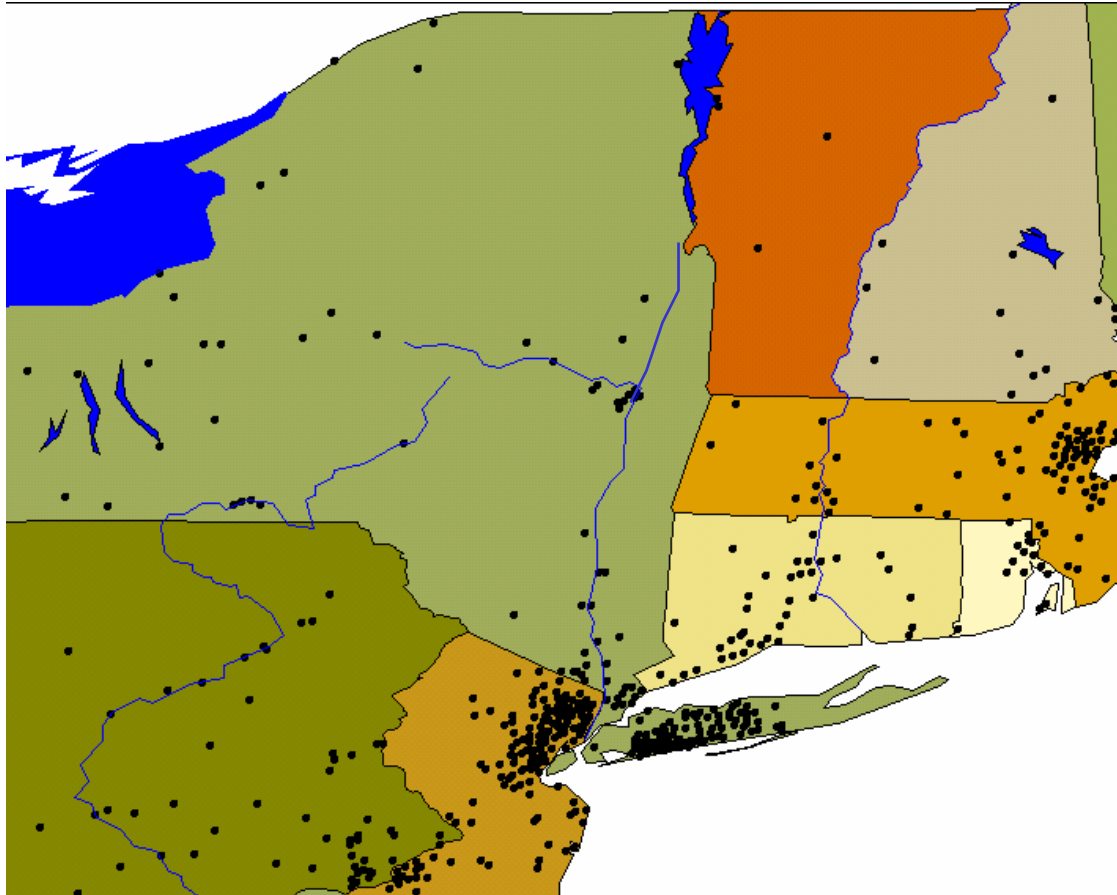
Strategic Analysis

- **Geopolitics**
- **Strategic Mobility**



Military Implications

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Military Implications

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Tactical Analysis

- **Avenues of Approach**
- **Observation of Fields of Fire**
- **Key Terrain**
- **Obstacles**
- **Cover and Concealment**



Military Implications

11 of 11

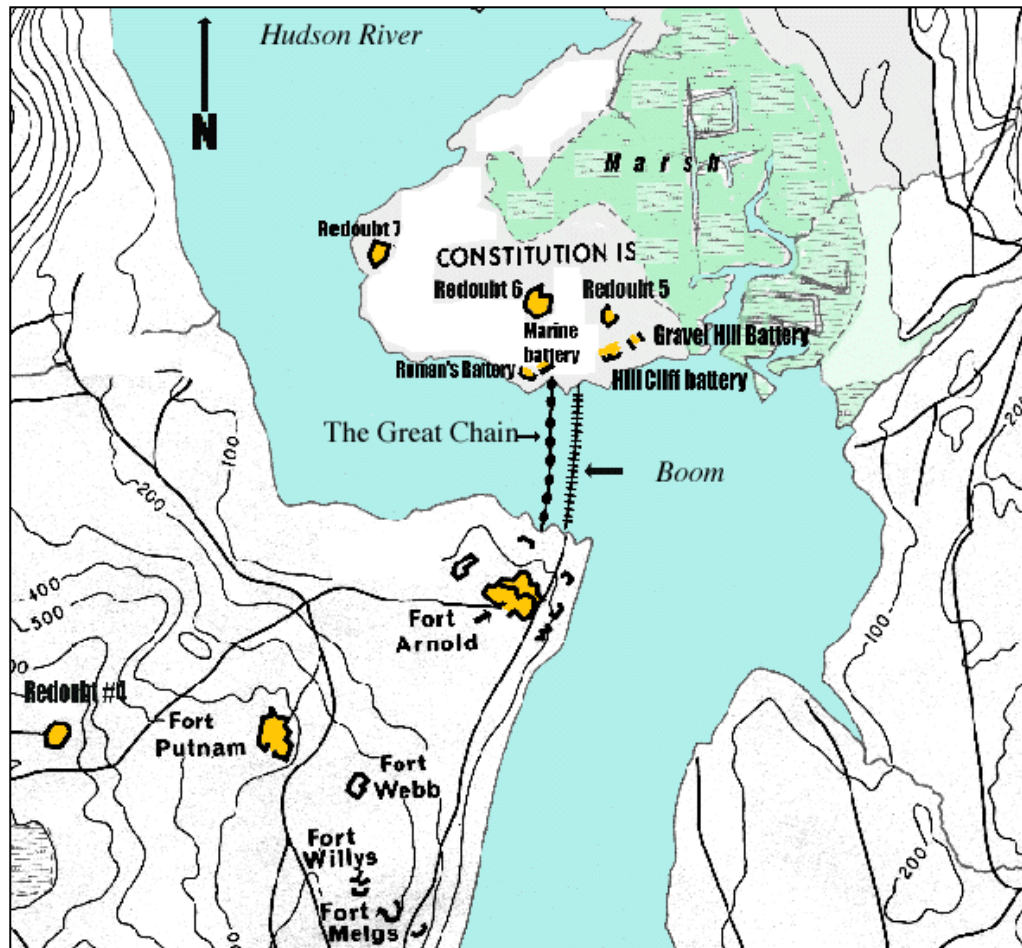
Logistical Analysis

- **Supply**
- **Transportation**
- **Construction Materials**



Major Fortifications

1 of 10



Major Fortifications

3 of 10

Constitution Island

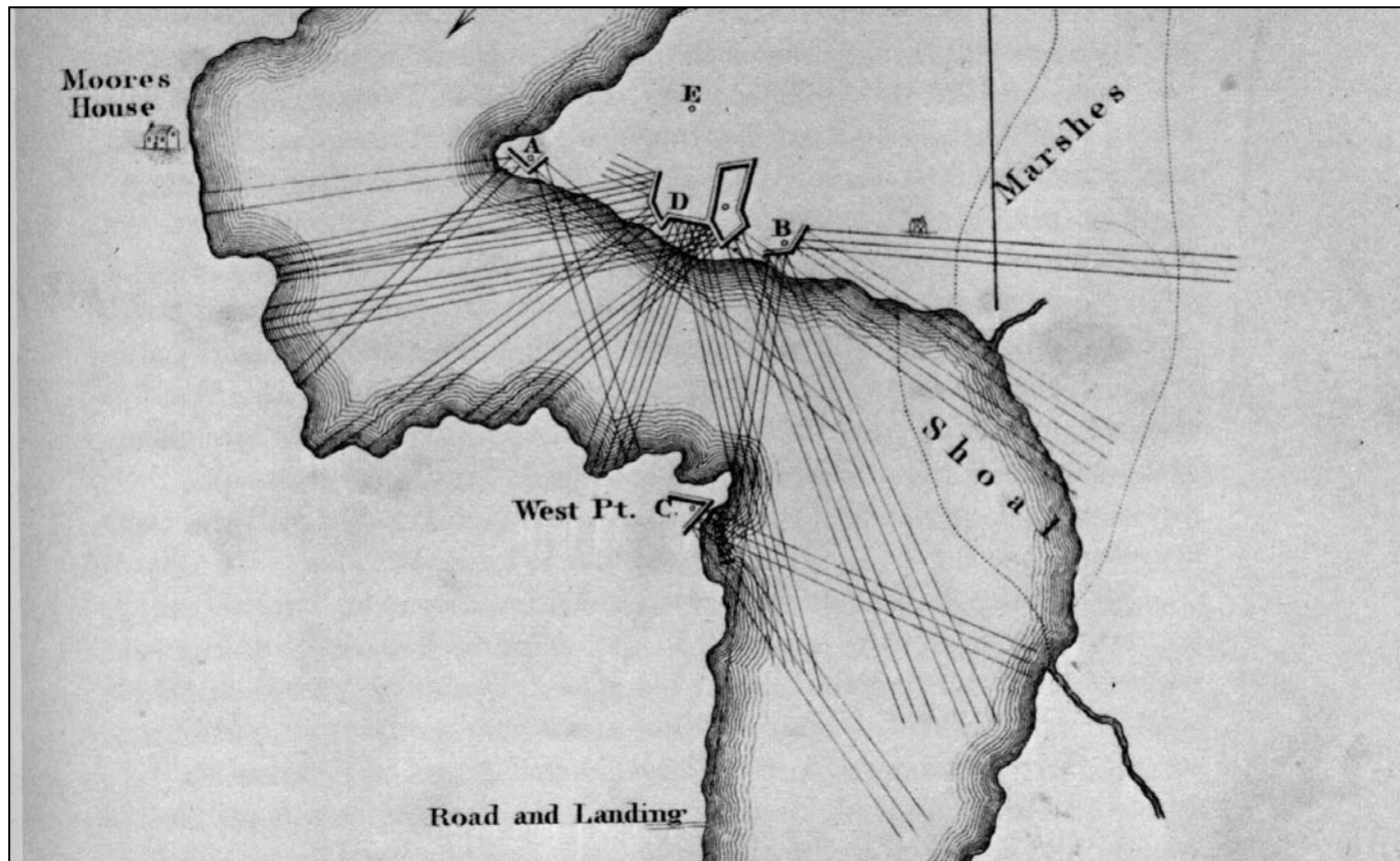
- **Original plan created by Bernard Romans**
- **East side of Hudson, excellent Southeast Fields of Fire**
- **Surrounded by water on three sides and Marsh on its east side**
- **Not the highest terrain in the area**



Major Fortifications

4 of 10

Fields of Fire from Fort Constitution

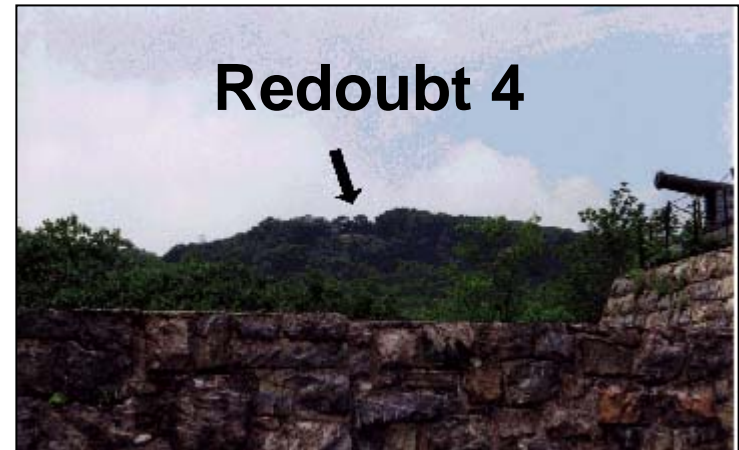


The Hudson River and West Point

Major Fortifications

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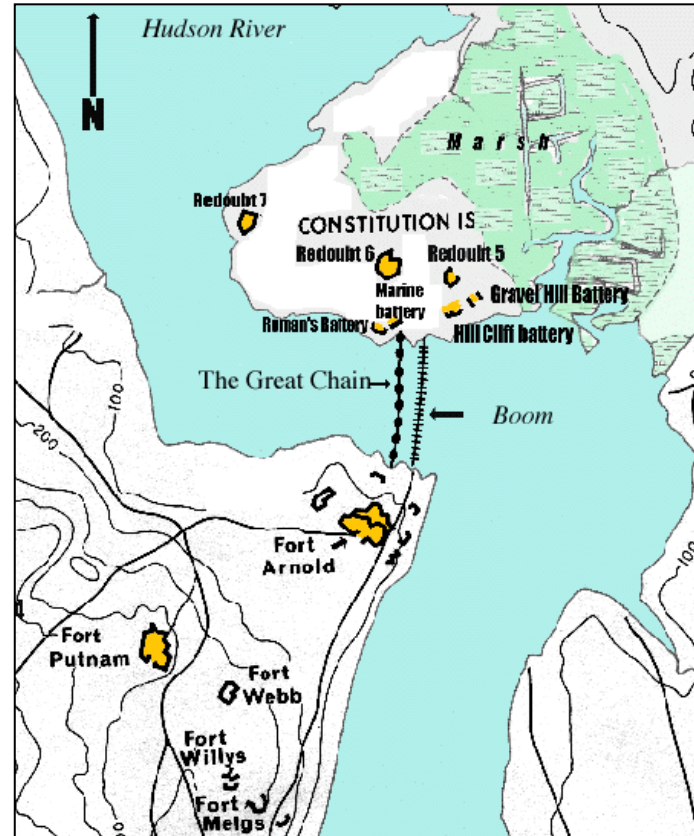
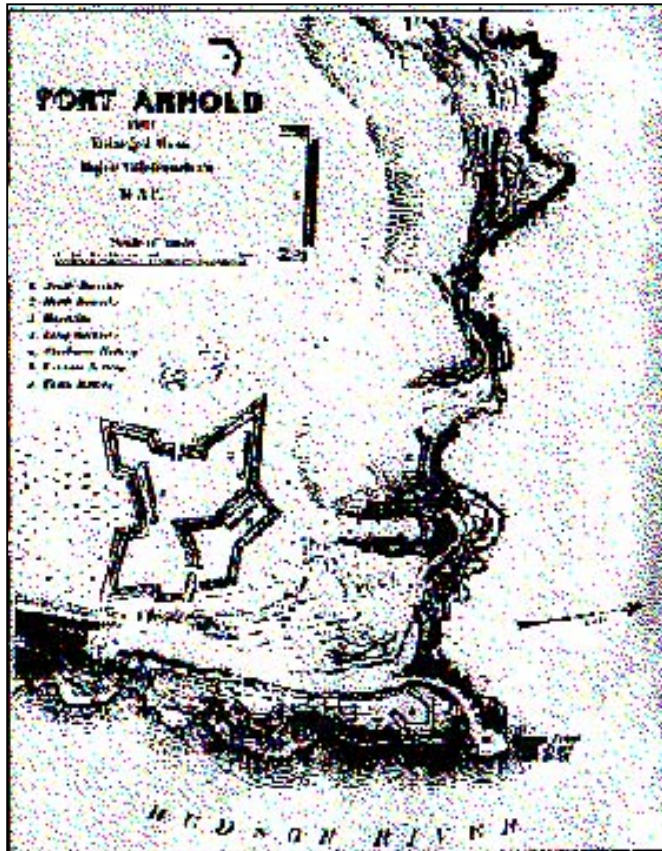
Fort Putnam



Major Fortifications

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Fort Arnold/Clinton on West Point



The Hudson River and West Point

Major Fortifications

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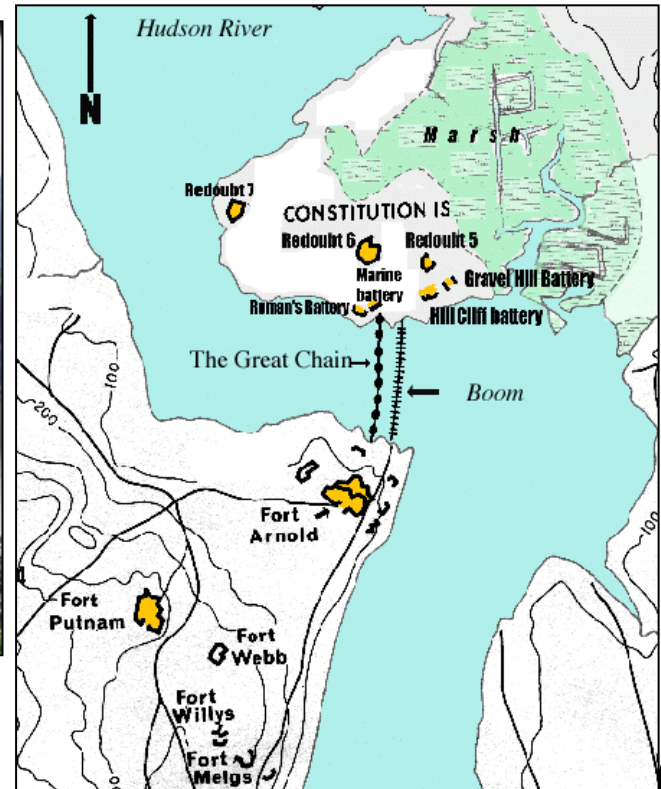
View of Hudson River from Fort Arnold/Clinto



Major Fortifications

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The Great Chain



Major Fortifications

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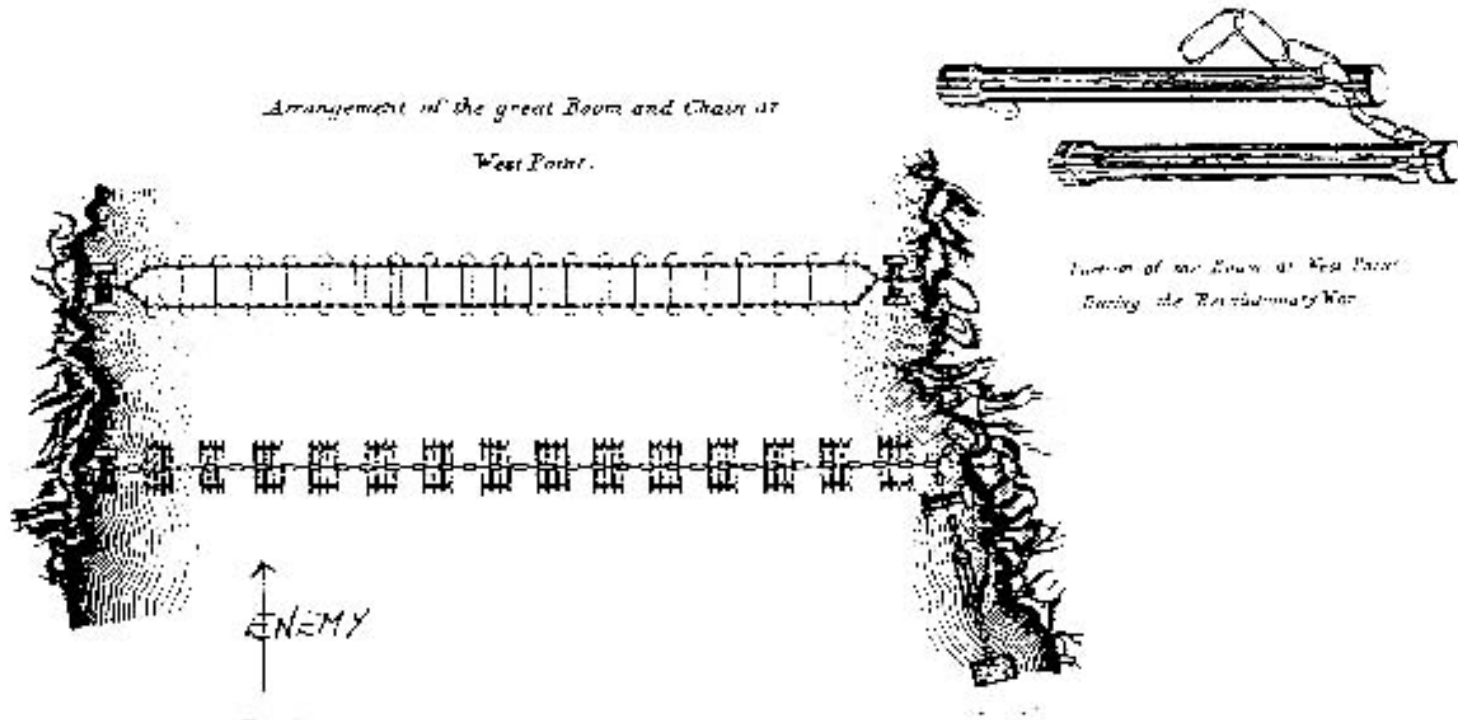
The Great Chain



Major Fortifications

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The Great Chain



6-3 Undocumented sketch of the chain at West Point in Boynton, *History of West Point* and a sketch of a portion of the log boom.



SUMMARY

- **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.**



Questions

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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

