

## Manhattan Island, New York, August 23, 1775

The night sky was dark, made more so by the forbidding clouds blocking out the stars. The last hundred British troops had withdrawn from Manhattan only that very day. Still, Army Artillery Captain, John Lamb knew it wasn't over yet. There wasn't a chance the British were leaving without some kind of fight. He'd had Hamilton—a young volunteer with his own militia—send out men to watch and ensure the king's soldiers left. They'd left all right—walked straight off the island and onto an enormous sixty-four-gun man-of-war called the *Asia*.

Intel and instinct told Captain Lamb that the ship was headed toward the fort at the southern tip of the island. That could only mean one thing—trouble. He and his men were going there that night to steal British cannons. If they could pull the twenty-four guns out of the fort and haul them away, General Washington could use them to drive out the king's army from his position. John Lamb's men were moving out as soon as he gave the order, and tension was high.

Lamb strode through the group of men he commanded, who, at this moment, were mingling with Hamilton's volunteers. How a nineteen-year-old had managed to amass such a large group of men was beyond John. "Men!" He called for their attention.

All around, conversation quieted, and all eyes turned to him. "Prepare to move out! We raid the battery tonight before the British reclaim it." Or destroy it, Lamb thought ruefully. What else would they intend to do with a sixty-four gun ship?

At that moment, from the midst of the crowd, Alexander Hamilton appeared, already carrying a loaded musket. "Ready, sir!" he called, and his volunteers fell in line behind him. It was as if the teen had predicted this.

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John's company—accompanied by a light infantry unit and Hamilton's men—set out at eleven o'clock that night. They marched along toward Manhattan's tip, straight for the fort. The sound of the ocean and a hot wind whipping across the landscape, covered for their movements as they traveled. A hundred men trudged along, carrying long thick coils of rope over their shoulder and guns in their hands. Determination lined the face of every one of them.

Alexander Hamilton, leading the group from the front, was the first one to see the ship in the harbor. The vessel's hulking form sat in the water forward of the fort. It was already out in the harbor and seemed to be moored for the night. It had to be the *Asia* since it was too much of a coincidence to be any other ship. As soon as he spotted it, Hamilton called back to his men, having them pick up the pace. Though the *Asia* didn't appear to be moving closer, things would change if Hamilton and his men were spotted.

"Pick up the pace! See that ship!" He called, pointing out at the dark form ahead of them. He circled back, encouraging his men to move quickly.

In only a matter of minutes, Hamilton's company had outpaced John's men. They raced along at a dangerously fast pace in the dark. Excitement and adrenaline kept the men from slowing or stumbling—even in the dark. Ahead, the fort loomed. In the harbor, slumbering like a giant in the water, the *Asia* waited in the dark. Trees and buildings hid Hamilton and his men from those aboard the ship, but it wouldn't last. Even *if* the British didn't see them, they were still headed for the fort.

At last, they reached the cannonry. Just as they'd expected, the cannons stood in a neat row like twenty-four shining, black, metal beasts. The men wasted no time in tying the ropes they'd brought to the guns' heavy bodies.

Hamilton rushed to each cannon, checking to ensure his men were getting them secured. When the first one was ready, Hamilton picked a group to pull it out and back down the hill. "Take this back to the captain's company! Mulligan!" he called another man over. "Help me with the next one!" He and Hercules Mulligan, along with several others set up the next cannon for transport.

Now split into groups, the men hauled the heavy cannons down one at a time. In the dark, the footing was treacherous. On more than one occasion, the guns would roll faster than the men could walk, and several others had to join in, tugging with all their might to keep the hulking weapons from crushing someone.

The groups passed the guns off to John's men, who'd caught up quickly, and they worked together, straining at the weight of them. It was a slow process, made all the more taxing by the British ship.

It was past midnight when the men caught sight of a British barge moving toward the fort. However, the men aboard the barge had also spotted Hamilton, his friend Hercules Mulligan, and about a hundred comrades now tugging on ropes they had attached to the heavy guns. Shouts of shock and anger came over the water from the British ship. Within moments, the redcoats fired from the barge.

"Keep going! Stay behind the cannons!" Hamilton called, just in time to hear a musket ball ricochet off the very gun he stood beside. To his credit, he didn't flinch.

The cannon was secured and rolled out, but progress stopped. The group of men was under fire, pinned down, and several had been wounded.

Hamilton strode forward, planting himself beside his men, and took aim. The men on the barge had lit several lanterns, making their bright coats easily visible through the dark. They were close enough... "Return fire!" Hamilton shouted. The time for stealth was over.

With that, he himself fired. One of the men sporting a fancy red coat fell, disappearing over the side of the barge. The militiamen returned fire, a small group now covering for the others while they continued moving the cannons.

Out in the harbor, the *Asia* hoisted sails and drifted inward, working its way close to shore. They were moving in to help their comrades on the barge.

Within only five minutes, the huge ship now stood between the land and the British barge. The ominous silence lasted only a short time.

"Incoming!" Mulligan shouted.

The *Asia* opened fire with thirty-two cannons on its side. The noise was deafening, like a continuous volley of thunder. Smoke and gunpowder filled the night air. One of the heavy rounds flew well over Hamilton's group, slamming through the roof of an old tavern. Instant chaos and panic could be heard from inside the establishment. People flooded the streets and ran for cover.

Hamilton—his own gun now empty, called Mulligan over. "Hold this!" Hamilton shouted over the riotous noise.

"Yes, sir!" Mulligan, bewildered, took the musket and watched as Hamilton ran back for yet another cannon.

Hamilton counted the remaining guns, weighing the odds of getting them all at once. No—it couldn't be done. Now that they were taking fire from the ship, they couldn't make several trips required to get them all. Of the twenty-four cannons, they'd taken twenty. He and one other man secured one more cannon—making the number twenty-one—and strained against the gun's weight until it began rolling. They dragged it forward at what felt like a slug's pace.

Mulligan set Hamilton's musket aside to fire his own. "Will we go for the other three?" Mulligan growled when he spotted Hamilton.

"No!" Hamilton said. His mouth kept moving, but another round of fire from the *Asia* drowned out his words.

Mulligan nodded and ran, leaving the battery to help a group take a cannon down the hill. He didn't look back—leaving Hamilton's musket in the chaos.

With the *Asia* firing on them in the harbor, dirt and debris sprayed all around them. The soldiers were mud-stained and battered but kept dragging their newly-acquired weapons, not relinquishing them for a moment. At one point, a cannon ball landed so close it shook the ground.

At last, they reached cover and an angle at which the ship's guns couldn't hit them. When Hamilton caught up to Mulligan and the others, he looked around, "I'll take my

musket back now." His tone was so dry that Mulligan knew Hamilton must've seen him set it down... and leave it back in the fort.

"It's back up in the battery. I leaned it against a wall so I could return fire..." Mulligan stopped, watching as Hamilton waved an unconcerned hand and turned, heading back through cannon fire. "Are you mad?" Mulligan called after him.

Hamilton strode forward, purpose intent in keen eyes as he searched the dark rubble for his forsaken weapon. Locating it quickly, the young man jogged back through the fray to where he'd left Mulligan. He looked far from concerned. If anything, Hamilton looked excited. When Hamilton returned, he now held his musket aloft, showing it off like a prize. The men cheered, shouting congratulations and relief, though the night was yet to be over. Young Hamilton flashed Mulligan a grin and then headed off to speak to John Lamb, who was now assisting in moving the confiscated cannons.

"How many did we get?" John asked grimly.

"Twenty-one, sir."

John's eyes widened in surprise. "Well done, Alexander."

Hamilton saluted, and moved off toward the guns, dragging them farther away from the harbor and the British ship. The men—not out of danger yet—carefully steered the guns behind buildings to keep from being seen by those firing *Asia's* cannons. Within the hour, they had put enough distance between them, and the British had given up the pursuit, leaving the Continentals bolstered with a rare victory after so many losses and retreats.