

# Thomas Paine: *An American Patriot*

Based on a manuscript by Mae Kramer Silver

## *Last week* ~ Chapter 6

**Patriots Flee, But Fight Back** As the British occupy Philadelphia, Paine and other patriots flee the city and hatch plans for an attack.

## *Chapter 7* ~

### Exiled Patriots Hatch a Plot

The experiment of tying kegs together and sending them down the Delaware River to sink the British fleet seems outlandish and silly in modern terms. But back then, it stoked the imagination and pride of the fighting colonists who were looking for any way possible to win the war.

Francis Hopkinson wrote this humorous song-poem about the incident and called it "The Battle of the Kegs."

Many Revolutionary War battles were recounted, not only in news articles and letters, but in songs and poems as well.

#### "The Battle of the Kegs"

By Francis Hopkinson

(Sung to the tune of "Yankee Doodle")

Gallants, attend, and hear a friend  
Trill forth harmonious ditty.  
Strange things I'll tell, which late  
befell  
In Philadelphia city.

'Twas early day, as poets say,  
Just when the sun was rising.  
A soldier stood on a log of wood  
And saw a thing surprising.

As in amaze he stood to gaze.  
The truth can't be denied, sir  
He spied a score of kegs or more

Come  
floating down the tide, sir.

A sailor, too, in jerkin blue,  
This strange appearance viewing,  
First damned his eyes, in great  
surprise,  
Then said, "Some mischief's brewing.

"These kegs, I'm told, the rebels hold,  
Packed up like pickled herring,  
And they're come down t'attack  
the town In this new way of ferrying."

The soldier flew, the  
sailor too, And scared  
almost to death, sir,  
Wore out their shoes to  
spread the news,  
And ran till out of breath, sir....

Sir William, he,  
snug as a flea,  
Lay all this time  
a-snoring;  
Nor dreamed of  
harm, as he lay  
In bed with Mrs.  
[Loring].

Now in a fright, he  
starts upright,  
Awaked by such a clatter;  
He rubs his eyes and  
boldly cries,  
"For God's sake, what's  
the matter?"

At his bedside, he then  
espied Sir Erskine at  
command, sir;  
Upon one foot he had one  
boot,  
And tither in his  
hand, sir.

"Arise! arise!"  
Sir Erskine cries.  
"The rebels more's the pity  
Without a boat are all afloat  
And ranged before the city.

"The motley crew,  
in vessels new,  
With Satan for their guide, sir,  
Packed up in bags, or wooden  
kegs, Come driving down the  
tide, sir.

"Therefore prepare for bloody war;  
These kegs must all be routed,  
Or surely we despised shall be,  
And British courage doubted."

The royal band now ready stand,  
All ranged in dread array, sir,  
With stomach stout, to see it out  
And make a bloody day, sir.

The cannons roar from shore  
to shore,  
The small arms make a rattle;  
Since wars began, I'm sure no man  
Ere saw so strange a battle....

The kegs, 'tis said, though  
strongly made  
Of rebel staves and hoops, sir,  
Could not oppose their powerful foes,  
The conquering British troops, sir.

From morn till night, these men of  
might  
Displayed amazing courage;  
And when the sun was fairly down,  
Retired to sup their porridge.

An hundred men, with each a pen,  
Or more, upon my word, sir,  
It is most true would be too few  
Their valor to record, sir.

Such feats did they perform that day  
Against those wicked kegs, sir,  
That years to come, if they get home,  
They'll make their boasts and  
brags, sir.

## *Q&A* ~

**Comprehension Question:** Why is this story being retold? Why did they decide to make it a "harmonious ditty?"

**NIE Activity:** Songs and poems are often written about interesting events, just as "The Battle of the Kegs" humorously depicts a plot devised by the colonists to fight the British. Look through the newspaper for an interesting story. Write a brief poem or pick a simple tune and write some lyrics that describe the story you chose. Try to add a bit of humor to your poem or song.

**Essay Question:** The attack described in the song would be considered a terrorist attack today. Were the conspirators terrorists?

**Serialized Story Guide for Teachers, Students and Parents:**  
[www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html)

Designed by Terry Bellucci

## *Next week* ~ Chapter 8

**Good Ideas in Print Shaped a Nation** Paine's ideas are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Read more about Thomas Paine: [www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html)