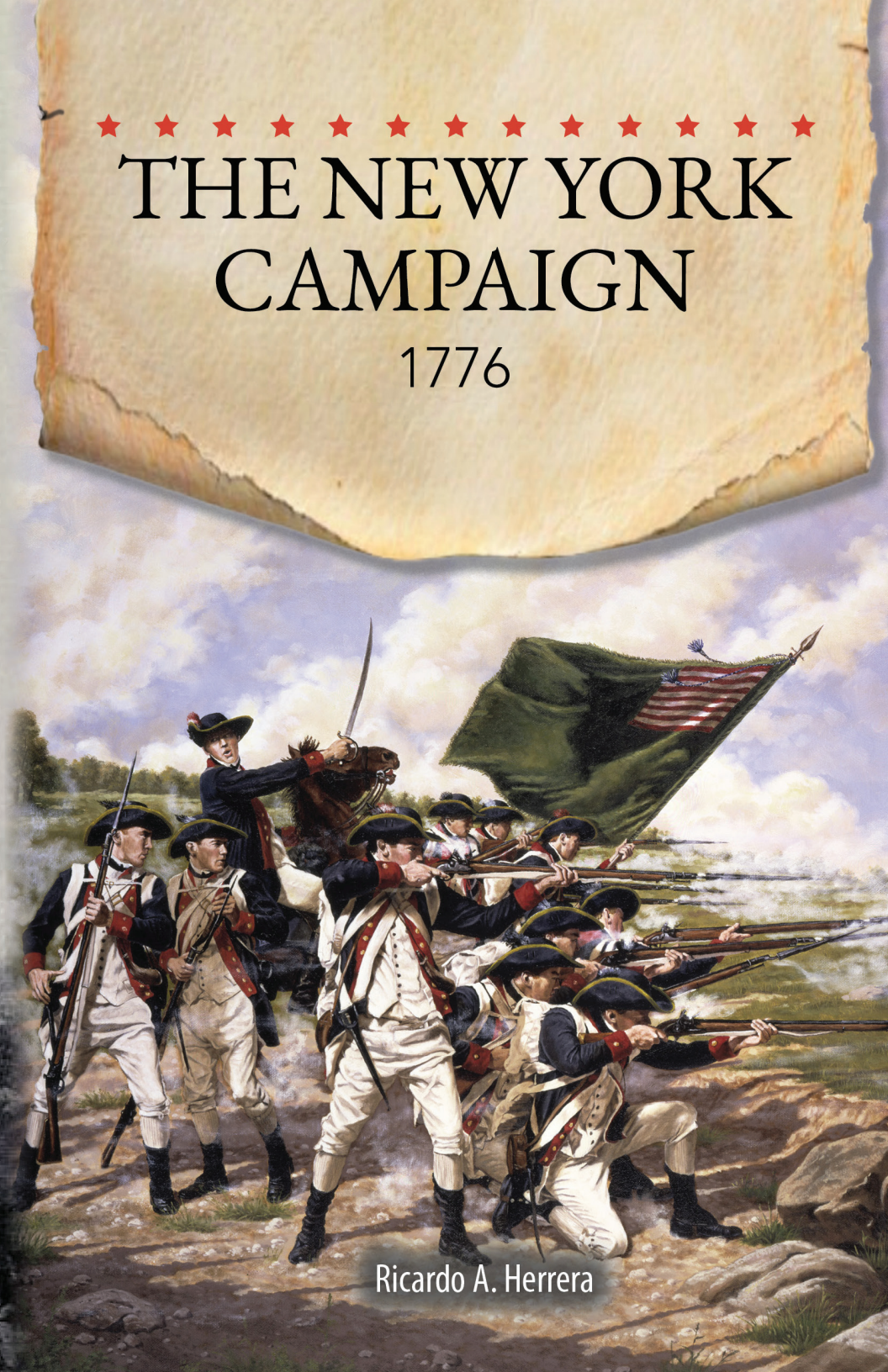
THE NEW YORK CAMPAIGN

1776



Ricardo A. Herrera

The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

Series Editors
David W. Hogan Jr.
Joseph A. Seymour
Jonathan D. Bratten

Opening Shots in the Colonies, 1775–1776
The Canadian Campaign, 1775–1776
The New York Campaign, 1776
The New Jersey Campaign, 1776–1777
The Philadelphia Campaign, 1777
The Saratoga Campaign, 1777
Valley Forge to Monmouth, 1778
The War in the North, 1778–1781
The Frontier War, 1775–1783
The War in the South, 1778–1780
The War in the Carolinas and Georgia, 1781–1782
The War in Virginia, 1781
Securing Victory, 1781–1783

To read other titles in this series, visit https://history.army.mil.

ISBN: 978-1-959302-21-6

Cover: *The Battle of Long Island,* Domenick D'Andrea, ca. 2004, a National Guard Heritage Painting, courtesy of the National Guard Bureau

The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

THE NEW YORK CAMPAIGN, 1776

by
Ricardo A. Herrera

Center of Military History
United States Army
Washington, D.C., 2025

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Herrera, Ricardo A. (Associate professor) author | Center of Military History issuing body
Title: The New York campaign, 1776 / by Ricardo A. Herrera.
Other titles: U.S. Army campaigns of the Revolutionary War
Description: Washington, D.C. : Center of Military History, United States Army, 2025. | Series: The U.S. Army campaigns of the Revolutionary War | In scope of the U.S. Government Publishing Office Cataloging and Indexing Program (C&I); Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) distribution status to be determined upon publication. | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025018830 (print) | LCCN 2025018831 (ebook) | ISBN 9781959302216 paperback | ISBN 9781959302216 Adobe pdf.
Subjects: LCSH: New York (State)--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--Campaigns | New York (N.Y.)--History--Revolution, 1775-1783 | Hudson River Valley (N.Y. and N.J.)--History, Military--18th century | United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--Strategic aspects | United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--British forces
Classification: LCC E230.5.N4 (print) | LCC E230.5.N4 (ebook) | DDC 974.703--dc23/eng/20250515
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025018830
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025018831

CMH Pub 71–44

CONTENTS

Maps

Note: We have retained the original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation in quoted materials.

INTRODUCTION

As America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War, it is a perfect time to reflect on the revolutionary generation. In the two-and-a-half centuries since the war, the United States has grappled with the complexities and paradoxes of its revolution. How could a nation be born from the idea that all men are created equal, and yet deny much of that freedom to many of its citizens? How should a central federal government balance power with state governments? Could those thirteen fractious colonies merge into one nation? The seeds of what would become our country's future political and military conflicts lie in these complexities, as do some of our greatest national accomplishments.

This milestone anniversary is also an appropriate time to reflect on the history of the United States Army. The Army stands as our first truly national institution, having been established by the Continental Congress on 14 June 1775. General George Washington's ability to meld the soldiers of the various colonies together into one national force provided an example to the rest of the country that national unity was possible. If the Army failed to overcome the regional sectionalism prevalent at the time, it would fall to superior British resources and organization. If the Army failed, the nation would fail. Washington gave us the precedent of military subordination to the civil authority, one of the core tenets of our political tradition and way of life. At the end of the war, he resigned his commission and voluntarily gave up all his power to return to civil life. His example has inspired us as a model of military and political leadership for generations.

The Massachusetts militiamen who fired the first shots of the war on 19 April 1775 had no blueprint for creating a nation—nor did many think that the conflict would result in a drive for independence. Deep-seated colonial resentments over their rights as English citizens had been simmering since before the 1750s. As the British Parliament enacted even more restrictive laws, peaceful protests turned to military organization, and finally open violence. As New England formed its Army of Observation in the wake of the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress saw the need for a national army.

For eight long years, the Continental Army maintained itself in the field, despite fighting superior odds, starvation, diminished resources, and divided leadership. Setbacks in the New York Campaign of 1776 nearly destroyed Washington's army as the British drove it into Pennsylvania. Yet as 1777 opened, Washington changed the operational situation by seizing the initiative in a series of tactical victories at Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey. That fall, a British invasion into northern New York met with failure and capture at the hands of the Northern Army and militia at Saratoga, ultimately bringing France into war on the side of the United States. At the same time, Washington kept a British army penned up in Philadelphia while he instituted a training regimen for his army at their encampment in Valley Forge that winter. Trained under the tutelage of German-born Frederick von Steuben, the Continentals harried the British out of Philadelphia and back to New York City, fighting like regulars at Monmouth in 1778.

General Washington faced the challenge of countering British victories at Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, when the British shifted the war south in 1778, while also containing powerful British forces in Canada and New York City. Relying on skilled subordinates such as Anthony Wayne, Nathanael Greene, and the Marquis de Lafayette—all of whom in turn worked closely with state militia—Washington was able to hold the delicate balance of power in both the northern and southern theaters. Seizing the opportunity presented by his French allies, Washington quickly shifted a large portion of his army from New York City to Yorktown,

Virginia. There, the allies laid siege to another British army, forcing it to capitulate in the fall of 1781. Although this victory sounded the death knell for British control of the American colonies, peace talks would last for two more years. During this time, Washington kept an army in the field, maintained the supremacy of civil authority over the military, and presented a credible threat to the remaining British garrisons. When the peace came, the true architects of the revolution's success were the Continental Army, state troops, and the militia.

The Revolutionary War created the model for our modern Army. It set the stage for what eventually would become a three-component force, with the Continentals and militia operating in complementary roles. Today, thirty-four National Guard units can trace their lineage to the Revolutionary War, which is a testament to their role in the formation of this country. Eight army branches also have their beginnings in the revolution. The U.S. Army's very motto, "This We'll Defend," is rooted in the "self-evident" truths enunciated in the Declaration of Independence and American interpretations of Enlightenment traditions, which came together in the seal for the Board of War and Ordnance and became the Department of the Army seal in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, it also would take until the twentieth century for the U.S. Army to be as racially integrated as its Continental Army forebears.

The traditions begun and precedents set by Washington and his soldiers continue to influence the U.S. Army and causes around the world. The seeds of hope shown at Trenton and Princeton have inspired leaders in other dark times, such as Bull Run, Shiloh, and Kasserine Pass. The revolutionary generation taught us that the true strength of our Army is our people; from the frontline soldiers to the camp followers who sustained the regiments. And it is to these individuals, who forged ahead through privation and misery to final victory and who rarely received any greater recognition in their own lifetimes than the simple epitaph "A Soldier of the Revolution," that these volumes are humbly dedicated.

CHARLES R. BOWERY JR.
Executive Director

THE NEW YORK CAMPAIGN, 1776

The opening battles of Lexington and Concord had been impromptu affairs with unforetold consequences. New England militiamen and British soldiers alike had no idea that they had fired the opening shots in a war for American independence. By the summer of 1776, however, both Americans and Britons recognized the greater implications of what was at stake—colonial independence and the creation of the first republic in the modern era, or colonial submission to imperial rule. There was no middle ground in the contest, no room for compromise. Two years earlier, King George III had opined to Prime Minister Frederick, Lord North, that "the dye is now cast, the Colonies must either submit or triumph." He later predicted that "blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this Country or independent." Although the king had been writing about the colonial protests following the 1774 Coercive Acts, better known to Americans as the Intolerable Acts, his words proved prescient. The blows struck in the New York Campaign were among the first struck by the newly declared "free and independent [United]

STATES" of America. Establishing American independence and the country's "peace and safety," as General George Washington wrote, "depends . . . solely on the success of our arms."

STRATEGIC SETTING

The New York Campaign of 1776 was the centerpiece of Great Britain's war to subdue the American rebellion. As Britain's main effort, it was the last best chance at quashing the nascent movement for American independence before the spirit of revolution and rebellion spread and deepened throughout the colonies. British planning for the larger campaign of 1776 was comprehensive in concept and grand in scope, but poorly resourced and haltingly executed. The British plans spanned the Atlantic seaboard. (*See Map 1.*) They included the *Royal Navy*'s blockade of the American coast, an invasion southward from Canada into the Hudson River Valley, and one northward from New York City into the valley. Britain's strategic leaders envisioned smaller efforts in the southern colonies but focused on New York. It was there that an army of 30,000 soldiers would land, destroy the Continental Army in battle, and seize the city. In the wake of military victory would come the return of peace and order within the empire. All this and more brought British arms to New York.

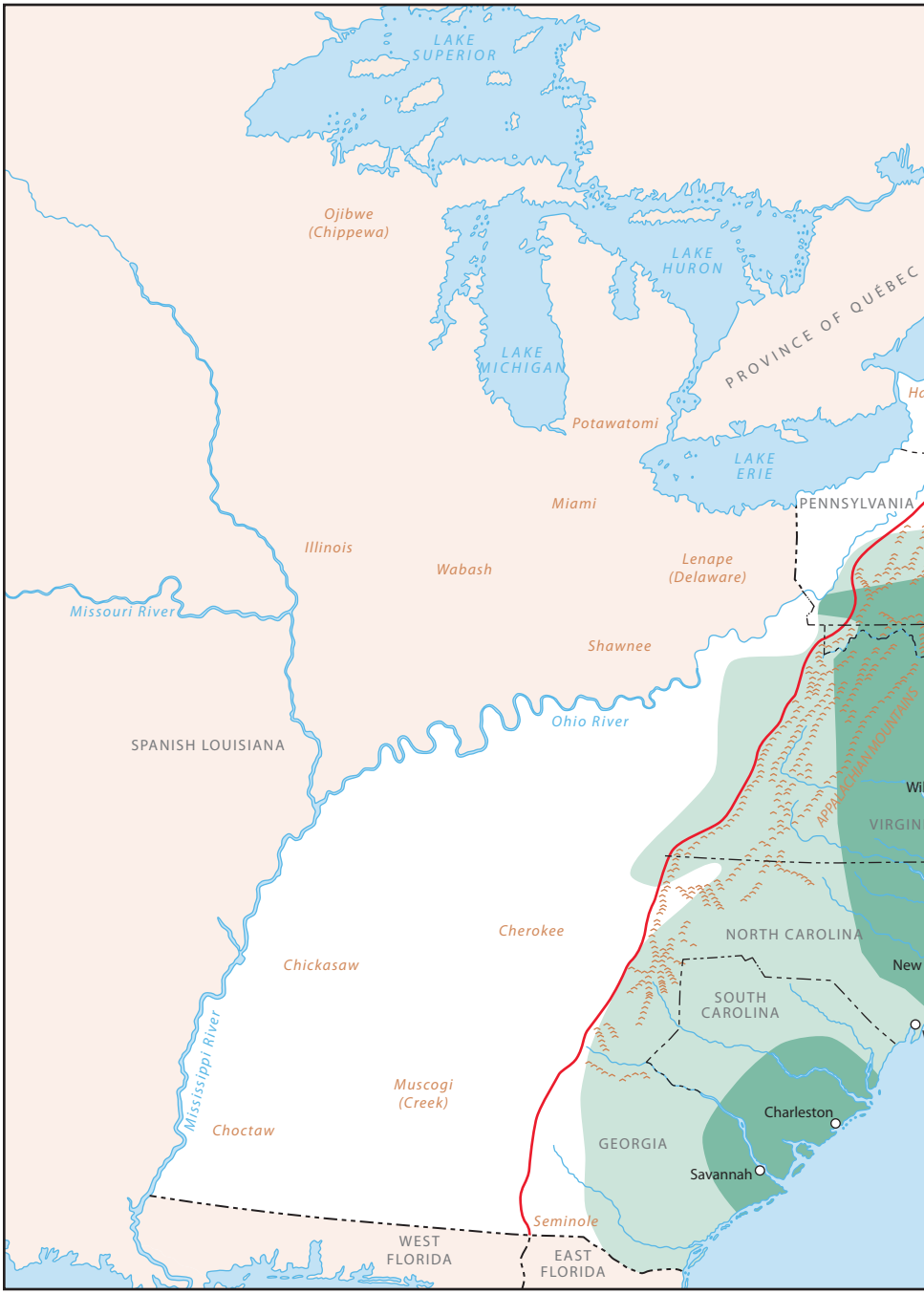
Lord George Germain, the colonial secretary, was the chief architect of Britain's strategy. Like other British political and military leaders, Germain misunderstood the nature of the American rebellion and how best to suppress it. He was not alone. Advised by the First Lord of the Admiralty, George Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, Germain sought a military solution for what in retrospect was an

intractable political problem. White British North Americans were among the freest, least taxed, and most lightly governed people on earth, but their societies had reached political maturity and were on the cusp of attaining economic maturity. Many British Americans resented Parliament's restrictions on western migration into Native American lands. They bristled at Parliament's assertion of "virtual representation" and persistent stance on taxation. American colonists no longer could be restrained from grasping at the next stage: political independence. Even with Britain's best efforts to stall this momentum, no measure of success could last for long.

Two of the realm's most experienced senior officers shouldered the responsibilities of executing British strategy in the New York Campaign: General William Howe, commander in chief of the British army in America, and his elder brother V. Adm. Richard, 4th Viscount Howe, commander in chief of the *Royal Navy* in North America.[1] General Howe had served in Canada during the French and Indian War, and then in Cuba. His brother had commanded expeditions against French coastal posts and during the Battle of Quiberon Bay in the Seven Years' War. Both were well-connected at court, and both sought advancement. Where other senior officers had refused command in the war, the Howes sought it. Ambitions aside, for Germain, Sandwich, the Howe brothers, and others, there was a campaign to win, a war to fight, a rebellion to quell, and a victory to secure. As for the Americans, their task seemed nearly as formidable.

The Revolutionary War had ignited in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, on 19 April 1775. Massachusetts militia and the king's troops had exchanged fire on Lexington Green, at the North Bridge in Concord, and along Menotomy road, all the way back to Boston. Following the bloody and harrowing encounter, New England's colonial militia laid siege to the British garrison in Boston and events quickened.

1. William Howe and several other officers, including Henry Clinton, held the local rank (brevet) of general in North America.


LAKE SUPERIOR
Ojibwe (Chippewa)
LAKE HURON
LAKE MICHIGAN
PROVINCE OF QUÉBEC
Potawatomi
LAKE ERIE
PENNSYLVANIA
Miami
Illinois
Wabash
Lenape (Delaware)
Missouri River
Shawnee
Ohio River
SPANISH LOUISIANA
APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS
VIRGIN
Cherokee
NORTH CAROLINA
Chickasaw
SOUTH CAROLINA
Mississippi River
Muscogi (Creek)
Charleston
Choctaw
GEORGIA
Savannah
Seminole
WEST FLORIDA
EAST FLORIDA

Map 1


QUÉBEC
NOVA SCOTIA
Wabanaki
Wyandot
MASSACHUSETTS
(MAINE)
Halifax
Montréal
LAKE
CHAMPLAIN
Ticonderoga
Falmouth
LAKE
ONTARIO
NEW
YORK
NEW
HAMPSHIRE
Portsmouth
udenosaunee
(Iroquois)
Albany
Boston
MASSACHUSETTS
Providence
Hartford
Newport
RHODE
ISLAND
CONNECTICUT
Lenape
New York
Trenton
Philadelphia
Baltimore
NEW
JERSEY
Dover
DELAWARE
Oxford
lliamsburg
Norfolk
ATLANTIC
OCEAN
Bern
Wilmington
BRITISH COLONIES
NORTH AMERICA
1775
Proclamation Line of 1763
Cherokee
American Indian Tribal Area
Colonial Population
>40 inhabitants per sq mile
16–40 inhabitants per sq mile
2–15 inhabitants per sq mile
Sparsely Populated
0
70
Miles

After the arrival of reinforcements that spring, British troops under the command of General Howe attacked colonial fortifications on Breeds Hill, which overlooked Charlestown and Boston. In a series of attacks on 17 June 1775, the British assaults drove off the American defenders and seized Breeds Hill and nearby Bunker Hill. Victory came at a steep price. One third of the 3,000 British soldiers and marines who repeatedly attacked the American positions lay dead or wounded in a Pyrrhic victory. Howe made it through the attacks physically unscathed. None of his staff, however, survived. The disturbing memory of the battle and its butcher's bill would linger in Howe's mind.

Following the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Americans tightened their hold on Boston, yet the British failed to stir. In the meantime, General George Washington arrived at the main American encampment at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in July. The Second Continental Congress had appointed him commander in chief of all Continental forces on 15 June. The day prior, 14 June, it had created the Continental Army and adopted the besieging New England militia, the Army of Observation, as part of it. In October, Howe replaced Lt. Gen. Thomas Gage as commander of the British army, and in January 1776 he received the local rank of general. Three months later, Lt. Gen. Henry Clinton and 1,500 soldiers set sail for the Carolinas with orders to join forces with troops sailing from Ireland. Clinton had orders to support a loyalist uprising and to seize a port for future operations.

While Clinton sailed southward, Col. Henry Knox, a one-time Boston bookseller and self-educated artillerist, led a column of soldiers transporting the "Noble Train of Artillery"—cannons and mortars seized from the former British post at Fort Ticonderoga, New York—over water and land to Massachusetts. Knox's artillery train reached Cambridge in January. On 4 March, Continental soldiers fortified Dorchester Heights outside the city of Boston and then emplaced Knox's guns. Artillery in the westernmost battery was able to range Boston whereas guns in the eastern battery could fire upon the main shipping channel. In the face of these threats, on 17 March the *Royal Navy* evacuated

the army and a number of loyalists from Boston. The war entered a new phase.

American Strategic Considerations

The Americans had no difficulty determining where Britain's blow would land next: New York was the obvious answer. Yet even with that knowledge, the questions of when and how best to defend against the coming attack and the larger strategy that would guide American efforts were altogether different matters. The mechanisms of creating grand strategy in the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia or in the British government ministries in London revealed much about American and British political and military thought, processes, and organization. Unlike their modern-day counterparts in the United States or British governments, neither the American congressional committees overseeing the direction of the war nor the policymakers in Westminster had any real sense of collective responsibility or strong executive leadership. In both cases, strategic decision-making often was a matter of negotiation. Specialized bodies akin to modern military staffs did not exist in either army. None of these observations, however, are a criticism. Britain had waged a global war from 1754 to 1763, and in the end had done so credibly.

Congress and General Washington considered five possible strategies against Britain, and throughout the war employed all of them at one time or another. The first was waging an economic war at sea through privateers preying on merchant shipping. A strategy of the weak, attacking merchant vessels directly affected the commercial classes and shipowners, but not the landed gentry or aristocrats who held power in Parliament. The second option was a Fabian strategy: a long, slow, grinding war of attrition whereby American armies would eschew battle except on their own terms. It took its name from a statesman and general of the Roman Republic who had employed these tactics against an invading foreign foe. Brig. Gen. Horatio Gates, the Continental Army's adjutant general and a former British officer, favored this approach. Avoiding battle,

attacking only the weakest or most vulnerable elements of the enemy, and wearing down Britain's will to wage war made sense for an inexperienced American force facing a better-trained and better-equipped enemy, but it risked the loss of popular and political support. Without the people's support, a people's war was impossible.

Waging a partisan war offered a third option. Rather than fighting conventionally, small bands of irregular forces would raid British posts and attack isolated garrisons and detachments. Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, like Gates a one-time British officer, called for this approach. Although this scheme played to some American strengths, it risked increased lawlessness and a breakdown of societal order. Elites feared that reassembling the prerevolutionary social order would be a difficult, even impossible task. Like the Fabian strategy, a partisan war would take time and risked losing popular and political support.

Washington favored creating a strong Continental Army and conducting a defensive war, despite his inclination to bring the enemy to battle through his own offensive actions. By forcing the enemy to attack Continental and militia forces behind stout fortifications, as they had at Bunker Hill, the Americans could inflict maximum damage on their opponents with minimal loss of life or expenditure of scarce resources. Yet as tempting as this approach was, it presumed that the enemy forces would be unthinking and easily duped.

Finally, there was a more opportunistic and fluid method that combined offensive and defensive elements as necessary. It required maintaining a strong army, defending strategic points against the British, and striking out against the enemy when opportunities beckoned. Washington gravitated toward this type of compromise approach. Nonetheless, whatever strategy Washington followed, he would need the support of the Continental Congress and the Board of War.

On 13 June 1776, Congress created the five-member Board of War, chaired by John Adams of Massachusetts. Edward Rutledge of South Carolina, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, James Wilson of Pennsylvania, and Benjamin Harrison of Virginia served on this

board. Their responsibilities included drawing up the Army's first articles of war; maintaining a roster of Continental Army officers; and keeping an account of Continental firearms, artillery, ammunition, and other military stores and overseeing their care. They also had to manage communications between the Congress, the Army, and the colonies (and later, the states); handle and distribute funds for the Army's use; supervise the recruiting and equipping of Continental Army forces; care for prisoners of war; deal with spies; and, finally, direct the larger movements of the Army.

The board's geographic composition reflected the nature of the American cause and confederation. It was an alliance between nascent autonomous republics, each jealous of its rights and prerogatives, each suspicious of military power and its threat to liberty. The duties, however, were too much for the five members, each of whom served on other committees and were also full-time delegates whose records of attendance and participation in Congress varied. Not one of them had any experience in crafting or directing military strategy. Yet Britain also struggled in fashioning a strategy to put down the rebellion and restore order and a measure of harmony within the fractious colonies. Britain's challenge was the more difficult. Whereas the rebellious Americans had to avoid losing, Britain had to win a war and impose, or at least negotiate, a lasting peace.

British Strategic Considerations

Great Britain had the advantage of having long-established offices for war and the admiralty. Both had experienced and skillful administrators at their heads. Furthermore, they also had the organizational and institutional structures essential to waging war, including the treasury, ordnance, victualling, arsenals, navy yards, and myriad clerks experienced in making contracts with those who supplied the vast needs of British soldiers and sailors. This experience and expertise, however, did not always translate into efficiency. The bureaucracies were hidebound, and decision-making was complex and even convoluted.

The process of fashioning strategy exposed the strengths and weaknesses of the eighteenth-century British system. Ministers, who sat in the House of Commons and were responsible to their own electorates or patrons, or hereditary peers sitting in the House of Lords, proposed policies as individuals rather than in concert with their fellow ministers. The prime minister, Lord North, was but the first among equals in the cabinet. Hence, North's fellow ministers conceived approaches to quashing the rebellion independent of any guiding hand or coordinating authority. North was amiable, intelligent, and a gifted speaker with a large parliamentary following. He therefore had the support to secure the votes necessary to enact government policies, but he was not a strong leader. Moreover, he had a longstanding personal relationship with King George III that both enabled and constrained him. Their friendship and personal history acted against North's later wish to quit the government.

Most British decision-makers in the ministry believed that the country would prevail in the war. In 1775, ministers, their parliamentary allies, and most of the generals and admirals drew upon selective memories of the poor performance of colonial soldiers in the previous war against France and its native allies. Militia and longer-serving provincials, they remembered, were slovenly, undisciplined, poorly trained, indifferently armed and equipped, mutinous, litigious, and apathetic. They rarely were willing to venture far from their homes and were inclined to desert at the first chance. British officers frequently spoke ill of the colonists' lack of combat prowess, and preferred that Americans act in labor or security roles. Britons' blinkered views ignored a number of key factors: the changed circumstances of 1776, the remarkable performance of a handful of units such as the ranging companies, or the much larger context of the revolution and soldiers' motives for fighting. The Revolutionary War was a people's war, something for which British strategists had no recent point of reference. Moreover, it was a civil war within the empire, pitting Britons against British Americans, and British Americans against their fellow colonists.

Within North's ministry, members had divided opinions on how best to solve the problem; quash the rebellion; and restore peace,

order, and tranquility in the colonies. Negotiations would follow. Ministerial positions on strategy ran the gamut from a vigorous prosecution of the war to some sort of negotiated settlement. All agreed that the *Royal Navy*'s command of the sea would strangle the colonial economies and starve the Americans of the much-needed materials of war like muskets, artillery, gunpowder, ammunition, uniforms, and shoes. For many years, various acts of Parliament had prohibited Americans from manufacturing finished goods, and the British leadership believed that without these vital supplies the colonists' ability to wage war would be short-lived. Most British politicians, generals, and admirals assumed that the war would be confined to North America, and the only combatants would be Britons, loyalists, rebels, and perhaps allied Native American nations.

The Earl of Sandwich, a long-serving and capable First Lord of the Admiralty (1771–1782), was the civilian head of the *Royal Navy*. He favored a land campaign to crush the rebellion, as he was concerned about the navy's imperial commitments and the high taxes required to maintain them, as well as the country's maritime defenses against revanchist France. His arrogance and ignorance regarding Americans' fighting qualities was almost a caricature of the extremes of British hubris. Although an able and experienced naval administrator, Sandwich's understanding, appreciation, and framing of the war left much to be desired.

William Barrington, 2nd Viscount Barrington, the Secretary at War (1765–1778), held diametrically differing views to Sandwich. In his position, Barrington was responsible for overseeing the supply and administrative functioning of the army. Paradoxically, he favored a maritime strategy. Instead of a land war, he believed in a slower but (in his view) less costly and more effective attritional strategy that favored Britain's military and economic power. He called for an increase in the size of the army to hold strategic points and launch raids against American military, economic, port, and supply centers.

In the end, crafting strategy was the purview of Germain, the former Lord George Sackville. As a lieutenant general in the British

army during the Seven Years' War, Sackville had been cashiered (dismissed from his position) and court-martialed for disobedience during the Battle of Minden on 1 August 1759. His road to redemption from the disgrace of his conviction and dismissal was a long and unsuccessful one, until the death of a wealthy acquaintance enabled him to inherit a fortune and assume a new name. Now styled Lord George Germain, his views were consonant with hardline members of the ministry. In his view, nothing less than complete submission by the rebellious Americans would suffice. Thereafter, negotiations about colonial rights and imperial policies might proceed.

For most of the struggle, from November 1775 through February 1782, Germain oversaw the direction of Britain's war in America from London—a distance of more than 3,000 nautical miles. Depending on the wind and weather conditions, it might take six weeks for messages to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Germain was fortunate that the only seaborne threat to those extended lines of communications in 1776 came from American privateers, individual states' navies, and the small Continental Navy.

Without an overall commander of British forces in America, it was vital that the commanders of Britain's ground and naval forces trusted each other, willingly consulted with each other, and cooperated in planning and acting. All of these considerations were doubly important in terms of the relationship between the Howe brothers and Germain. To wage war at a long distance, trust and broad orders affording a significant amount of operational latitude would be critical to success. Common sense, the lengthy time required for information to travel, and the vulnerable nature of written-letter-based communications dictated as much. Hence, the good fortune in having the Howe brothers serving together promised cooperation between naval and military forces. Yet the brothers, especially General Howe, were more comfortable as tactical or theater commanders. Strategy, in the sense of translating military actions into the ways of attaining political ends, escaped them.

Creating strategy was a process of proposals and negotiations among Germain, Sandwich, North, the Howes, and importantly the sovereign. Ultimately, Germain was responsible for making the

final decisions, but he also recognized that he had to give distant commanders a measure of latitude and discretion in modifying and carrying out plans and attaining the objectives he set. Germain was too experienced a former soldier to expect anything else, although he did have definite ideas of what he wanted, and he expected the Howes to adhere to them. In his view, shared by Sandwich, the rebellion had to be stamped out quickly and in a single campaign. Britain could not afford to wage a war of attrition.

The colonial secretary carefully weighed Britain's strategic situation. He believed that a single victorious campaign would preclude French entry into the war. By winning quickly and decisively, Britain would gain a crucial edge in negotiations with the defeated rebels; minimize the manpower, material, and monetary drains on the realm; and preserve the kingdom's status in the European order. Like George III, Germain believed that losing the war and the colonies would drive Britain out of the first tier of European powers, such as France and Russia, and into the second tier of European powers alongside Spain and the Dutch Republic—a humiliation.

Tactically astute and informed by years of experience, the Howes were perhaps one of the strongest and best prepared command teams in early modern British military history. However, the brothers faced a difficult task, further complicated by their reticence at waging war as envisioned by Germain. Their commissions allowed them to accept American submission, but not negotiate the terms of peace. Neither Howe was keen to wage war against fellow subjects, yet both were eager to assume their commands. General Howe had served alongside Americans in the Seven Years' War, and both brothers were fond of the colonists. Although the two British commanders might have wished to have had negotiating powers, their lack of authority in this regard did not inhibit their planning or performance. Once they had received their orders, the Howe brothers set about preparing for their mission in their own way.

No other place beckoned British arms as did New York City. Indeed, no other location shared its advantages. The city's housing, wharves, and warehouses promised quarters for soldiers, dry storage for supplies, and safe anchorages for warships, transports,

and victualers from Great Britain and Ireland. Moreover, the Hudson River, which emptied into the Atlantic Ocean through the harbor, offered a south-to-north riverine line of advance and communications. Three drawbacks, however, limited the city's full potential. First, it lacked the dockyards and the extensive repair facilities necessary for ships' maintenance. Second, the bar at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, was a mixed blessing. Ships that intended to cross it needed pilots familiar with the tides and channels. Hence, the bar protected the harbor from a direct attack by enemy warships even as it limited easy sailing by British shipping. Finally, in the winter, the harbor froze. Newport, Rhode Island, which did not freeze, offered much easier shipping approaches, but its out-of-the-way location and significant lack of adequate housing, wharves, and warehouses limited its utility and relegated it to a secondary status. New York was a far better position from which to subdue the American rebellion and restore British rule.

Another aspect of New York that made it attractive to British eyes was the perceived presence of a strong contingent of loyalists. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, royal governors had reported to the colonial secretary that the protests and other disturbances emanating from their colonies were the work of a handful of agitators, and that most British subjects were loyal to the Crown. All they needed to rally in defense of the king's standard was a show of force by British soldiers, which would inspire the loyalists to rise up on behalf of George III.

In the British ministry's eyes, the cancer of rebellion was spreading out from New England, and Boston was its source. Other towns, cities, and colonies were in rebellion, but none so much as Boston or for so long. Only by blockading American ports, and then severing New England's north-south line of communications along the Richelieu River–Lake Champlain–Lake George–Hudson River corridor with the colonies west and south, could the British excise the cancer. Physical and commercial isolation coupled with swift, destructive strikes into New England would prevent the uprising from spreading and further inflaming the rest of British North America.

***A Plan of the City and Environs of New York in North America*, ca. 1776 (*Library of Congress*)**

By seizing New York and building a stronghold from which to advance northward, British arms would establish control along the Hudson River with subsidiary posts and riverine and ranging patrols launched by the army and navy. British planning envisioned a similar strike, albeit southward, from Canada along the Richelieu River–Lake Champlain–Lake George line that would link up with the New York–based column. Retaking posts like Crown Point on the western shore of Lake Champlain and Fort Ticonderoga to its south would provide ready-made positions for British columns and patrols to plunge into New England and from which they might supply Native American allies.

Together, British forces would isolate New England, raise native allies and loyalist auxiliaries, and raid into the region's interior. Britain's hard hand of war would bring New England to proper submission and would compel Americans in general to recognize parliamentary supremacy. With this in mind, Britain's political and military leaders planned for the 1776 campaign.

The Armies

Although the war in America had stretched the British army to the breaking point, King George III was unwilling to authorize raising new regiments. One of the reasons for this reluctance had to do with the purchase system then commonly in use in the British army, through which individuals could buy officers' commissions in certain army units. The king felt that the creation of additional commissions for officers in the newly raised formations would reduce the value of commissions in older established regiments, which would be a problem for the service when the war ended and Britain needed to reduce the size of its military. Moreover, George disliked the long-term effects of the purchase system, as it required the Crown to budget a certain amount of revenue to keep officers on "half-pay" status when their regiments were not in active service.

Britain's need for soldiers forced it to reach out to foreign courts and negotiate the hiring of auxiliaries from other rulers' militaries to augment its army, a common practice in early modern Europe. After Catherine the Great, tsarina of Russia, refused British diplomats' request for soldiers from the Imperial Russian Army, British officials signed agreements with a number of German states for 30,000 additional soldiers. The rulers of Anhalt-Zerbst, Ansbach-Bayreuth, Braunschweig, Hesse-Kassel, Hesse-Hanau, and Waldeck hired out their soldiers for service abroad. Because the two states of Hesse provided most of the German forces, these auxiliaries who supplemented Britain's redcoats collectively became known as "Hessians." The German troops were not quite allies to the British: as auxiliaries, German soldiers answered to their own generals, and the German generals answered to the British generals but ultimately maintained their existing allegiances to the German princes. Although these German soldiers had been hired out by their rulers who profited from the soldier trade, they remained in service to their own governments; contrary to American myth, they were not "mercenaries" in this conflict.

Following the British army's evacuation of Boston in March 1776, it sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia. There, its new commander,

General Howe, instituted a drill regimen that trained soldiers in light infantry tactics. Rather than restricting light infantry drill to the light companies of the infantry regiments, Howe ensured that all British infantry units learned light infantry practices that would prove invaluable in the war. The new regimen allowed for a faster rate of advance from the 75 steps per minute necessary to maintain alignment to 120 steps or more. It also enabled them to advance with muskets trailing, a practice in which soldiers would grasp the barrel and stock of the musket with the right hand and trail it a few inches above the ground, which allowed for much faster movement when shouldering arms. The British army was anything but an automaton. It was a thinking, adaptive, flexible, and agile fighting force. Yet Howe was not alone in initiating reforms. On the American side, Washington's task was far greater. He had to create a continental army—a unified, rationally organized force.

Congress gave Washington great latitude in organizing the army. The militia had done yeoman work, but as Washington noted, a reliance upon the militia posed problems for the army. Militia soldiers, particularly the New Englanders, may have been skilled in combat, but their discipline was lax and their enlistments were of short duration. Washington proposed recruiting beyond New England to expand the geographic composition of the army. Expanding the recruiting would not only make the army more continental in nature but would also increase the number of capable officers. Besides the army composition, Washington, with help from his senior commanders and staff officers, agreed upon the desired size of the Main Army: the contingent under Washington's direct command. They settled on a minimum of 20,000 soldiers organized in 26 standardized infantry regiments of 8 companies, mustering 640 soldiers, 32 officers, and 32 sergeants each. Artillery, riflemen, and light dragoons were separate units with different organizations. These Continental units largely resembled their British counterparts. Congress approved the organizational changes and authorized Washington to begin recruiting soldiers for a new Continental Army. These soldiers' enlistments would terminate on 31 December 1776.

As far as staffs went, each general would have a "military family": a group of personally chosen secretaries and aides-de-camp who copied and transmitted orders and served as the general's eyes and ears. Adjutants general, quartermasters general, commissaries general, and their deputies and assistants aided with the armies' staff work in administering, supplying, and feeding soldiers, and in selecting quarters or areas for encampments. Civilians often filled other staff positions. They served as purchasing and distributing agents for foodstuffs, forage, and fodder, and supplied clothing, leather goods, and other necessities, even to the point of providing food and clothing for prisoners of war. When it came to planning operations or analyzing intelligence, those burdens fell upon the shoulders of the commanding general, sometimes shared with a handful of trustworthy officers. By way of comparison, a modern infantry division has a larger staff than the entirety of the Continental or British armies' staffs combined in 1776. These personal staffs were not permanent, nor indeed were large formations.

OPERATIONS

In February 1776, Maj. Gen. Charles Lee assumed responsibility for the defense of New York City. (*See Map 2.*) Lee, a former British officer, had years of experience spanning wars in North America, Portugal, and Poland. Of the four original major generals commissioned by the Continental Congress, he was third in seniority, preceded by Washington and Maj. Gen. Artemas Ward of Massachusetts. Lee faced a Herculean task. Long reliant upon the *Royal Navy*'s wooden walls for its protection, the city's defenses were woefully lacking. The tumbledown walls of the ill-supplied and undergunned Fort George,

which sat at the southern tip of Manhattan, were decrepit to say the least. To face New York's former guardians now turned enemies, Lee had to lay out the defenses for a city whose chief virtue—seaborne access—was now its chief liability. Without a navy, his task was even more difficult. Indeed, it was impossible, and Lee recognized this fact.

The island of Manhattan was just under 13 miles long, running southwest to northeast, and around 2 miles east to west at its widest point. With modern fill and the extension of the waterfront, it is slightly larger today. At its southern tip sat New York, which was less than 1 square mile in extent. Its population of about 25,000 made it the second largest city in British North America. The city sat a few feet above sea level, its waterfront lined with wharves, warehouses, ships' chandlers, ropewalks, shipyards, and more. To the northeast, the gentle landscape gave way to farmland and then broken terrain dotted with hills. Present-day Central Park was forested, rocky, and crosscut by ravines. At the northern edge, this rugged terrain gave way to the Plains of Harlem. Along its western edge, overlooking the plains and the Hudson River, were Harlem Heights, a narrow spit of high ground surrounded on three sides by water.

The Hudson (or North) River, a tidal estuary, bounded Manhattan along its west, and the East River, a tidal estuary that is the western extension of the Long Island Sound, ran along the eastern edge and the northern shore of Long Island. At the northern tip of Manhattan, the Harlem River met the East River at Hell Gate, a constricted tidal strait known for its whirlpools, fierce tides, and difficult navigation. The Harlem River narrowed north of Hell Gate, to form the Spuyten Duyvil—Spitting Devil—a narrow, winding stretch of water where the Hudson and East Rivers met and formed the northern extent of the island. King's Bridge and the road to White Plains led northward, through Westchester, the present-day Bronx.

Lee surveyed the area and began selecting dominant terrain to fortify and maximize the range of the artillery. He intended to make the battle for New York as painful and costly as possible for the British. He examined constricted points along the rivers where batteries and obstacles might channelize, slow, or even block the


NEW JERSEY
Scralenberg
Hackensack
Bergen
Spuyten Duyvil
Hudson River
Manhattan Island
East River
Paulus Hook
New York City
Governor's Island
Brooklyn
Eastchester
CANADA
Lake Champlain
Westchester
Morrisania
Harlem
Crown Point
Fort Ticonderoga
Lake George
Whitstown
Flushing
Newtown
Bushwick
Hudson River
Bedford
Long Island
Flatbush
Flatlands
Watering Place
The Narrows
Staten Island
Gravesend
Gravesend Bay
New Utrecht
Barren Island
Long Island
ATLANTIC OCEAN
NEW YORK CITY
AND THE CHAMPLAIN CORRIDOR
1776
0
3
Miles

Map 2

Royal Navy. The army's senior officers agreed with Lee's ideas, but some then began exercising undisciplined initiative. The most outrageous demonstration came in April, when Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam took it upon himself to position 1,000 soldiers on Governor's Island, just off the southern tip of Manhattan. Not long thereafter, Washington arrived in New York to take command.

Washington approved of Lee's concept, but New York's political leaders had other ideas. They importuned Washington to fortify the city and turn New York itself into an impregnable fortress. Bowing to pressure, Washington ordered the erection of a series of strong points and entrenchments throughout the length and breadth of Manhattan. When the British army landed, the Continentals and militia would make it pay for the privilege of seizing the city. The new concept of the defense was sizeable. In theory, it offered a defense in depth within the city and throughout Manhattan with entrenchments, redoubts, and mutually reinforcing outer works that exploited the terrain.

In bowing to New York's civic leaders, Washington's more expansive plan attempted to present strength everywhere, but in reality, it was a brittle, hollow shell. Although elements of Lee's ideas remained, the new plan dissipated the army's strength by distributing too few soldiers to too many positions. Organized in three divisions, the army's ten brigades of Continentals, militia, and levies looked impressive on paper. Washington spread these forces throughout the area, posting seven brigades in New York City itself. To the north, at Fort Washington and King's Bridge, were two more brigades, and a pair of isolated regiments remained on Governor's Island. A focus on terrain, rather than manpower, ruled.

Work on the fortifications continued. Across the Hudson, New Jersey faced Manhattan. The Palisades, sheer cliffs rising vertically from the river's edge, ranged from 300 to more than 500 feet above the river. Atop the Palisades sat Fort Lee, also known as Fort Constitution. It anchored a chain of scuttled vessels and other obstructions that crossed the river, below its surface, to Fort Washington on the Harlem Heights. Together, they oversaw the

Hudson and protected the chain of vessels designed to slow or halt riverine traffic.

Across the East River from New York sat the village of Brooklyn, the largest settlement on Long Island. It guarded the eastern approaches to Manhattan. Above Brooklyn were the Heights of Guan, a ridgeline rising some 100 to 150 feet above western Long Island. The heights, in the present-day boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, extended some 12 to 15 miles, running roughly east-northeast from the western tip of Long Island almost to the village of Jamaica. The western terminus overlooked New York's Upper Bay. North of this ridge, Brooklyn Heights, some 100 feet in elevation, dominated the village of Brooklyn to its west; the East River to its north; and Wallabout Bay, site of the future Brooklyn Navy Yard, to the east.

One possible defensive option for Lee was to order the construction of batteries on Sandy Hook to cover the shipping channel that allowed maritime traffic into the lower bay or the Narrows, the strait between Staten Island and western Long Island spanned today by the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge (*Map 3*). Such batteries could have impeded British progress for a while, but without supporting works, artillery, or sufficient troops for those positions, the matter was moot. Having laid out New York's defenses, Lee headed south to do the same for Charles Town (Charleston), South Carolina. Taking his place was Brig. Gen. William Alexander, Lord Stirling, who assumed direct responsibility in May for the construction of the fortifications.

On 3 June, Congress authorized the creation of the Flying Camp, a mobile reserve of 10,000 militia from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland. The Flying Camp would provide security for the water approaches to New York City until state and Continental troops became available. The Flying Camp included a composite battalion of Philadelphia and New Jersey Artillery that, by August, defended key positions at Perth Amboy, Passaic, Elizabethtown, Newark, and Woodbridge.

Signals hoisted on Staten Island alerted Continental soldiers, militiamen, and the people of New York at 0900 on Saturday, 29 June 1776, that the invasion fleet had appeared. Five hours later, the


NEW YORK HARBOR
1776
0
20
Miles
NEW JERSEY
Newark
Elizabethtown
Staten Island
Raritan Bay
NEW JERSEY
Hudson River
Manhattan Island
East River
New York City
Brooklyn
Governor's Island
Long Island
The Narrows
Sandy Hook
ATLANTIC OCEAN

Map 3

defenders received reports of more than one hundred ships having anchored at Sandy Hook. Couriers rode hard and fast to alert the militia of Connecticut and New Jersey and urge them to New York. Beginning on 1 July, the fleet sailed into New York's lower bay. Few if any of the observers had ever seen a sight such as this. It sent the people of Staten Island into a panic. Less than a week later, more than 110 vessels had sailed into the lower bay off Staten Island and dropped anchor. More were to come.

On 2 July, as the Second Continental Congress voted on adopting the Declaration of Independence, warships of the *Royal Navy* cleared for action as gun crews raised their gunport lids, loaded their cannons, and ran them out of their gunports, ready to fire. As jack-tars and marines stood ready, soldiers made their way down rope ladders dangling along the transports' sides to board waiting barges that were rising and falling in the bay's swells. Soon, the transports reached Staten Island and began disgorging the might of Britain's military power, more than 9,000 soldiers. More would follow over the next few weeks. The handful of Continental soldiers on the island fired a few scattered shots and retired. Staten Island's militia, seeing that discretion was the better part of valor, abjured the rebel regime of New York and swore allegiance to George III.

The 2 July landing displayed the full might of Britain's naval and military power. Warships, transports, and victualers hove into New York's lower bay. Without a navy to contest Britannia at sea, the only thing that Washington's soldiers could do was gape in wonderment and terror at the strongest force ever to have entered American waters. Yet more were to come. On 12 August, forty-five more vessels arrived, laden with some 3,000 British soldiers just returned from General Clinton's abortive expedition against Charleston, South Carolina, as well as 8,000 more German soldiers. Clinton's joint venture with *Royal Navy* Commodore Sir Peter Parker against the fort at Sullivan's Island had been a debacle: hastily conceived, poorly coordinated, and with little knowledge of the terrain and tides. The defenders of Charleston had sent King George's legions packing.

With the final arrival of the vessels transporting Clinton's command and the German auxiliaries, the number of ships and other vessels rose to more than 400, including 73 warships. All told, they brought 32,000 soldiers to New York in Britain's greatest transoceanic projection of military force until the twentieth century. Facing Howe's soldiers, Washington's combined force of Continentals and militia numbered around 19,000. Having neither an intelligence network nor any way of divining Howe's fuller intentions, Washington tried to anticipate and prepare for his opponent's moves.

As soldiers recovered from their voyages, V. Adm. Molyneux Shuldham, who had been in command of the *Royal Navy* until Admiral Howe's arrival, consulted with General Howe. The general requested that Shuldham probe the river defenses. Shuldham readily agreed and ordered Capt. Hyde Parker Jr. with his forty-four-gun frigate *Phoenix* and Capt. James Wallace with his twenty-gun *Rose* to test the Americans' defenses by sailing up the Hudson River. With a steady south wind to drive them, the *Phoenix*, the *Rose*, and their tenders made for points upriver on 12 July. As the *Phoenix* and the *Rose* entered within range of the American batteries, the Americans opened fire.

Admiral Howe, aboard the sixty-four-gun *Eagle*, had passed Sandy Hook on 11 July. He arrived off Staten Island next day, in time to be greeted by the sound of heavy cannonading, estimated at just under 200 rounds, as the *Phoenix* and the *Rose* sailed past the Americans. The American artillery fire was loud and brisk, but ineffective. Their fortifications were too high for an optimal trajectory, and the guns could not depress more than about 5 degrees. The best the American cannoneers could do was damage some of the ships' rigging and wound some sailors. As the ships passed upriver, the British returned fire. One sailor aboard *Rose* demonstrated his contempt for American gunnery by sitting on the ship's topgallant yard, the highest yard on the mast, as American shot flew past him and the *Phoenix* sailed past the American gunners.

The *Phoenix*, the *Rose*, and their consorts ventured as far upriver as Ossining, more than 30 miles from New York. They anchored in Tappan Zee. With two frigates, the British had demonstrated how

easily they could isolate New York City and support loyalists along the Hudson River. The Americans could do nothing to stop it. Passing the American defenses was cause for celebration. Captains Parker and Wallace and their officers toasted the occasion with punch and claret. It seemed an auspicious opening for the campaign.

As the frigates and their tenders passed the American defensive works, the brothers Howe conferred on 13 July aboard the *Eagle*. General Howe shared with his brother news of the Declaration of Independence. Four days earlier, on 9 July, Washington had ordered public readings of the Declaration to the Continental Army. Later that evening, a large number of soldiers, sailors, dockworkers, and others gathered at Bowling Green, a small public park in the city. Inspired by revolutionary rhetoric, drink, and more, they pried loose from its base the gilded lead statute of King George III that the British government had erected on the green six years earlier. Weighing 4,000 pounds, the king's image took some effort to pull down, but before long it fell and shattered. The rebels cut the statue into smaller pieces and paraded the remains through New York's streets, much as prisoners were marched or carted to prison or the gallows. The toppling of George III's statue dramatically symbolized the break from the British Crown. Pieces of its lead went to Litchfield, Connecticut, for smelting, and the Americans thereby returned the statue to Great Britain in the shape of more than 40,000 rounds of musket balls.

Despite this burst of anti-British sentiment, Admiral Howe proposed opening discussion with the Americans. He had insisted that Germain appoint him and his brother the general peace commissioners with extensive latitude to negotiate with the Americans. Admiral Howe, like his brother, believed in parliamentary supremacy, but thought that it was in everyone's best interests to settle the rebellion with as little bloodshed as possible. He wanted the authority to negotiate and issue pardons, all of which Germain opposed. In the end, the Howe brothers received limited powers. They could only accept the Americans' submission and issue pardons.

Notwithstanding their circumscribed powers, Admiral Howe began his work as a peace commissioner. He offered pardons to

colonists who would abjure the rebel cause and help reestablish the Crown's authority. To make sure that the offer went far and wide, the admiral transmitted the letters unsealed to the colonies' governors. By doing so, he knew that the Continental Congress would receive word of the offer, which might undercut sentiments for independence. Simultaneously, Admiral Howe invited General Washington to meet with him. However, the admiral failed to recognize Washington by his rank. Washington's aides-de-camp rejected a second written proposal for yet again failing to address Washington as general. On the third, verbal attempt, Washington agreed to meet the admiral's representative after Howe's aide referred to Washington as "General."

Admiral Howe's efforts were for naught. Washington directed the British envoy to present himself to Congress, an act he designed to force a tacit recognition of Congress's legitimacy. Washington was committed to the cause of American independence and to civilian control of the military, as expressed through the will of the Continental Congress. He derived his authority from Congress, and was insistent that the Howes, the ministry, and the Crown recognize Congress's legitimacy by addressing it and by recognizing his rank. In the meantime, Congress ordered the publication of Admiral Howe's letters. The delegates understood the power of performance. Publishing the letters suggested that they were open to discussions, when in fact they were not. They were committed to independence. Moreover, publication exposed the Howe brothers' limitations as peace commissioners.

With the Americans having cast aside Howe's entreaties, it was time to prepare for battle. General Howe bided his time as more transports and supply ships sailed into the harbor. Some of the transports carried the 800 soldiers of *Lord Dunmore's Ethiopians*, a regiment of formerly enslaved men. John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, had promised these men their liberty if they fought for the Crown. In raising this formation, Dunmore had added to the war's complexity. His decision enhanced Britain's strength and deprived rebel owners of their unfree labor, but it also threatened loyalist slaveholders, who feared their own enslaved labor would flock to the king's colors.

As more forces and supplies arrived, artificers began constructing additional landing craft for an amphibious assault. The flatboats carried from thirty to fifty soldiers apiece. The boats were shallow draft, drawing only around 3 feet of water, which allowed them to approach the shore and beach easily. Measuring around 30 feet in length and nearly 10 feet in breadth, they were equipped with twin gangplanks for quick debarkation. Rowed and steered by sailors and propelled by sixteen oars, the boats could also take a mast and sail and mount a swivel gun, either a half-pounder or a 1-pounder, in the bow. As the boat approached shore, the crew dropped a kedge anchor by the stern to steady the boat. Later, they would haul it off the beach for a return trip to embark more soldiers or artillery. From the beached flatboats, crews extended the gangplanks, and the soldiers disembarked on the beachhead. Crews could also fit the boats with decking to transport artillery. Before the landing, escorting warships laid down suppressive fire on the beachhead and around the surrounding area.

In addition to allowing the massing of personnel and supplies, the delay also afforded General Howe time to determine where he would strike and to assess the readiness of the army and its discipline. Following the bloodletting at Bunker Hill the previous summer, Howe had come away with a poor impression of British discipline. Officers did not seem to have firm control of their soldiers. With most of the British army deployed in North America, General Howe could ill-afford to waste that most precious commodity, the British soldier. By mid-August, when the last elements of the army had arrived, General Howe was ready.

With everything in order, General Howe and his command set off from Staten Island to prepare for the short voyage to Long Island on 18 August. Howe's second-in-command, General Clinton, had proposed a landing at the northern tip of Manhattan. Clinton argued for a riverine turning movement that would place the British army behind the Americans, cut off their lines of retreat, and force a quick surrender. It was reminiscent of Clinton's proposal the year before in Boston, where he had suggested landing behind the New Englanders' defenses and cutting them off at the Charlestown

Peninsula's isthmus. In both cases, he had argued for an indirect approach; in both cases, Howe decided against it. Howe opted instead to land on Long Island and seize Brooklyn Heights, which overlooked New York and the East River. All he needed now was for the remainder of his forces to join him.

On the afternoon of 21 August and the morning of 22 August, the frigates *Phoenix*, *Rose*, and the twenty-eight-gun *Greyhound* (commanded by Capt. Archibald Dickson) moored off Staten Island, weighed anchor, sailed, and stood into Gravesend Bay, a short distance away. They anchored broadside, presenting their gunports to the landing site. Two bomb vessels, craft with reinforced beams that mounted a heavy siege mortar, joined the frigates and presented their bows and mortars to the landing sites. The bomb vessels were the *Thunder*, commanded by Lt. Anthony James Pye Molloy, and the *Carcass*, under Lt. Robert Dring. Sometime between 0730 and 0800, Admiral Howe shifted his flag to the *Phoenix* for the amphibious assault and gave the signal to commence landing operations by ordering a gun fired from the *Phoenix* and flying a blue-and-white-striped flag from the mizzen topmast of the frigate. Soldiers under his brother's command began their landings sometime between 0900 and 1000. Admiral Howe returned to his flagship *Eagle* sometime after 1400. Commodore William Hotham, aboard the *Phoenix*, then assumed immediate oversight of the landings.

Seventy-five purpose-built flatboats and eleven batteaux (shallow-draft, flat-bottomed, double-ended boats) packed with soldiers streamed from the various warships, transports, and embarkation sites on Staten Island. The crews had begun staging the landing craft off the island at 0200 in preparation for the 2- to 3-mile voyage to Gravesend Bay. The weather that day had begun with rain squalls but improved as the day wore on, becoming partly cloudy with breezes. The first wave, under the command of General Charles, 2nd Earl Cornwallis, consisted of the light infantry; the grenadiers; Highlanders; and dismounted companies of jaegers, rifle-armed light infantry and mounted troops recruited from German hunters and woodsmen. The landing was unopposed. Once ashore, the initial wave assembled, formed up quickly and easily on the beach,

and then advanced, driving away an American screen of infantry. (*See Map 4.*)

While Cornwallis secured the landing site and expanded the initial lodgment, the flatboat and batteau crews returned to collect two further waves of troops. By 1200, some 15,000 British and Hessian soldiers had landed on Long Island. The landing had been a complete success. By 25 August, the remainder of the German auxiliaries had landed. General Howe now had around 22,000 soldiers ashore in Long Island. Washington's intelligence system, such as it was, misjudged the strength of Howe's force. Reports had suggested to Washington that Howe had landed around 9,000 soldiers, and that the British operations were merely a feint to disguise a larger attack against New York itself. In time, American intelligence gathering and evaluation would mature, but for the moment it was little better than uninspired guesswork. Washington, for his part, believed that Howe's attack would come directly against Manhattan. He was sadly mistaken.

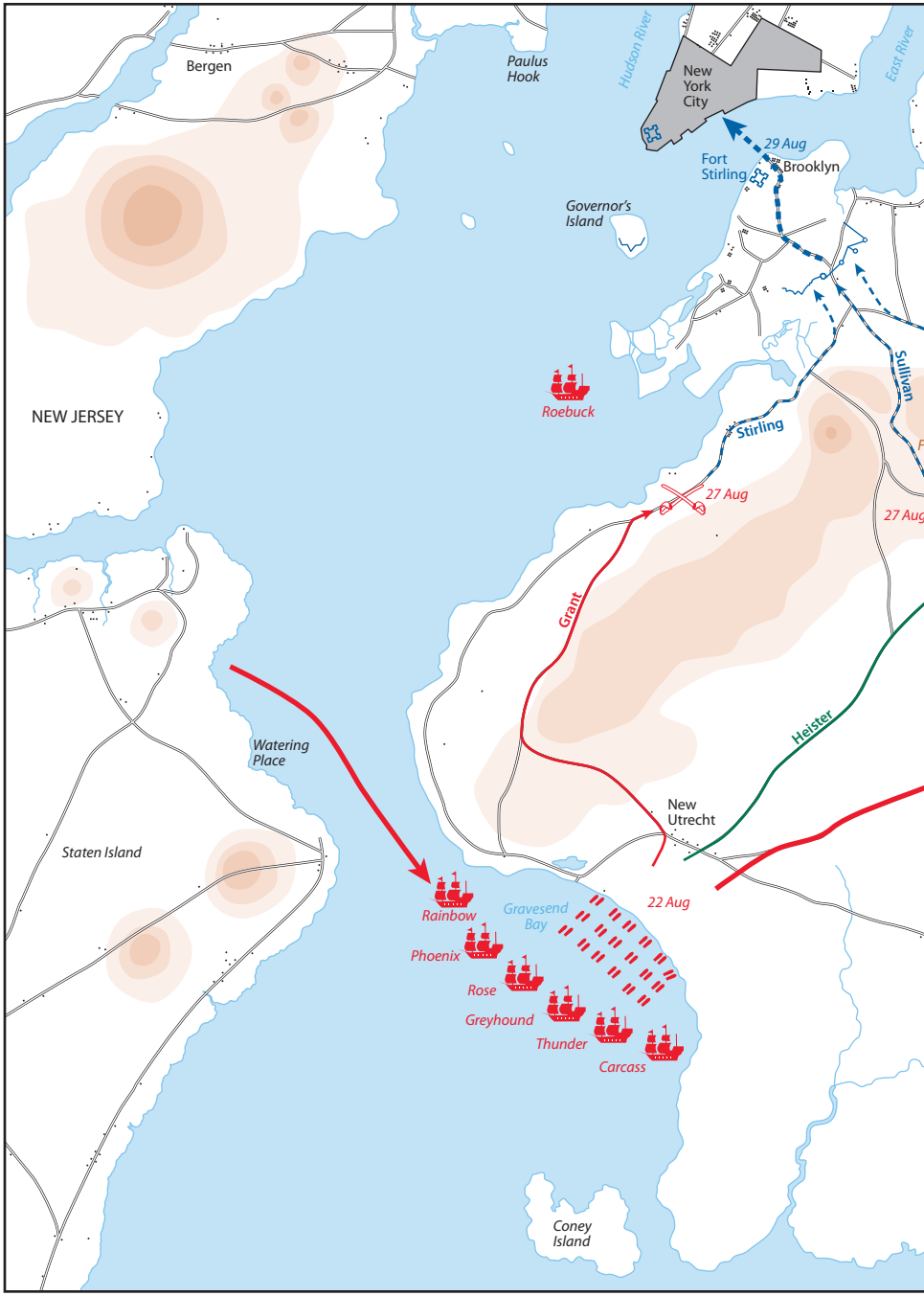
Washington's command was in disarray. His forces had been dispersed on two islands guarding the major seaborne approaches. The American soldiers were undisciplined, and disease wracked the army. Many of Washington's troops wasted precious gunpowder and lead by firing their muskets at shadowy threats or for the simple pleasure of it. Too often, their fire wounded or killed fellow soldiers. No matter how many orders Washington issued against discharging weapons, they too often went unheeded. As poorly disciplined as the Continental regiments were, the militia regiments were even worse. They came and went as they pleased while consuming precious supplies. Temptation also lured soldiers away from their duties. By one estimate, as many as 20 percent of the unmarried women in New York City were involved in prostitution, and venereal diseases were one of the many conditions sapping the army's strength.

Malnutrition, scurvy, and gastrointestinal maladies also laid Washington's troops low. Soldiers' rations were strong in salted meats and breads but poor in fruits and vegetables. The city of New York was surrounded by rich agricultural lands tilled by farmers eager to sell their produce to the army, but many undisciplined Continentals

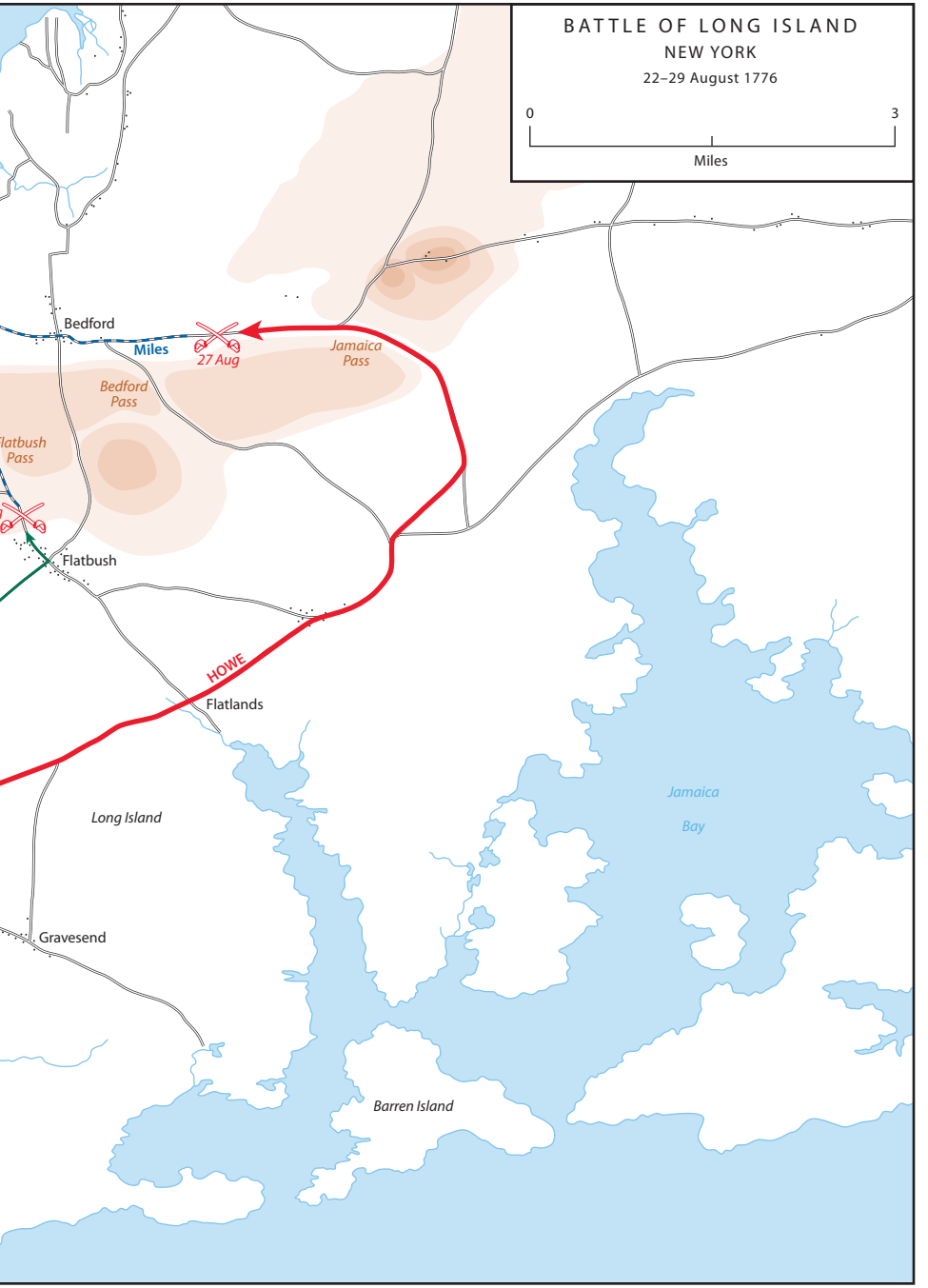
and militiamen stole farmers' offerings, which discouraged the latter from entering the city's limits. Without fresh vegetables, fruits, or antiscorbutics, soldiers were prone to developing scurvy. Congress's quartermaster and commissary system, which relied on individual purchasing agents' personal credit rather than government credit—of which there was none—only exacerbated the situation. The shambolic supply system presaged even worse problems in the years to come.

Living in close quarters demanded high standards of personal hygiene, something else in low supply. European armies and navies, accustomed to close living, had the institutional knowledge and discipline necessary to safeguard soldiers' health, but they too suffered from myriad illnesses. If they did not understand germ theory or other microscopic causes of disease, they knew enough to enforce the habits of cleanliness so necessary to safeguard the fighting strength of military forces. In the early days of the Revolutionary War, American soldiers failed to practice basic group hygiene practices like not urinating or defecating near groundwater sources. Latrines, called vaults in the eighteenth century, were rarities in the American army. The ones that did exist often were situated near sources of fresh drinking water. Soldiers failed to cover the vaults with fresh soil to minimize the odors. They relieved themselves where they pleased, often in the ditches fronting fortifications. It was no wonder that American camps were immediately recognizable by their stench or that their hospitals were filled with ailing soldiers. Upward of one quarter of Washington's army was sick, including Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, who had overseen the erection of fortifications covering Brooklyn Heights. On 15 August, he went down with fever, incapacitating him at a critical point in the runup to the confrontation with the British. American military hygiene improved later in the war but remained deficient well into the late nineteenth century. Disease was the major killer of American soldiers, not bullets, bayonets, or cannonballs.

By 25 August, Howe's army on Long Island numbered around 20,000 soldiers. He had organized the army into numbered infantry brigades, from the *1st* through the *7th*, and he created two ad hoc


Bergen
Paulus Hook
Hudson River
New York City
East River
29 Aug
Fort Stirling
Brooklyn
Governor's Island
Roebuck
NEW JERSEY
Stirling
Sullivan
27 Aug
27 Aug
Grant
Heister
Watering Place
New Utrecht
Staten Island
22 Aug
Gravesend Bay
Rainbow
Phoenix
Rose
Greyhound
Thunder
Carcass
Coney Island

Map 4


BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND
NEW YORK
22–29 August 1776
0
3
Miles
Bedford
Miles
27 Aug
Jamaica Pass
Bedford Pass
latbush Pass
Flatbush
HOWE
Flatlands
Long Island
Jamaica Bay
Gravesend
Barren Island

units, the *Light Infantry* and the *Grenadier* brigades composed of the infantry regiments' light and grenadier companies. Howe then grouped the *1st*, *2d*, *5th*, and *6th Brigades* under General Clinton in the *1st Line*. The *2d Line*, commanded by General Hugh, Lord Percy, contained the *3d*, *4th*, and *7th* brigades. General Cornwallis commanded the *Reserve Corps*, which had the *Grenadier Brigade* and the *33d* and *42d Regiments of Foot*. Howe's command faced around 10,000 Continentals and militiamen.

Now, it remained for General Howe to conceive a plan of battle. Although he had a general idea of American dispositions on Long Island, Howe bided his time developing a clearer idea of how and where the Americans had laid out their defenses and what potential vulnerabilities he might exploit. Howe was not about to waste soldiers' lives in bloody assaults as he had in June 1775 at Bunker Hill.

As Howe considered his options, Washington tried to divine his opponent's intentions. Even though 90 percent of the British expeditionary force had landed, Washington believed that he faced only a quarter of its total strength on Long Island. He expected that the main British effort would be directed against Manhattan. Still, Washington was unsure of General Howe's intentions. Rather than concentrating his forces on Manhattan, Washington ordered ten regiments to Long Island. Among them were two whose performance in the campaign and for much of the war spoke well for their leadership, discipline, and training: Col. William Smallwood's 1st Maryland Regiment and Col. John Haslet's Delaware Regiment.

With Greene ill, Maj. Gen. John Sullivan stepped into the leadership void. Greene had intended to defend Brooklyn Heights. Washington joined Sullivan on 23 August and together they reconnoitered the area. After examining it, they decided to alter Greene's troop dispositions, and advance the American defenses to the Heights of Guan, south of Gowanus Creek.

Brooklyn Heights had been the initial American position, but it became a secondary post following Washington's and Sullivan's inspection. Together, they ordered a new line of defenses to the south. American forces erected hasty fortifications along the Heights of Guan that extended from a point south of Gowanus Creek eastward

beyond Flatbush Pass and Bedford Pass. Thick woods dotted the heights in places. Soldiers dug ditches in front of the heights, and they laid abatis in front of their positions.

The defensive line stopped a little more than a mile short of Jamaica Pass, which lay slightly more than 2 miles to the east-northeast of Bedford Pass. The Americans chose not to fortify Jamaica Pass because they did not have enough forces available to extend the left of the line. Instead, they placed their faith in patrols to provide adequate warning of a British approach. If Howe were to launch a frontal assault, as the Americans hoped he would, then they would have no need to be concerned about Jamaica Pass. Washington and Sullivan intended that some 3,000 soldiers occupy the new line. The new line was not the only change.

Washington replaced Sullivan with Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam, who had been in New York since early April. The increasing number of regiments assigned to the defense of Long Island, reckoned at anywhere from sixteen to thirty-one, pointed to the island's growing importance. It merited the command of a more senior officer than Sullivan, who was tenth in precedence among the major generals. Putnam, who ranked as fourth in seniority, was the senior major general, and so it was logical that he should command. Interestingly, Greene was eleventh in seniority. His initial selection to command at Long Island portended a growing regard of the general by Washington.

As Putnam, popularly known as "Old Put," assumed command, Washington enjoined him to impose more exacting discipline on the forces deployed on Long Island. Discipline and order, never the strong suits of the militia or the early Continental Army, were promiscuously absent. Soldiers and entire regiments wandered about or shifted positions as they pleased. As if all of these problems were not enough, Washington or his immediate staff created even more confusion as they attempted to impose order on the army's organization by placing regiments into brigade command structures and establishing a more vertical organization that eased senior officers' burdens of command. Still, the Continental Army was more an armed motley than it was a well-disciplined, trained, or organized force of soldiers.

Putnam did his best to impose order on his command. He divided responsibility for the defense of the Heights of Guan between Stirling in the west and Sullivan in the east. Following Putnam's division, Washington inspected the lines on the twenty-sixth and gave his approval. Two days before reviewing the defenses, Washington had ordered three regiments of Brig. Gen. Samuel Holden Parsons's brigade of Connecticut Continentals and Lt. Col. Nicholas Lutz's and Lt. Col. William Hay's battalions of Pennsylvania Associators from the Flying Camp to reinforce Putnam. Importantly, this movement indicated that Washington finally had realized that Howe had selected Long Island for his main effort.

Washington was concerned about the Bedford and Jamaica passes. Roughly 3 miles of wooded terrain separated them. Consequently, he ordered Col. Samuel Miles, commanding the Pennsylvania State Regiment, to patrol the area. Miles reported the presence of enemy troops to Sullivan. This reconnaissance was not enough to effectively protect and preserve the American left, but it did demonstrate Washington's awareness of the vulnerabilities. Still, he did not order Putnam to send out patrols to actively discern enemy dispositions, nor did Putnam, Stirling, or Sullivan take their own initiative to do so. The lack of mounted troops available to reconnoiter more extensively than the infantry and report back to Washington more rapidly than foot soldiers compounded the problem.

In the fight for intelligence, Howe easily won. With the exception of the Pennsylvania State Regiment, his light troops aggressively probed American lines to determine enemy dispositions and shut down what few American patrols ventured forth. Just as important were Long Island's loyalists, who freely offered information about the locations of the American army, the terrain, and vulnerabilities that Howe might exploit. They shared with Howe and Clinton that the American eastern flank was in the air—in other words, unprotected—and resting a mile short of Jamaica Pass to the east. With this information, Clinton devised a plan, and Howe listened.

Clinton advised a joint army-navy operation to crush the American army. Led by Clinton and accompanied by Howe, the main effort would turn the American left with roughly half the army,

some 10,000 soldiers. This column would march from Gravesend Bay through the village of Gravesend and then through Flatlands, along the King's Road, across the American front at a distance ranging from just more than 3 miles at the initiation of the march, to more than 4 miles from the American line, and close to about a mile after having turned the American left flank. The column's path resembled what it was about to become—a deadly scythe cutting all before it, with the blade's sharp concave edge facing the American line. About 2 miles from Howard's Tavern, at the southern opening of Jamaica Pass, the column angled from a north-northeast approach to a northeasterly direction, forming the scythe's handle. Once it passed through Jamaica Pass, Howe's scythe would form into two assault columns and commence cutting down the Americans.

To ensure that the main effort's approach march went undetected, the British would initiate two demonstrations—feigned bursts of activity intended as a deception—against the American western positions and center, advancing to distract American attention. Maj. Gen. James Grant would command the effort against the American right while Lt. Gen. Leopold de Heister and the Hessians approached the center. Grant had under his command some 7,000 soldiers. They included his own *4th Brigade*, the *6th Brigade*, the *42d Foot*, and two companies of loyalists. At 0900, two signal guns would announce the advance. As the Americans fell back toward Brooklyn seeking passage to Manhattan and succor from British arms, they would be disappointed. Rather than transports to safety, ships of the *Royal Navy* would instead greet them. Clinton's plan, coordinated with Admiral Howe, promised a decisive victory.

Led by three loyalists, the British column set off on the night of 26–27 August. Clinton with the vanguard departed around 2000, followed four hours later by Howe and Cornwallis with the main body. Clinton had under his command the *16th* and *17th Light Dragoons* and the *Light Infantry Brigade*. Howe's flanking column consisted of the *Grenadier Brigade*; the *Brigade of Guards*; the *33d Foot*; and the *1st*, *2d*, *3d*, *5th*, and *7th Brigades*.

The march was uneventful, save for encountering and capturing a handful of militiamen at Jamaica Pass. The guides led the army

across unfamiliar country lanes and paths. That a 10,000-strong force, 2 miles in length, drawing artillery could march several miles across the American front speaks volumes for British skill and luck, and American amateurism. Several of the senior American officers forgot about the basics of security.

By 0200, the vanguard had arrived at Howard's Inn, at the southern limit of Jamaica Pass. Clinton's troops awakened innkeeper William Howard and his son. Clinton ordered them taken prisoner and demanded they guide him and an advanced party around the pass. Finding no Americans, Clinton ordered the advance party to secure the pass's northern end. The British now held Jamaica Pass, key to the American defenses. Howe and the main body arrived two hours later. All was ready. The commanding general ordered a halt before the pass and rested his fatigued soldiers. Difficult and bloody work would come in the morning.

As Howe, Cornwallis, Percy, and the main body departed, a firefight developed and then grew in front of the American right near Red Lion Inn, which stood about 1 mile southwest of the Continentals' western flank. Pennsylvania riflemen had opened fire on a handful of British soldiers. Grant, an aggressive commander who was also contemptuous of Americans, sent forward several hundred soldiers. His troops drove off the pickets, advanced, and occupied the extreme right of the American line with ease.

Putnam responded and ordered Stirling forward. Advancing with more than 1,500 soldiers, Stirling quickly sized up what faced him as Grant pushed forward. His command included the 1st Maryland and the Delaware Regiments. Well-armed, disciplined, and competently led, that day the Marylanders and Delawares established reputations as hard-fighting soldiers. As they advanced, Stirling ordered forward the Pennsylvania State Battalion of Musketry and soldiers from other regiments while he formed up the Maryland and Delaware Regiments on a ridge north northeast of the Red Lion Inn. The Pennsylvanians opened fire at Grant's advancing force and maintained good order in the face of the redcoats. After exchanging a few volleys, the Pennsylvania battalion retired and took up positions with the Marylanders.

Although the signal guns were yet silent, Grant advanced toward a bridge over a wetland. He outnumbered the Americans by a magnitude of four to one. Despite Grant's overwhelming advantage in numbers and qualitative advantages in training, discipline, and experienced leadership, he merely formed his command in line of battle and extended it westward but did not press forward. In extending his line, Grant's right moved to occupy a hill that threatened the Marylanders' left. The American commander ordered the Pennsylvania battalion and Brig. Gen. Jedediah Huntington to extend the American left. British troops fired a volley, drove off the Americans, and seized the hill. Undeterred, the Pennsylvanians re-formed and attacked. They drove the British off the hill. Unwilling to surrender the hill to the Americans, the British counterattacked, but the Pennsylvania battalion held its ground. Reinforced by more redcoats, the British re-formed and made as if they would attack once again. They did not. Because of Grant's orders to demonstrate, a standoff developed. More American units joined the line, including a two-gun company of artillery.

Finally, at 0900, two signal guns fired. Although Grant had commenced his demonstration before the signal guns sounded, Heister had held his command in readiness and waited for the signal that sent his soldiers forward. With the Americans distracted by Grant's and Heister's demonstrations on their right and center, Howe's soldiers worked their way through Jamaica Pass. It did not take long. Clinton, in the lead, ordered his troops forward. As they emerged from the pass, Sullivan's left crumpled. His outposts of Pennsylvania troops briefly fired on the advancing redcoats before breaking.

The British advanced so quickly and in such overwhelming strength that the Pennsylvanians rushed to Brooklyn as best they could. In the collapse and pell-mell retreat of the Pennsylvanians, the British captured around half of them. Washington and Putnam, who witnessed the rout of the American right and were full of fury, responded as best they could. They physically interceded—using, according to an observer, riding crops, canes, and the flats of their swords—to reverse the flight and beat officers, noncommissioned

officers, and enlisted soldiers back into line of battle. It was to no avail. Howe had turned the American left. With little to challenge them, the British advanced quickly toward Brooklyn. As they made way through the American rear, the British encountered scattered elements resisting them, but no organized defense.

In Stirling's sector, Grant and Heister had converted their demonstrations into full-blown attacks. By 1100, now aware of the British turning movement, Stirling decided that it was time for his command to retire to the lines at Brooklyn. As Grant's and Heister's soldiers pressed forward aggressively against Stirling's front, Cornwallis pushed eastward and very nearly cut Stirling's line of communications with Brooklyn: the Gowanus Road. Faced with this dire situation, Stirling led forward the Marylanders and elements of the Delawareans to delay the British attack and allow the bulk of his division to retire. Led by Stirling, they advanced into a farm field near the Cortelyou House into the teeth of Grant's and Cornwallis's attacks. The fight bought valuable time for Sullivan's command to fall back, but very nearly destroyed the Maryland regiment. In the process, Stirling surrendered to Heister.

The fighting along the Heights of Guan was vicious. Several Americans who attempted surrender instead met their deaths at the end of Highland and German bayonets. Some British officers applauded the butchery. After a short while, however, British and German officers began accepting American surrenders. The bravery of some troops and the gallantry of the Marylanders and Delawareans aside, the day had been a disaster for the Americans. Some British units had pursued them so closely that Howe had had to restrain his soldiers before they could assault the formerly fleeing Americans who had taken shelter behind earthworks. Howe feared a repetition of Bunker Hill and knew that he could not afford to waste his soldiers' lives.

The Americans had lost around 300 killed, more than 1,000 captured, and an unknown number wounded. Howe had lost somewhere between 350 and 400 killed, wounded, and captured. Among the American captives was General Sullivan. Howe ordered Sullivan released on condition that he carry a message to the Continental

***Battle of Long Island,* Alonzo Chappel, 1858 (*New York Public Library*)**

Congress calling for negotiations. In the aftermath of the battle and considering the conduct of Howe's army, neither Washington nor Congress would entertain the idea of negotiations. Howe had won a clear victory, but even though Washington had not covered himself in laurels, negotiating with a foe whose troops had refused to accept the surrender of American soldiers was too much to stomach.

With the defeated remnants of the American army behind fortifications at Brooklyn, it seemed but a matter of time before the Americans would have to capitulate. The *Royal Navy* controlled the waterways, allowing no escape from Brooklyn. Rather than attempting a coup de main, a sudden attack, General Howe decided to lay siege to the rebel army. He sent word to his brother, the admiral, to prepare to cut off the American line of retreat across the East River. Time was on Howe's side, but, as he soon discovered, nature was not.

Throughout the day of the battle and into the twenty-eighth, Washington had fed reinforcements into Brooklyn, reinforcing defeat with over a brigade's worth of Continentals and militia. His strength now stood upward of 9,000 or more. Were Howe to capture this prize, he might well put an end to the contest at minimal cost

in lives, effort, and treasure. Yet on 28 August, the wind shifted, and the weather signaled a change. Winds blowing from the west had swung to the northeast and began rising. Heavy rain pouring from black clouds drenched the armies and turned the freshly dug fields into muddy seas. The storm's intensity grew, and the winds and rain lashed Americans, Britons, and Germans alike as a nor'easter drove in and pummeled the armies.

For the besieging British army, the storm was no obstacle. They were wet, but soldiers labored and dug parallels (trenches that paralleled enemy fortifications) and saps (zigzag trenches that approached enemy fortifications) to advance against the American posts. Sore muscles and backs were cheaper than soldiers' lives. American soldiers, many standing calf-deep or more in the rainwater gradually filling their trenches, awakened to British approaches a mere 600 yards or so away on the morning of 29 August. While Howe's troops advanced, Washington called a council of war to determine the army's next moves. Meeting in the gambrel-roofed Philip Livingstone house, Washington posed a question to major generals Israel Putnam and Oliver Spencer, and brigadier generals Thomas Mifflin, Alexander McDougall, Samuel Holden Parsons, John Morin Scott, and James Wadsworth: should the army evacuate Long Island? It was a simple yes-or-no question with tremendous implications. Abandoning Long Island would signal yet another defeat, yet it would preserve the army to fight another day. The council members, all of whom had led during the battle, unanimously agreed to cross over to Manhattan.

The nor'easter brought misery and salvation in unequal measure. The storm, which drove in hard from the northeast, prevented any of Admiral Howe's ships from sailing up the East River, the only practicable route. The Harlem River was too narrow and sailing around Long Island to approach from the northeast through Long Island Sound was a waste of time. It was now up to the Americans to gather whatever watercraft they could to effect their escape from Brooklyn. Washington sent a verbal order to Hugh Hughes, deputy quartermaster general, to collect all the watercraft between Spuyten Duyvil and Hell Gate and gather them at Brooklyn's waterfront.

Fortunately for the army, two regiments of Massachusetts Continentals mustered sailors and fishermen from north of Boston: Col. John Glover's 14th Continental Regiment came from Marblehead merchant sailors, and the soldiers of Col. Israel Hutchinson's 27th Continental Regiment formerly fished North Atlantic cod out of Lynn and Salem. Both regiments were likely among the most racially diverse in the army; one observer noted that Glover's regiment contained "a number of negroes." Because the two regiments drew from the maritime trades, noted for their integrated workforces and Massachusetts's close ties to the sea, it is probable that both mustered a large proportion of Black and Native American soldiers. Colonels Glover and Hutchinson received orders to crew the boats collected by Hughes and ferry the army to Manhattan. Around 2000, soldiers began a hushed movement down Ferry Road. The mud was so deep that gun carriages sank to their hubs, yet the army did not abandon its guns. Officers had orders to leave fires burning to deceive the enemy. General Mifflin commanded the rearguard that remained in the works.

Fortunately, the nor'easter continued as the Bay State sailors-turned-soldiers-turned-sailors made repeat trips between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Their work continued through the night and into the morning of 30 August. Across the harbor, to the west, a similar scene took place on Governor's Island. By morning, the nor'easter had abated, but in its stead came a heavy fog that masked the army's retreat. Even with the sunrise, the fog persisted, and so the army made good its escape.

Once ashore, Washington ordered the regimental commanders to form their troops, call the rolls, inspect them, and send in accurate returns. He made some organizational changes, consolidating brigades and reducing his own span of control by reducing the number of divisions from five to three—Putnam's, Spencer's, and Maj. Gen. William Heath's. Although the army had displayed admirable discipline in evacuating Brooklyn, it still had far to go. With the army recovering from the Battle of Long Island and retreat to Manhattan, the next step was determining how best to prepare for the eventual British attack against New York City.

On 6 September, Washington held another council of war to assess the army's state and decide the next course of action. Rather than reflecting on his own shortcomings as a commander and tactician, Washington instead placed fault upon his soldiers, especially the states' militia. Just like his soldiers, Washington was learning through hard-won experience. He believed that the army would learn how to fight.

The key consideration facing Washington was whether the army should continue to defend New York. He recognized that trying to protect the entirety of Manhattan stretched his forces thin and left them open to defeat. At the same time, he believed that abandoning the city would dispirit the army. Not having much faith in his ability to hold the city, Washington ordered excess supplies and the sick and wounded removed to Orangetown, New York, about 28 miles upriver on the west bank of the Hudson. As for defenses, Washington split the differences. Five thousand soldiers would remain in the city while another 14,000 were to defend King's Bridge and nearby positions. The remainder would cover the ground between the city and King's Bridge, ready to respond wherever needed. Yet again, in attempting to defend everywhere the Americans were strong nowhere. Importantly, though, Washington was giving deeper thought to American strategy. He appreciated that a dramatic victory over Howe would raise American hopes but was coming to the realization that a protracted war of attrition was the likely course in the longer term. Strategy aside, reacting to the next British moves dominated the thoughts of the army's senior leaders.

A curious episode took place the night of the council of war. Sgt. Ezra Lee of the 10th Connecticut Regiment squeezed himself into an, egg-shaped submersible named the *Turtle*. Connecticut inventor David Bushnell designed the *Turtle* to approach its prey from just below the surface of the water. A small conning tower projected above the water's surface, allowing the pilot some measure of vision through thick glass mounted in the tower. The operator had to be physically fit, as the craft was powered by a two-pedal-driven crankshaft attached to a front-mounted propellor and steered by hand. Around 2300 on 6 September, Sergeant Lee entered the

Turtle and worked his way from New York toward the flagship of the British fleet, HMS *Eagle*. Once at his target, Lee was to bore a hole into the *Eagle*'s hull, attach a gunpowder-filled cask called a torpedo, fire the fuse, and get away as quickly as possible. Moored off Governor's Island, the *Eagle* was not difficult to identify. Getting to the ship, however, was a chore. It took Lee something like two hours to get to the *Eagle*, fighting the currents of the harbor. Once he arrived at his prey, Lee was unable to bore a hole into the *Eagle*'s hull. He may have struck an iron mounting for the ship's rudder, rather than the soft, thin copper sheathing affixed to the hull to prevent teredo worms from boring into the wood.

Exhausted from his exertions, Lee was unable to accomplish his mission. Moreover, British sentries on Governor's Island had spotted the *Turtle* and had rowed out to investigate. Lee fired the fuse and cut loose the torpedo. Rather than exploding close to the soldiers or any British vessel, it drifted toward the East River, where it blew up. Lee tried once again against a frigate on 5 October, but after enemy forces spotted him, he aborted the mission. For his services, Lee received a promotion to ensign in the 1st Connecticut Regiment. He remained with the army until 1782, ending his service as paymaster of the 5th Connecticut Regiment.

A scant five days after the 6 September council of war, seven generals, led by General Greene, requested another council of war. They, like Washington, had deduced that a landing on Manhattan Island was in the offing. They wanted to abandon New York City and save the army. Washington concurred with their judgment. On 12 September, ten of the army's thirteen generals determined that the best course of action was to remove the remainder of the army's supplies and artillery and abandon the city, leaving 8,000 soldiers to hold Fort Washington, its outer works, and Harlem Heights. Try as it might, removing supplies was beyond the ability of the quartermaster general's department. In an early example of a problem that recurred throughout the war, not enough wagons were available to move supplies. Compounding the problem in New York was a situation rarely encountered by the Continental Army—too many supplies.

As the generals discussed and then voted to leave New York to the British, Admiral Howe met with three leading delegates to put an end to the war. Benjamin Franklin from Pennsylvania, John Adams, and Edward Rutledge met in the seventeenth-century Billopp House on southern Staten Island. There, Howe expressed his hopes for a reconciliation, his sorrow over the state of affairs, and his great regard for Americans. Although Admiral Howe was more successful than his brother had been, in the sense that he actually had been able to meet with Americans, he too failed to make any inroads. Affairs were too far gone. The Americans would settle for nothing less than independence.

In abandoning the city, Washington also suggested that they burn it to deny it to the British. Fire would render New York untenable in the coming winter. British and German soldiers would have to construct new quarters or live under canvas. Either way, it would greatly hamper General Howe's ability to prosecute the war. Congress, however, opposed the idea. The delegates believed that Americans would retake New York quickly. However, it would not be until 1783, a full seven years later, that Continental forces would reenter the city.

The Howe brothers once more demonstrated their tactical acumen and the joint strength of an army and navy working together. Between 13 and 15 September, warships of the *Royal Navy* weighed anchor and sailed between Governor's Island to the west and Brooklyn to the east. Captain Parker with the *Phoenix*; Capt. Andrew Snape Hamond commanding the forty-four-gun *Roebuck*; the thirty-two-gun *Orpheus* under Capt. Charles Hudson; the *Rose* commanded by Captain Wallace; and Capt. Robert Fanshaw with the twenty-eight-gun *Carysfort* made up the squadron. They sailed up the East River and anchored off Bushwick Creek, Brooklyn, having exchanged fire with rebel batteries on Manhattan. American shot damaged some ships' rigging and sails and penetrated the hull of the *Phoenix*. Fire from the American guns killed at least one sailor aboard Parker's ship.

On 15 September, Admiral Howe dispatched a second, smaller squadron up the Hudson River to deceive the Americans. Around 0700, Capt. Francis Banks in the fifty-gun *Renown* led the thirty-

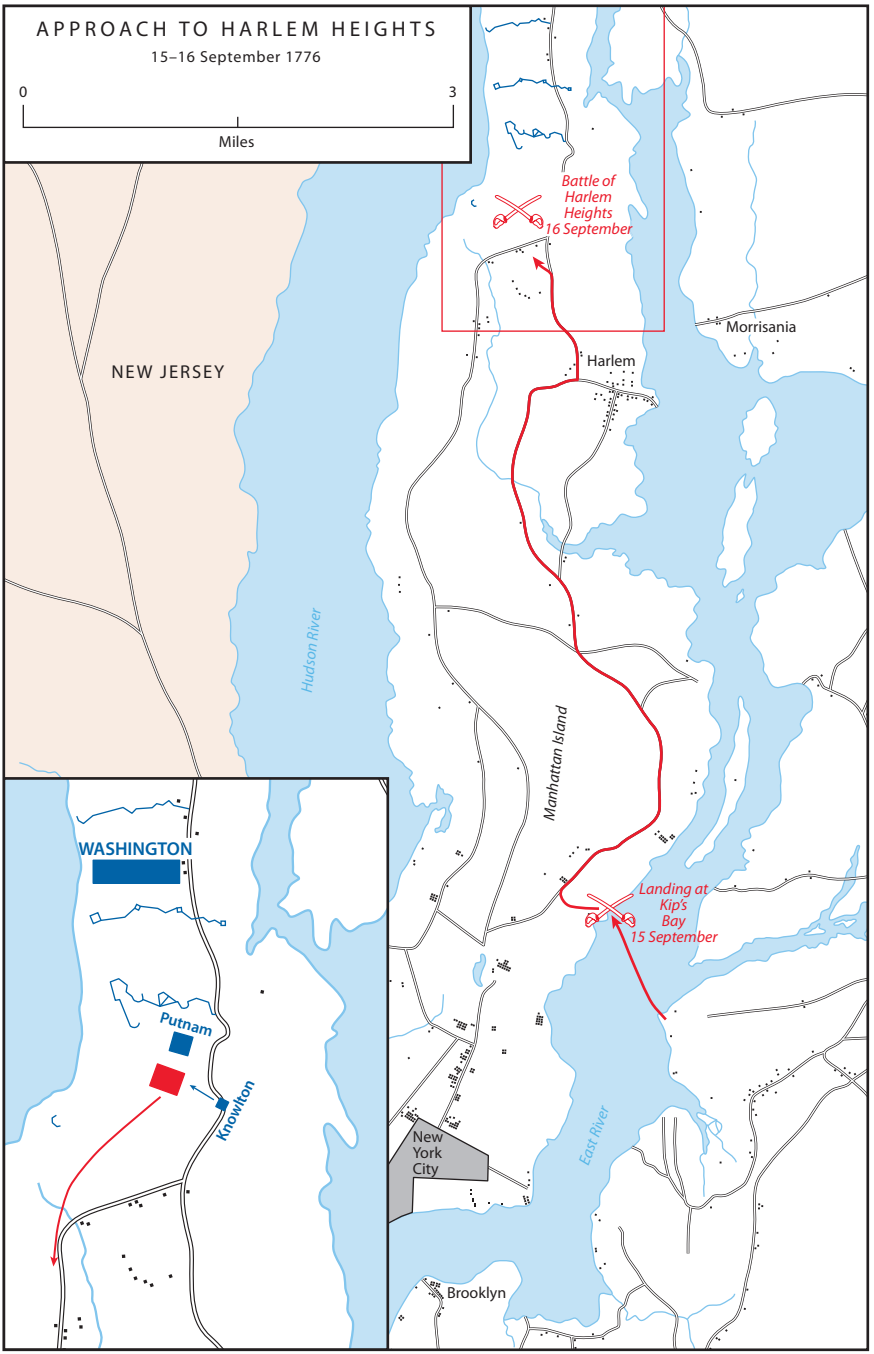
two-gun *Repulse* commanded by Capt. Henry Davis, the thirty-two-gun *Pearl* sailing under Capt. Thomas Wilkinson, and the *Tryal* under Lt. John Brown upriver and exchanged fire with the American batteries as they sailed northward. Two-and-a-half hours later, they anchored about 4 or 5 miles upriver, within view of the fleet but out of American artillery range. Washington suspected that the squadron was a diversion, and that the British would attack at Harlem. Accordingly, he rode for Harlem in anticipation of an attack. Washington was wrong.

Between 0330 and 0430, the five frigates moored in Bushwick Inlet set off for Kip's Bay and anchored line ahead by 0530, broadsides presented to the shore. Admiral Howe had originally intended that the *Phoenix*, the *Orpheus*, and the *Rose* would demonstrate against the American battery at Hell Gate and draw attention away from Kip's Bay. Local pilots informed Parker that the tide was too powerful for the ships to anchor, thus five frigates provided fire support for the landings.

Around 0900, more than eighty flatboats filled with soldiers departed from Newtown Creek, rowing toward five transports anchored just downstream near Bushwick Inlet. There they waited and then at 1100 began rowing hard for the beach at Kip's Bay. About ten minutes before the boats' crews put their backs to the oars, they witnessed the power of the Royal Navy as the eighty-four guns of the *Phoenix*, the *Roebuck*, the *Orpheus*, the *Rose*, and the *Carysfort* unleashed broadsides of 18-, 12-, 9-, and 6-pound solid shot, double-headed shot, and grapeshot that lashed the landing beach in preparation for the amphibious assault (*Map 5*).

The bombardment was fierce. Connecticut militiamen in the entrenchments fronting Kip's Bay broke and ran. Not long after the firing had commenced, Washington rode hard for the landing site where he witnessed the panic-stricken militia fleeing from it. He was furious and gave full rein to his temper, throwing his hat on the ground and striking several fleeing officers. Washington had no way to halt, much less slow the British landing.

A handful of American soldiers had stood their ground, but the landing force took them prisoner or killed them in action. Commanded by General Clinton, the landing force pushed hard


APPROACH TO HARLEM HEIGHTS
15–16 September 1776
0
3
Miles
Battle of Harlem Heights 16 September
NEW JERSEY
Harlem
Morrisania
Hudson River
Manhattan Island
WASHINGTON
Putnam
Knowlton
Landing at Kip's Bay 15 September
New York City
East River
Brooklyn

Map 5

to expand the lodgment. Some 4,000 soldiers of the *Light Infantry Brigade*, and the Hessian jaegers and *Grenadiers* led by Cornwallis and Col. Carl von Donop made up the landing force. The initial wave advanced northwest as far as Iclenburg, today's Murray Hill. The lodgment's northeast-southwest extent ran just more than 1 mile. Clinton wanted to advance and cut the American lines of retreat from the city, but General Howe halted any further advance. Rather than risking the defeat of isolated units by having spread his forces too thinly across the island, he ordered a pause that would allow the second wave of soldiers to land. By the end of the day, more than 12,000 soldiers had landed on Manhattan. The pause gave General Putnam and some 3,500 American soldiers time to evacuate the city and fall back to the northeast.

Howe's pause during the landings did not equate to a pause in the pursuit of Washington's command. Throughout the day, British and Hessian forces continued their advance northward, pushing back the Americans. Along the west side of Manhattan, the *2d* and *3d Battalions* of light infantry and the *42d Foot* under Brig. Gen. Alexander Leslie led the 6-mile advance from Kip's Bay in search of the American army.

By the end of 15 September, Washington had drawn up the main body of the Continental Army at Harlem Heights along the northwestern side of Manhattan. It was good, defensible, high ground fronted by lower terrain, the Hollow Way, which added to the position's natural strength. Washington, who had made his headquarters in the home of loyalist Roger Morris (today, the Morris-Jumel Mansion), was writing an account of the previous day's battle when the report of musketry alerted him. Washington ordered his close adviser Col. Joseph Reed, adjutant general of the Continental Army, to ride out and investigate. Reed encountered Lt. Col. Thomas Knowlton of the 20th Continental Regiment and 150 picked soldiers, Knowlton's Rangers, skirmishing with Leslie's light infantry and *Highlanders* in the Hollow Way. Knowlton's Rangers had established contact with the British at the Jones Farm, a little less than 2 miles southwest of Harlem Heights, and were engaged with the enemy close to the American lines.

Washington soon rode toward the action to ascertain the situation for himself. He encountered Reed, who told him of the skirmish and recommended sending reinforcements to Knowlton. Before Washington could act, Knowlton's soldiers made their way back to the American lines, pursued by the light infantry. Reed later recorded that the light infantry had mocked the Americans with their horns. Some have suggested that the light infantry played "Gone Away," a fox hunting call that signaled the death of the fox or the end of the hunt. It was no matter. Washington acted decisively and directed Brig. Gen. John Nixon's brigade of New England Continentals forward. He then ordered Knowlton and his rangers to advance, along with three companies of the 3d Virginia Regiment under Col. George Weedon.

Washington had ordered Knowlton and Weedon to attack the British on their right flank, but the plan went awry. In the action, British fire mortally wounded Knowlton. The counterattack, which now included Marylanders, drove the British southward out of the Hollow Way and up the heights into a buckwheat field. The action continued for more than two hours. Casualty estimates range wildly. The Americans suffered between twenty-five and thirty-three killed and from fifty to one hundred wounded. The British, by comparison, lost from fourteen to sixteen killed and perhaps from seventy to eighty-nine wounded. British casualties were likely higher, as Howe had a propensity for seriously undercounting his losses in reports. The victory may have been small, but it was a welcome one. American morale shot up as news of the fight spread throughout the camps.

As the American army had fallen back toward Harlem Heights, Greene and Lee advised Washington to burn the city. Washington, who was of a like mind, replied, and told them that he had already put the matter before Congress, but that it had denied him permission. He predicted that Congress would regret the decision.

Howe appointed Brig. Gen. James Robertson as commandant of New York on 16 September. It made good sense. Robertson knew the city and its people after twenty years of previous service in New York, and he owned a home there. While the fighting took place at Harlem Heights, Robertson began establishing British military

***Representation du Feu terrible a Nouvelle Yorck,* Franz Xaver Habermann, 1776 (*New York Public Library*)**

government, including finding housing for the garrison, seizing rebels' homes, and removing and burying corpses. Robertson also needed to organize a fire department out of the few firefighters who remained in the city. The proximity of buildings and large number of wooden structures demanded as much. Moreover, Robertson had heard of rumors to burn the city, and British soldiers had found evidence of preparations to start fires scattered throughout the town.

Robertson's fears—and perhaps Washington's, Lee's, and Greene's hopes—came to pass the night of 20–21 September, when a blaze erupted at the Fighting Cocks tavern at Whitehall Slip on the southeastern tip of Manhattan, scant yards from where the East River met the Hudson River. The fire roared up the west side of the island, past the battery and Fort George. It jumped west across Broadway and consumed the neighborhoods between Broadway and the Hudson River as far north as Barkley Street and just beyond. The conflagration consumed between 400 to 1,000 of New York's buildings across twenty blocks, from 10 to 25 percent of the city's structures. As many as 1,500 people may have perished. Circumstantial evidence suggests that radical New Yorkers may

have set the blaze or that Washington and the Continental Congress secretly supported the act of arson. The city did not recover until after 1783.

Understandably, British suspicions about arsonists ran high following the fire. On 21 September, as the Great Fire burned itself out, Capt. Nathan Hale of the 19th Continental Regiment unwittingly revealed his identity to Lt. Col. Robert Rogers, commanding the loyalist *Queen's American Rangers*. Hale, a graduate of Yale College, had volunteered to spy on British forces in New York. He assumed the guise of an out-of-work teacher seeking employment. Hale may have been intelligent, but he was not gifted at intelligence gathering or spy craft. Unable to create a convincing persona or keep silent about his identity or mission, he exposed himself to Rogers, who reported Hale to British authorities. When the British found incriminating evidence on Hale's person, General Howe ordered that Hale be executed as a spy. On 22 September, Hale's captors marched him to the artillery park and hanged him. Hale is purported to have quoted from Joseph Addison's 1712 play *Cato* when he gave his last words: "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

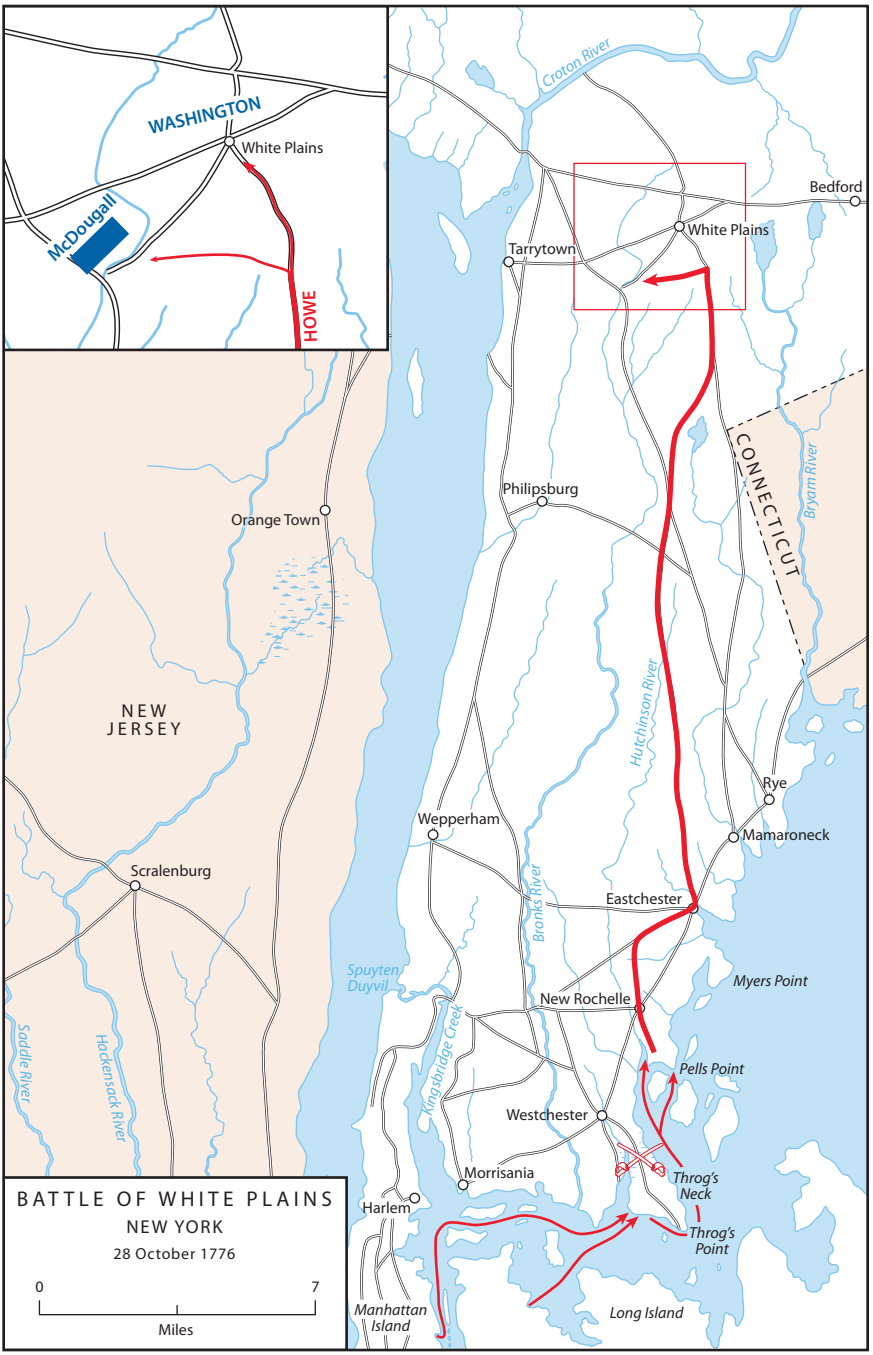
Following the engagement at Harlem Heights, the armies paused as their commanders planned their next moves and tried to anticipate those of their enemies. Washington's soldiers dug three lines of fortifications across Harlem Heights, a defense in depth tied into natural obstacles like the Hudson River on the right and the Harlem River on the left, and the steep hillsides leading down to the rivers. The positions consisted of hastily constructed parapets and redoubts. Situated above the lines to the north was Fort Washington, a complex of fortifications, which occupied the highest ground on Manhattan. The Continentals and militia were not alone in preparing for the next actions. Despite the fire, the Howe brothers shifted their base of operations to New York and reconstituted their forces as drafts of soldiers from other regiments in Britain and Ireland, more German auxiliaries, additional supplies, and ships of the *Royal Navy* arrived.

Washington, in the meantime, fretted over the condition of his command. The weather and the wear and tear of soldiering had

worn out uniforms and equipment. By the end of September, fewer than 15,000 soldiers were fit for duty. He had begun the campaign with around 25,000 soldiers, but now more than 10,000 had died, had been wounded, were prisoners, or had deserted. Washington clung to his consistent tactical hope that he could tempt General Howe into attacking his entrenched army, despite the *Royal Navy's* previous displays of mobility along the waterways surrounding New York and Long Island and his own recognition of New York's vulnerability to naval power.

The Howes declined to oblige Washington's hopes. Instead, General Howe wanted to draw Washington's command out of its fortifications by cutting the American lines of communications to Connecticut. The Howes decided to outflank the Americans yet again. Admiral Howe dispatched the frigates *Phoenix*, *Roebuck*, the twenty-eight-gun *Tartar* under Capt. Cornthwaite Ommaney, and schooner *Tryal* on the morning of 9 October. At 0730, they weighed anchor and sailed up the Hudson, exchanging fire with Forts Washington and Lee until around 0900. Captain Parker, who commanded the force, sailed close to Manhattan, where the channel was deeper. As before, the obstacles in the river neither deterred nor impeded the enemy's passage. American guns killed and wounded several sailors and damaged the rigging and spars on the three frigates. The squadron anchored that afternoon off Tarrytown. Admiral Howe had cut the Americans' riverine line of communications.

Two days later, on 11 October, Admiral Howe, Commodore Hotham, and most of the ships' captains made for Kip's Bay and Turtle Bay on the East River. They had with them the sloops, other small craft, and the flatboats and batteaux that previously had executed the landings at Gravesend and Kip's Bays. The next morning, about 0300, some 4,000 to 5,000 soldiers embarked. The Howe brothers were exploiting their advantages and looked to flank Washington once again. They aimed at sailing up the East River, passing through Hell Gate, on through the Long Island Sound, to landing at Throg's—variously spelled Throgs, Throggs, and Frog's—Neck in Westchester (*Map 6*).


WASHINGTON
White Plains
McDougall
HOWE
Croton River
Bedford
White Plains
Tarrytown
Philipsburg
Orange Town
CONNECTICUT
Bryam River
NEW
JERSEY
Hutchinson River
Rye
Wepperham
Mamaroneck
Scralenburg
Eastchester
Bronks River
Spuyten
Duyvil
Myers Point
New Rochelle
Saddle River
Hackensack River
Kingsbridge Creek
Pells Point
Westchester
Throg's
Neck
Morrisania
Harlem
Throg's
Point
Manhattan
Island
Long Island
BATTLE OF WHITE PLAINS
NEW YORK
28 October 1776
0
7
Miles

Map 6

Landing at Throg's Neck gave General Howe options. First, it would put the British army a mere 5 miles from King's Bridge, the chief crossing point over Spuyten Duyvil. A quick march would enable Howe to seize the crossing site and isolate the American army on Manhattan. With the *Royal Navy* in control of the Hudson and East Rivers, Washington would have to fight, attempt to flee into New Jersey, or surrender. The landing also enabled Howe to move northward and place his army astride the Americans' line of communications to Connecticut, possibly forcing Washington to leave his fortifications and engage in an open field fight.

Fortune, however, smiled on the Americans as nature once more intervened. The British sailed against a strong ebb tide and just as a heavy fog settled. The fog made sailing, rowing, and towing dangerous, creating a real chance of collisions. While passing through Hell Gate, one of the galleys towing a flatboat carrying three 6-pounder guns, an officer, and twenty-five artillerymen tried passing another vessel in its way and managed to upset and capsize the flatboat. The British lost the 6-pounders and four artillerymen who drowned. Except for local pilots, nobody had any experience in passing Hell Gate.

The Americans had yet another piece of good fortune. Selecting Throg's Neck was a compromise between the army and the navy. Naval officers had wanted to land to the west of the neck, at Westchester Creek, which offered a protected anchorage but few and poor-quality roads. Army officers proposed New Rochelle to the northeast because it had better roads. Throg's Neck was the compromise. None of the British forces, however, knew the area. When troops began landing at about 0900, they discovered an island that was also a wetland at high tide. Moreover, the Americans had demolished the lone bridge and causeway that led out of Throg's Neck and defended the sole ford. Stone walls lined the roads leading out of Throg's Neck and the nearby fields, which provided good defensible terrain and limited the artillery's mobility. In the end, a few dozen American riflemen from Col. Edward Hand's 1st Continental Regiment stopped the British army. Flummoxed, the Howes withdrew the landing force on 18 October. Severe autumn storms prevented an earlier embarkation.

Once aboard their flatboats and batteaux, the landing force made its way 3 miles to the north. It landed at Pell's Point (today, Pelham Bay Park) at the mouth of the Hutchinson River. Clinton and Cornwallis directed the landing with light infantry, grenadiers, and dismounted light dragoons. The landing did not go unobserved. Col. John Glover and a brigade of Massachusetts Continental troops numbering about 750 soldiers observed the landing. Glover surveyed the area and decided to stagger his command behind stone walls and other obstacles. His plan was simple. As the British advanced, his soldiers were to fire and fall back. It was a delaying action meant to make the landing as painful as possible. Colonel Glover arrayed his forces on either side of Split Rock Road.

The plan worked. As British and Hessian troops advanced, Glover's soldiers fired into them and fell back. Each time they engaged, Glover's New Englanders forced the enemy to assault their positions. This entailed a limited range of options: sending out a skirmish line, forming ranks and firing, charging, or any combination of these. Whatever way the British responded, they slowed their advance and gave the Americans more time. Observing a flanking movement to his left, Glover steadily withdrew his brigade across the Hutchinson River. The brigade made its way northward to White Plains, where it rejoined the Main Army in its new position. Glover's brigade lost eight killed and thirteen wounded. Officially, the British and Hessians suffered around three killed and twenty wounded, but claims for British casualties went as high as two hundred killed and many more wounded.

Two days before the landing at Pell's Point, Washington had decided to abandon Manhattan. Calling a council of war on 16 October, Washington and his senior commanders discussed the situation facing them. The obstacles in the Hudson River had failed, and Howe with the bulk of his army had executed a turning movement that put the British army in the rear of the Continental Army. The island was untenable. As Washington put the matter to council, they had three courses of action: the Continentals and remaining militia could fight at an incredible disadvantage, with the enemy army to the front and rear and the *Royal Navy* along the rivers; retreat;

or surrender. Washington decided that the army would evacuate Manhattan but retain the garrison at Fort Washington.

Some 2,800 soldiers under Col. Robert Magaw, commander of the 5th Pennsylvania Battalion, remained behind to hold the position. Another 3,500 under General Greene held Fort Lee, across the river in New Jersey. Magaw's garrison was an inconvenient size: too small to hold the entirety of the fort and its outer works but too large to support the fort alone. Greene and others, however, had counseled Washington to hold the post. They believed it would tie down British forces on Manhattan, and, in conjunction with Fort Lee, impede shipping on the Hudson—even though the British had disproven this idea on more than one occasion. Moreover, the Americans thought they could easily evacuate Fort Washington.

Washington had anticipated that Howe would march for White Plains. The town was a road hub, the center of a local network. Roads radiating from White Plains led eastward to Connecticut, an important source for cattle and salt. The roads to Connecticut grew in significance after Howe had seized New Rochelle and interdicted the Post Road to Boston. They were now Washington's chief line of communications with Boston. From White Plains, forces could easily march to the Hudson Highlands in the north, to New Rochelle in the south, or to the important Hudson River crossing at Dobbs Ferry in the southwest. Tactically, White Plains had much to offer a defender. Situated in gently rolling terrain, several defensible hills overlooked the road junction and the Bronks (now Bronx) River that flowed southwestward along the western edge of the village.

The army began marching out of its defenses at Harlem Heights on 20 October. The advance guard reached White Plains the next day, and by 22 October, the 14,500-soldier army had concentrated at White Plains. Washington anticipated that Howe's most likely direction of advance would be to the north from New Rochelle. He drew up his initial defensive line on a 4½-mile long series of hills running northeast to southwest, bordering the northern edge of the village. Washington secured his eastern flank on Merritt Hill, with a battalion of New York militia and a company of artillery. The army's main defensive line began with General

Heath's division on Hatfield Hill. To the west-southwest on Purdy Hill, General Lee posted his division, followed by General Putnam on the right of Purdy Hill. Washington positioned himself in the center with Lee and anchored his western flank on the Bronks River. To the southwest, directly across the river, lay Chatterton Hill. Washington assigned General McDougall's brigade of New York and Connecticut Continentals and a company of artillery to secure the American right.

Around 0800 on 28 October, General Howe led 13,000 British and German soldiers against the Americans from the south. Examining the field from afar, Howe decided to turn Washington's right flank; Chatterton Hill was the key. When his force was about 2 miles away from the American line, Howe ordered General Heister to march his division toward the hill. Supported by twenty pieces of artillery, British and Hessian infantry advanced on Chatterton Hill. Despite the overwhelming British strength, American militia skirmished with them and delayed the advance. Recognizing the vulnerability of the hill, Washington reinforced McDougall with the Delaware Regiment and the remainder of the Marylanders.

As Heister's division proceeded against Chatterton Hill, General Clinton's division, with Howe in accompaniment, marched on the American center, formed in preparation for battle, and then halted a little more than half a mile south of Purdy Hill. The division remained in this position for the rest of the battle, while the fighting ensued against the Americans defending Chatterton Hill.

Heister's attack drove the American militia up the southeastern-facing slope of Chatterton Hill, but American fire drove the German troops back. As this contest ensued, Heister ordered Col. Johann Rall's brigade to attack the Americans on the southeastern tip of Chatterton Hill. The attack succeeded. Rall forced the militia back and began turning the American right. As the American right collapsed, Heister ordered Colonel Donop's and General Leslie's brigades against the Americans on the southeastern face of Chatterton Hill. McDougall pulled back his brigade in response. Most of the combat concluded around 1700.

Although Howe had turned the American right, Washington maintained his ground on the ridgeline overlooking White Plains into the next day. On 30 October, however, he withdrew the army about 4 miles northeastward to North Castle Heights. Howe advanced, but no closer than a mile or so from the new American line. With the armies facing one another into the next month, Washington ordered a brigade to the north-northwest to cover the crossing over the Croton River on 2 November.

On the night of 4–5 November, Howe finally returned to New York. Indiscipline, including rape, plunder, and physical assaults against civilians, marked the return march. The Continental Army remained in its lines until 10 November, when it marched northward.

The results of the battle of White Plains were mixed. Both armies had lost heavily in the fighting. The estimates for British and German losses ranged between 276 to 349 killed and wounded. American casualties were similarly high. Howe had turned the American right and forced the Continental Army to retire a handful of miles to a new set of lines. The British held the field, but so too did Washington. It seemed that the Americans were learning how to fight and fight well. Their leadership was also showing signs of improvement. With the armies marching in different directions, the campaign was coming to a close.

Washington led the army north to Peekskill, into the Hudson Highlands, a march of about 25 miles. By 12 November, he and the main body had crossed the Hudson and were in New Jersey. On the thirteenth, Washington arrived at Fort Lee, where he joined with General Greene, and they discussed the fate of Fort Washington. Greene believed that the post could be held and reinforced. Under dire circumstances, the garrison could escape easily across the river. Washington, however, was not convinced. He had witnessed the ease with which the *Royal Navy* repeatedly had passed the guns of Fort Washington and Fort Lee and the obstacles they were supposed to cover. Neither post fulfilled its mission. Yet, Greene was convinced that holding Fort Washington was worth the risk. Indeed, he did not believe the post was in much danger. Despite his better judgment, Washington agreed to hold the post.

Across the river in Manhattan, Magaw prepared his defenses as best he could. Designed to hold about 1,200 soldiers, Fort Washington was a five-sided earthwork with bastions projecting from each angle of the pentagon. It only appeared impressive to the casual observer. The complex had no well, no ammunition magazine, and no barracks. It was, at best, half completed. The rocky ground prevented the Americans from finishing the position properly. Rather than concentrate his forces in the fort, Magaw dispatched most of them to the outer works. To his south, about 1½ miles, he placed his own 5th Pennsylvania, Col. Lambert Cadwalader's 3d Pennsylvania Battalion, and scattered companies from several other Pennsylvania regiments in the Harlem Heights defenses with Cadwalader in command. Three quarters of a mile to the northeast, on Laurel Hill, facing the Harlem River, Magaw sent the Bucks County Associators from the Pennsylvania Flying Camp, a mobile reserve, under Lt. Col. William Baxter. Overlooking the approach from King's Bridge was a redoubt on Laurel Hill, about three quarters of a mile north northeast of the fort. There, Magaw posted the recently arrived Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment under Lt. Col. Moses Rawlings. Nearly 3,000 Americans defended the post.

Although he was not inclined to assaulting fortified positions, Howe had a change of mind. He was the recipient of an unanticipated and welcome intelligence coup. Ens. William Demont (Dement), Magaw's adjutant, deserted and surrendered to the British on 2 November, while Howe was still at White Plains. Demont brought with him sketches of Fort Washington and its outer works. Following careful consideration by General Percy, the senior British officer in New York, Percy forwarded the intelligence to Howe. Armed with foreknowledge, Howe felt assured that he did not face another Bunker Hill.

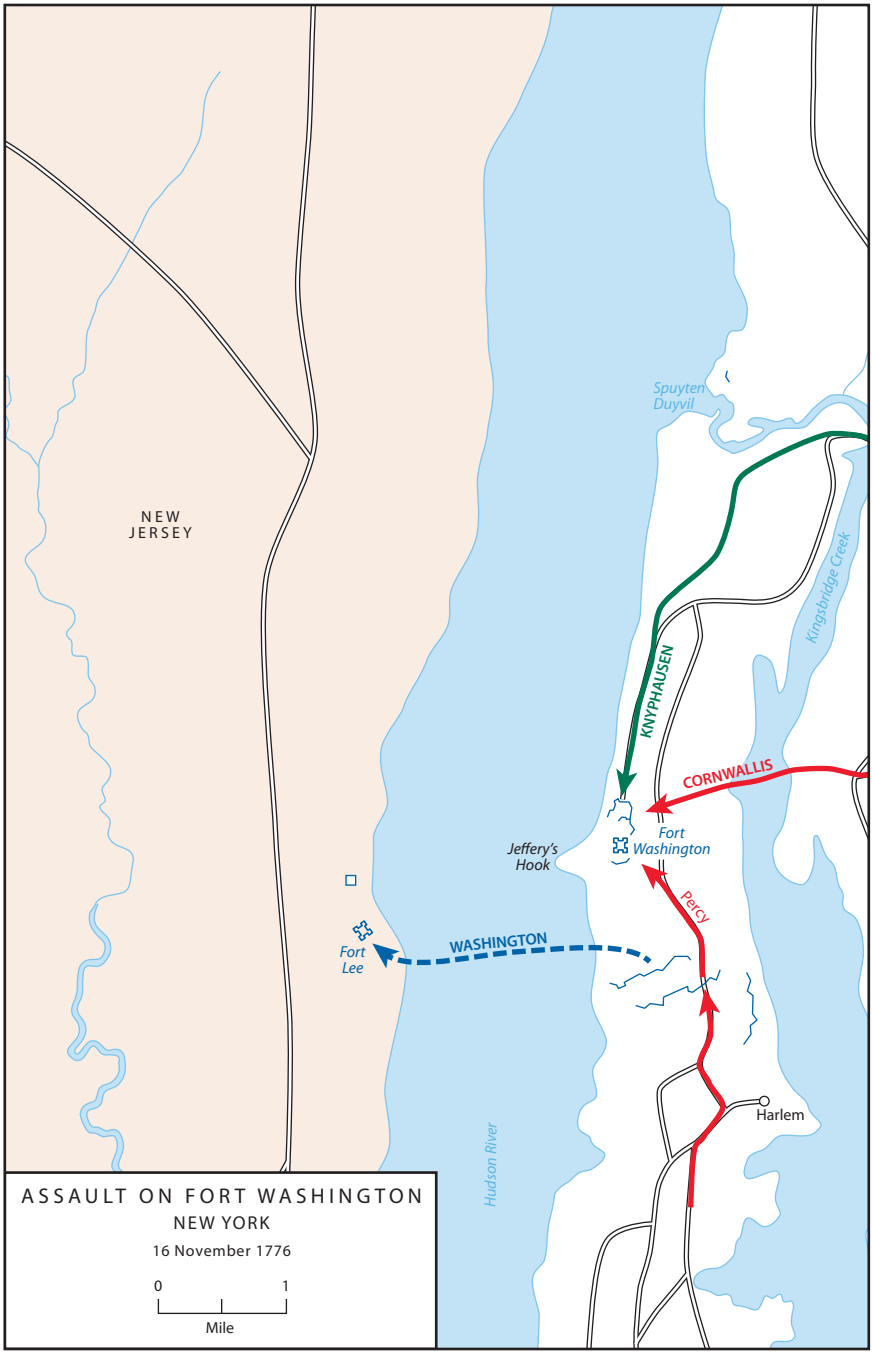
On 15 November, Howe demanded Magaw's surrender, or he would order the garrison put to death in the assault. Magaw did not believe that Howe would stoop to such an act, and he rejected the demand. Not long after the exchange of messages, Washington set off from New Jersey for Fort Washington. While crossing the Hudson River, he met Greene and Putnam who were returning to Fort Lee.

They reported that the garrison's morale was high. As it was late in the evening, Washington returned to Fort Lee in midstream.

Howe's demands aside, he planned a multipronged assault on Fort Washington and its outer works preceded by naval and land bombardments on 16 November. Pride of place in the attack went to the Germans. Lt. Gen. Wilhelm von Knyphausen had requested and received Howe's permission to implement the main assault against Fort Washington, and to do so with only Hessian forces. Knyphausen commanded Maj. Gen. Johann Daniel Stirn's and Maj. Gen. Werner von Mirbach's brigades, led by Colonel Rall and Maj. Gen. Martin Schmidt. They would attack from the north, past King's Bridge, and seize outer works north of the fort before assaulting Fort Washington (*Map 7*).

From the east, Brig. Gen. Edward Mathew with the *Light Infantry Brigade* and the *Brigade of Guards* would cross the Harlem River from Westchester County at 1000 and seize Laurel Hill, the high ground northeast of the fort. Cornwallis, commanding two British grenadier battalions and the *33d Foot*, would also cross the river at 1000 in support of Mathew's attack. From the southeast, General Percy would lead two brigades, one British, the other Hessian, in an assault against the defenses of Harlem Heights. Lt. Col. Thomas Stirling with his *42d Foot* waited across the Harlem River, prepared to cross the river, land, and support the attacks as directed.

At 0700 the frigate *Pearl*, anchored just above Fort Washington, and a battery across the Harlem River opened fire on the Americans for two hours. Knyphausen's division, 4,000 soldiers strong, attacked first. It made a short crossing of the Harlem River, just below King's Bridge, and landed around 0700. It advanced westward toward the Hudson River and marched toward the high ground on which the fort was located. As the Hessians advanced from the north, Howe ordered Knyphausen to fall back. Howe also ordered Percy to pause. Percy's attack had overwhelmed Cadwalader's initial line and quickly taken Harlem Heights. The flood tide on the Harlem River was too strong for the boats to embark Mathew's and Cornwallis's divisions before 1000. Howe ordered the pauses because he feared that without Mathew's and Cornwallis's attacks, the Americans


NEW
JERSEY
Spuyten
Duyvil
Kingsbridge Creek
KNYPHAUSEN
CORNWALLIS
Fort
Washington
Jeffery's
Hook
Percy
WASHINGTON
Fort
Lee
Harlem
Hudson River
ASSAULT ON FORT WASHINGTON
NEW YORK
16 November 1776
0
1
Mile

Map 7

***A View of the Attack against Fort Washington and Rebel redou[b]ts near New York on 16 of November 1776 by the British and Hessian Brigades,* Thomas Davies, ca. 1776 (*New York Public Library*)**

might either escape or withdraw into the fort. Coordination and simultaneity were essential to the success of the attack.

Washington, Greene, Putnam, and Brig. Gen. Hugh Mercer had crossed the Hudson sometime before the initial attacks had begun. They made their way to the Morris House overlooking the Harlem River and arrived in time to observe Percy's assault. Washington and his party witnessed the collapse of the defensive lines to the south. Dismayed, Greene, Putnam, and Mercer urged the commander in chief to return to Fort Lee. They offered to remain behind as Washington recrossed the Hudson, but he thought it best that they all depart. They remained until about 1115 before recrossing the Hudson River. Not long after their departure, Percy's troops advanced past the Morris House sometime after 1200—the tide had delayed the resumption of the British attacks until then. Mathew and Cornwallis landed and attacked Laurel Hill. To the south of them, Stirling and the *42d Foot* crossed the river.

Cadwalader observed the passage and dispatched Capt. David Lenox and around fifty soldiers to oppose the *Highlanders*' landing.

Not long after, another 100 or so soldiers joined Lenox, and together they fired on the *Highlanders*. The crossing, although short, was a terrible experience. Stirling and his *Highlanders* could do little more than endure the fire passively, but not for long. About noon, Stirling landed and attacked. His soldiers quickly overran Lenox's position and drove the Americans westward toward Fort Washington. The Scots took more than 150 prisoners in their assault. Together with Percy's attack, they pressed the Americans from the south and east and drove them into the fort. Howe's main effort, however, took place to the north.

Knyphausen recommenced his attack about noon and advanced in two columns, with Schmidt on the left and Rall on the right. Knyphausen accompanied Schmidt. Rawlings's riflemen and three pieces of artillery opened up on the advancing Hessians. American fire slowed Knyphausen's columns, but the Hessians pressed forward. Leading from the front, Knyphausen aided his soldiers in moving obstacles aside, clearing paths for them, and setting a high personal example of courage and leadership. American fire galled the Hessians. The steep slope—wooded, littered with large rocks, and fronted by abatis—slowed the attack, but did not deter it. Finally, the Americans' rifles fouled from firing. Knyphausen sensed the moment and launched his division forward in a bayonet assault that cleared a redoubt north of the fort and sent the Americans southward to Fort Washington.

In the assault against the fort's forward position, Knyphausen's soldiers met with galling fire from the two-gun battery defending the position. In response, a pair of Hessian 12-pounder cannons and a howitzer responded with counterbattery fire. John Corbin, a matross (member of a gun crew) in Capt. John Martin Strobagh's Company of the Pennsylvania State Artillery Battalion, was among the soldiers killed by German fire, either counterbattery or musketry. His wife, Margaret Cochran Corbin, a camp follower, assumed his place in the gun crew, where enemy fire severely wounded her. The Germans later captured Corbin; the British then sent her to Philadelphia. In 1779, the Continental Congress, in recognition of Margaret Corbin's

bravery in the battle for Fort Washington, awarded her the first-ever American military pension given to a woman.

Once Mathew, Cornwallis, Stirling, and their commands had landed, the British attack progressed quickly. They, along with Percy's and Knyphausen's forces had driven more than 2,000 soldiers into Fort Washington. They had supplies, but no water or shelter. The assault had begun at noon, it was now around 1300. From Fort Lee, across the Hudson River, Washington and other senior officers had trained their telescopes on Fort Washington and observed the final acts of the attack. They were not the only generals who witnessed Fort Washington's final act.

Howe had observed the actions and was pleased with the results. He recognized the greater difficulty faced by Knyphausen's soldiers and offered the general the honor of requesting Magaw's surrender. Knyphausen sent the demand to Magaw. He was to surrender all arms, ammunition, and supplies, and to send two field-grade officers to British headquarters as hostages to ensure good behavior. The garrison was to surrender as prisoners of war, but individual soldiers could retain their personal effects, and officers their swords. Rather than immediately acquiesce to Knyphausen, Magaw stalled for time. He purportedly received a message from Washington imploring the Pennsylvanian to hold out until nightfall, when the garrison might effect its escape. Without hope of relief or escape, however, Magaw agreed to capitulate at 1500, and one hour later the garrison lowered its colors and marched out of Fort Washington.

Knyphausen's soldiers abused the Americans who surrendered. They stripped a number of the surrendering soldiers and beat some of them. Reports of Hessians murdering captured riflemen spread, and Hessian officers were forced to intervene to put a stop to the abuse.

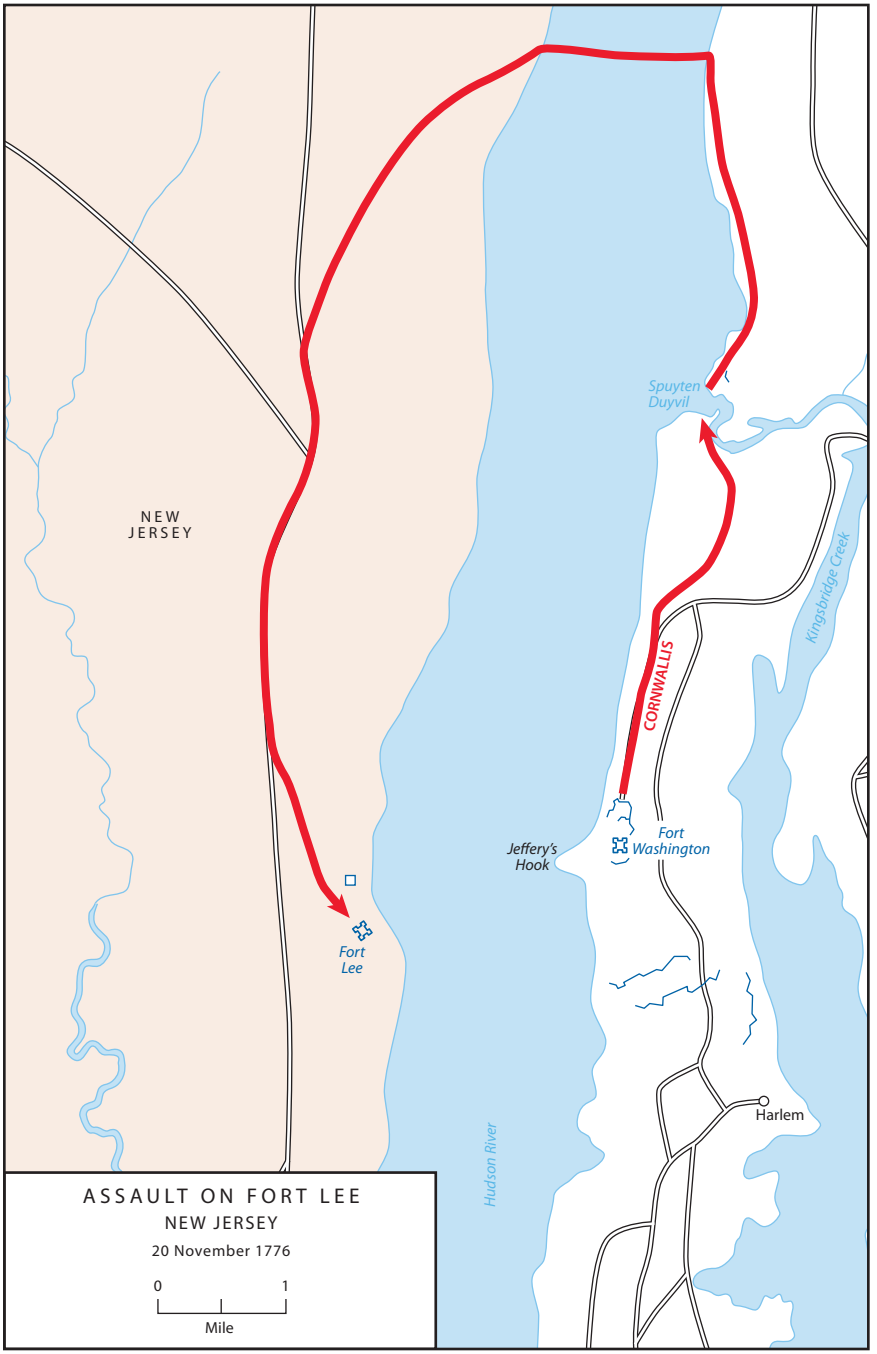
With the fall of Fort Washington, Howe had secured Manhattan. He had massed some 13,000 soldiers against Magaw's nearly 3,000. Besides the final count of prisoners, about 2,870 or more, Howe had captured 34 cannons; 2 howitzers; and an invaluable amount of supplies, including many stands of arms, powder, ammunition, tents, and more.

The British had suffered from 77 to 84 killed, 374 wounded, and 7 missing. American losses were fifty-three killed and ninety-six wounded. Of the nearly 2,900 American prisoners who marched into captivity, a mere 800 had survived when they were exchanged eighteen months later. As an officer, Magaw received parole from the British, who granted him liberty in New York. The British exchanged him in 1780.

The defeat and the realization of the role that his poor judgment and overconfidence had played devastated Greene. He was not alone. The loss of Fort Washington's garrison and stores mortified Washington. He had witnessed the final stages of the battle and then the surrender through his telescope, and he accepted responsibility for the loss. He sank into a deep depression; fearing that he had lost the war, self-doubt crowded out all else. An observer recorded that Washington wept. It was a low point in his life. The depression, though, did not last long. Washington steeled himself for the task ahead: the preservation of the army, the preservation of the revolution, and the preservation of hope.

One last task remained for Howe—the reduction of Fort Lee. Howe ordered General Cornwallis to take the fort. Securing the New Jersey bank of the Hudson would reduce threats to British shipping and enable the Howe brothers to project military and naval power northward more easily. Sailors rowed and sailed fifty flatboats and batteaux to Spuyten Duyvil the evening of 18 November. Cornwallis was to command twelve battalions for the operation, around 5,000 soldiers. He had the *Brigade of Guards*, the *Light Infantry Brigade*, the *Grenadier Brigade*, the *42d Foot*, his own *33d Foot*, three battalions of Hessian grenadiers, two companies of jaegers, *Royal Engineers*, and eight guns and their crews from the *Royal Artillery*.

On the evening of 19 November, Cornwallis and his assault force marched to the embarkation site on the Hudson River and boarded the small craft for the river crossing (*Map 8*). Light infantry comprised the initial force. Guided by New Jersey loyalists, the landing barges and batteaux first made their way upriver around 3 miles before turning west to approach the New Jersey bank of the Hudson. During the crossing, a cold rain fell and soaked the troops.


NEW
JERSEY
Spuyten
Duyvil
Kingsbridge Creek
CORNWALLIS
Jeffery's
Hook
Fort
Washington
Fort
Lee
Harlem
Hudson River
ASSAULT ON FORT LEE
NEW JERSEY
20 November 1776
0
1
Mile

Map 8

The Landing of the British Forces in the Jerseys on the 20th of November 1776 under the command of the Rt. Hon. Lieut. Gen. Earl Cornwallis, **Thomas Davies, 1776 (*New York Public Library*)**

Not long after, a thick fog rose and concealed their approach. Before dawn, the force landed at the Lower Closter Landing, also known as the New Dock or Huyler's Landing. The boats and crews returned to the Cortland Manor, about 3 miles north of the embarkation point on the New York bank of the river. The artillery and supporting troops arrived in the final wave during the daylight.

Sheer cliff faces presented themselves to the landing force—the New Jersey Palisades, which rose 500 or more feet at the landing site. Awestruck infantrymen wondered how they would scale the heights. Local loyalists guided them on a path too narrow for horses that led to the summit of the Palisades. Single file, they trudged up the path, prepared for a fight. Once the light infantry crested the cliffs, they discovered the position unguarded. They secured their position and began sending out patrols to expand the perimeter. Some 2,000 American soldiers a mere 2 miles southward in Fort Lee knew nothing.

When the artillery arrived, the gun crews hauled their pieces onto shore. They had four 3-pounders, two 6-pounders, and two

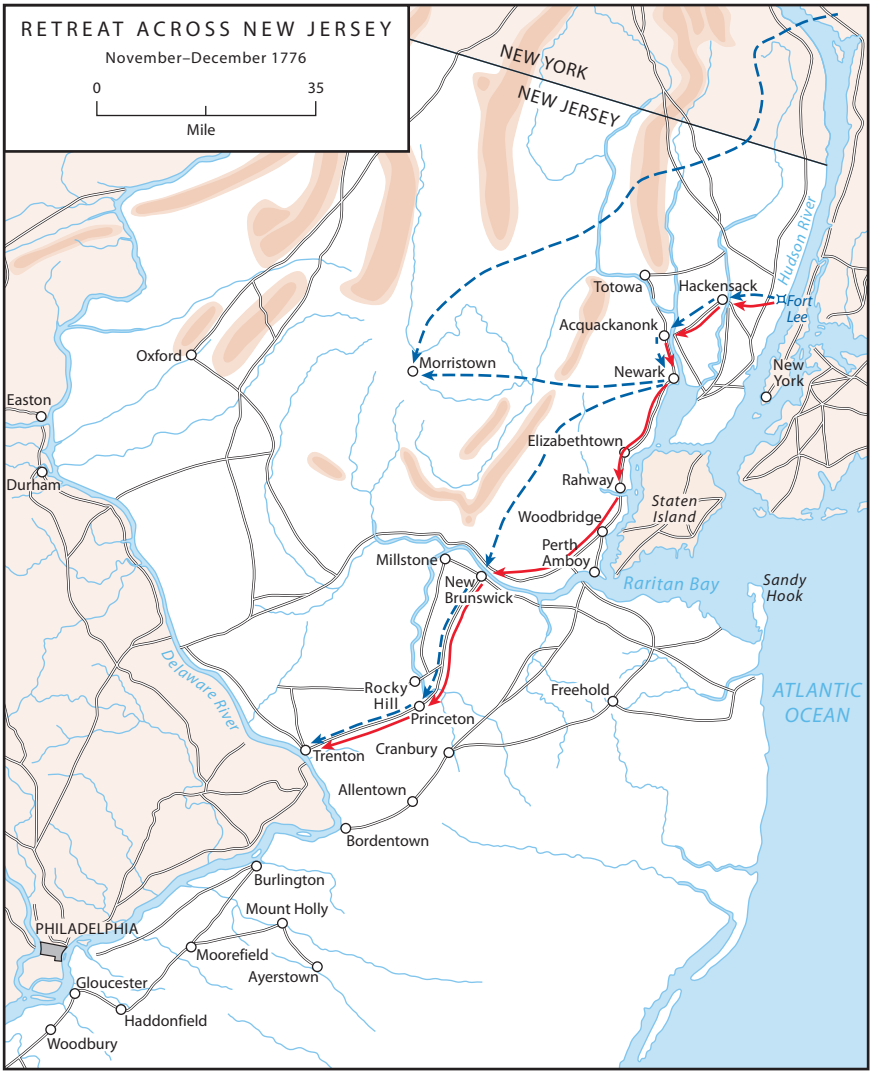
howitzers. Infantrymen, gun crews, and anybody else available strained and sweated to move the guns and ammunition up the trail. What a beast of burden could not accomplish, soldiers could. Once atop the Palisades, gun crews employed heavy ropes, known as prolonges, to pull their pieces forward.

At 1000, a courier brought news of the crossing to Washington, who was in Hackensack, about 5 miles west of Fort Lee. Washington issued orders to evacuate the post, intending to avoid a repetition of the Fort Washington disaster.

News of the British approach panicked the garrison. Discipline, never the strong suit of the militia and only rarely that of the Continentals, disappeared. Some soldiers broke into the stores of rum, others fled. When Washington and Greene arrived, they were able to impose order and organize the frightened mass within the garrison. They began marching westward, making for New Bridge, trying to put the Hackensack River between them and Cornwallis. They continued marching west, heading for the Acquackanonk Bridge over the Passaic River. Fortunately, the garrison marched off with its field artillery and most of the ammunition. The troops left behind some 50 heavy guns, 1,000 barrels of flour, valuable stores, and around 900 tents. Cornwallis's troops took a dozen drunken Americans prisoner and later captured another 150 in the vicinity. The garrison had gotten away just in time.

Jaegers led the British pursuit. Spying the signature of dust kicked up by the retiring American column, they set course for it and soon made contact. Light skirmishing developed between the jaegers and American stragglers. Seeing an opportunity to engage with the rear of the American column and bring on a battle, Capt. Johann Ewald sent word to Cornwallis requesting reinforcements. Instead, Cornwallis ordered Ewald to allow the Americans to retreat. Cornwallis was under orders to avoid bringing on a general engagement. He was to maintain pressure on the Americans and harry them through New Jersey (*Map 9*).

In this task, Cornwallis excelled. He chased Washington's ever-shrinking army across New Jersey and into Pennsylvania. Come spring, a new campaign would open, and the British army would put



Map 9

an end to the rebellion, unless the Americans came to their senses sooner and sued for peace.

The campaign for New York came to its close. Throughout the late summer and into the autumn, the Continental Army and militia from Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New

York had fought against the British army, its German auxiliaries, and the *Royal Navy*, and in most cases had been found wanting from its commander in chief down through the most junior private. It was probably the best that could be expected of recently organized, poorly trained, and indifferently armed and equipped amateurs led by amateurs with no real shared sense of identity. The Continental Army and the states' militia were learning to soldier in a severe school that rarely afforded second chances to its students.

ANALYSIS

The campaign for New York presaged much about the course of the war. British strategy was muddled in both conception and execution, owing to the irreconcilable tension between conquest and conciliation—the strategic ways for restoring colonial order. Lord George Germain, Britain's chief strategist, sought a quick and decisive outcome. Nothing less than colonial submission would satisfy him and King George III, yet Britain made the smallest possible commitment of forces. Ironically, Britain's forces, despite their small size, represented the Crown's largest-ever overseas deployment of troops. General Howe embodied the tension between conquest and conciliation. Like Germain, he wanted a quick and decisive victory with the smallest effusion of blood possible and did not want to risk his soldiers' lives in ineffective or unnecessary engagements.

At the outset of the war, Britain's ministers, generals, and admirals considered the conflict as strictly a colonial rebellion. They realized that European powers like France would look for opportunities to exploit British attention turning to America. It therefore seemed that speed and momentum were both absolute requirements for

the campaign, yet the operational environment was more complex than it first appeared. The Crown's burgeoning debt levels and the potential threats from other powers demanded that the British crush the American rebellion quickly and restore order as soon as possible, but the question of what postrebellion America would look like complicated British strategy and its tactical implementation. How hard should Britain wage war? How harsh should British measures be? What were the potential implications of a hard war? How easily might they bring former rebels and their sympathizers back into the imperial fold willingly? These questions and more vexed Britain's strategic leaders throughout the war and never would be answered adequately.

Congress had handed Washington the impossible task of defending New York, a city that was the key to British strategy. Without Congress's prompting, Washington had recognized the city's importance when he dispatched Charles Lee to lay out defenses, but New York could not be defended without a navy. Even though the Continentals had the advantage of interior lines, their poor intelligence gathering and analysis prevented them from accurately divining the Howe brothers' intentions. Rather than presenting the Americans with multiple dilemmas along their thinly stretched defensive lines, the Howes simply allowed the Americans to do so themselves as they attempted to defend everywhere.

Washington had believed that the Howes would strike directly at Manhattan, hence his surprise when he finally realized that Long Island was their immediate objective. Once Washington recognized that the landings at Gravesend Bay were not a feint, he belatedly began reinforcing the units there. Even then, Washington did not practice some of the basic elements of generalship, such as physically inspecting his troops' dispositions and the terrain or insisting on patrolling to discern enemy actions and to provide security. He placed too much trust in his as-yet-unproven subordinates, such as Greene. In retrospect, these shortcomings are understandable. Washington was learning his duties and responsibilities as a general. Over the course of the campaign, he showed signs of improvement.

Washington was a middling tactician. On Long Island, he paid scant attention to his left flank, and Howe easily turned Washington's easternmost position at Bedford Pass. Howe would do so again along Brandywine Creek and Birmingham Hill at the Battle of Brandywine in Pennsylvania in September 1777, despite Washington's belated efforts to reinforce his right flank there. Washington failed to understand the geometry of the battlefield. To him, battle was a straightforward affair with little room for tactical finesse or subtlety. On the rare occasions when he attempted much more than a frontal engagement, his plans proved too complex or went awry, as they would at Germantown in October 1777.

Because of his newness and trust in individuals like Greene, Washington tended to accept forceful or confident advice despite his own qualms. Washington's inexperience, as well as Congress's importuning that he consult councils of war, led him to rely on such councils in his decision-making. The choice to hold Fort Washington stands out as chief in his mistakes of trust. Washington had recognized that the post, along with Fort Lee and the river obstructions, had failed to deny the river to the *Royal Navy* or even to make the slightest impression on it. Yet Greene's confidence prevailed, and Washington acquiesced. Events very nearly repeated themselves at Fort Lee when Greene had failed to evacuate the post's heavy guns and supplies. Fortunately for the American army and cause, Washington saw past Greene's misjudgments and came to trust his own reasoning. Greene also grew as a commander, ultimately developing into Washington's finest campaigner. Moreover, Washington soon learned how to use the councils of war as sounding boards rather than decision-making bodies—although this knowledge was yet to come. He, along with the rest of the army, had begun to learn how to fight and how to think, plan, and act.

Despite the shortcomings displayed by some of the senior commanders, some moments shone in the army's performance at the tactical level. Stirling, along with Smallwood's Marylanders and Haslet's Delawareans, had demonstrated tremendous bravery, tenacity, and tactical skill at Gowanus Creek and again on Manhattan. They showed what American soldiers were capable of

when properly trained and led. Similarly, regimental commanders like Glover, Hutchinson, and their sailors-turned-soldiers performed brilliantly when they evacuated the army from Brooklyn. Glover once more rose to the moment at Pell's Point, where he directed a superb delaying action against superior forces.

Although Washington and the army had not shown themselves at their best, they were learning and growing, sometimes through repeated mistakes. Despite the deaths, desertions, and captures of so many in the army, a kernel of his forces existed at the end of the campaign and proved willing to continue fighting. The army had lost battles more often than it had won them, but in each of the engagements it showed an increasing ability to fight. Moreover, Washington was fast coming to the realization that keeping the field was more important than holding terrain or cities. The army's survival and continued resistance were key elements in the Continentals' maturing strategic outlook.

In the end, British experience, tactical skill, and the coordination between their army and navy had won the day, but their victories were fruitless and strategically meaningless. The New York Campaign demonstrated that tactical victories without a sound strategy were pointless. This conundrum would plague the British military until the end of the war.

Sea power, under the command of Admiral Howe, gave the army under his brother's command an operational and tactical flexibility that could only awe the Americans. The *Royal Navy*'s landing barges and batteaux had put the British army exactly where it needed to be and mostly when it was needed—the 16 November crossing of the East River being the exception. From making uncontested landings such as that at Gravesend to providing naval gunfire support at Kip's Bay and Fort Washington to crossing the East River, and finally the Hudson River, the crews of Admiral Howe's fleet had performed well.

In the end, however, the Howe brothers, particularly General Howe, had the task of subduing the rebellion, and in this they failed. They had gained New York as a base of operations and had defeated the Continental Army at nearly every turn, but they had

not destroyed it, nor had they extinguished the revolutionary spirit or the armed embodiment of the revolution, the Continental Army. The Howes had won the campaign for New York, but, in the end, it proved a hollow victory.

APPENDIX

"Order, Regularity, & Discipline": Waging War in the Eighteenth Century

by Joseph A. Seymour

By 1775, armies in Europe and North America had developed into complex forces organized around the infantry regiment. Artillery provided fire support. Mounted units performed reconnaissance, screened attacks and retreats, and added shock. Engineers and pioneers built and demolished fortifications and other works. Artificers repaired and maintained weapons and ordnance. Surgeons treated the sick and wounded. Civilian commissaries made, procured, and transported supplies and rations. All of them supported the foot soldiers, who usually dominated the battlefield.

Composition

The Continental Army and state militia generally organized their infantry regiments using the British model, with a colonel in command, aided by a lieutenant colonel, major, and regimental staff. A regiment had ten companies, including one light and one grenadier company. The light company consisted of the best shots, the cleverest, and the most agile in the regiment. These soldiers specialized in screening, skirmishing, patrolling, and scouting. Congress dispensed early on with the grenadier company, with its brawny shock troops who often formed the vanguard of assaults, and usually authorized

nine companies. Each company carried equipment and additional ammunition in one or two wagons. When the situation called for the infantry to operate away from its baggage train, soldiers placed extra ammunition and essential items in their knapsacks. Most companies had a few women on their rolls. Although not officially in the army, they could draw rations, and sometimes pay, by performing various essential duties, including nursing the sick and wounded and laundering the soldiers' clothing. Captains and lieutenants directed the maneuver and fire of the platoons in their companies. Sergeants and corporals maintained unit cohesion in battle, assisted officers, and enforced discipline in the sections under their charge. Drummers, who ranked between corporals and sergeants, communicated orders in camp and battle.

Equipment

A soldier's basic fighting equipment was known as a stand of arms, which commonly consisted of a musket; a bayonet; a cartridge box of wood, leather, or tin containing between twenty-three and twenty-nine paper cartridges; and cleaning tools. A standard firearm of the period was the British Land Pattern musket. It fired a powerful load consisting of a 1-ounce lead ball propelled by nearly a half ounce of gunpowder. Its oversized barrel of about 0.76- to 0.80-inch diameter made it easier to load. A ball fired from a musket of this type could reach massed troops out to 300 yards. At 100 yards, it was accurate enough to hit an individual and powerful enough to penetrate a two-inch elm plank. Continental, state, and militia forces augmented existing musket stores with locally made copies of the Land Pattern and imported French, German, Dutch, and Spanish arms of similar bore sizes and ballistics. Soldiers also shouldered sporting (nonmilitary issue) arms of different calibers, sometimes retrofitted to mount bayonets. The lack of serviceable arms slowed augmentation and the integration of reinforcements. Furthermore, companies equipped with a mix of arms could not easily sustain fire, let alone mount effective bayonet assaults.

Both armies also issued rifles to light troops or recruited experienced riflemen who brought their own. The rifles usually followed two patterns: the short-barreled, large-bore Germanic or *Jäger* (hunter) rifle, and the long-barreled, small-bore Pennsylvania rifle. Less powerful than muskets, both were accurate to about 300 yards and took about one minute to load. Neither could mount a bayonet. In 1777, British Maj. Patrick Ferguson fielded an innovative breech-loading rifle that mounted a bayonet, but it saw limited service.

Tactics

The musket's capabilities shaped tactics. A trained soldier could fire three rounds per minute. After twenty-five shots, the piece became too hot to handle, and the accumulation of residual gunpowder (known as powder-fouling) required cleaning and slowed reloading. Regiments formed in line at close order, presenting a continuous front of muskets and bayonets to concentrate their fire and mass to maximum effect. Close ranks also enabled company commanders to keep their troops together and thus better control them. The soldiers easily could hear orders communicated by drumbeat and could support each other using linear tactics described in tactical publications such as the *Manual Exercise, As Ordered by His Majesty in 1764*. In 1778, the Continental Army introduced a system spelled out in the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, nicknamed the Blue Book. Well-drilled companies could execute a variety of maneuvers to bring their firepower or bayonets to bear, unleashing simultaneous volleys with devastating effect, or firing alternately by platoon to sustain a running fire. Infantry usually closed to the optimal range of 40 yards for a killing volley before a bayonet assault. While battalions also could extend their intervals to optimize individual fire, volume rather than accuracy usually decided a battle's outcome.

Artillery on both sides organized as separate regiments and battalions but fought as detachments as needed. With a range of several hundred yards, 3-, 4-, and 6-pounder guns supported

battalions in battle. With their slightly longer range, 8- and 12-pounders supported brigades, while larger guns with greater range operated from fortifications. Mortars fired exploding shells in a high arc to get over walls or other obstacles. Howitzers fired shells either directly at troops or in an arc. Artillerists and wagon teams were valuable assets. Commanders therefore often ordered crews that were about to be overrun by the enemy to disable their guns with spikes and mallets and abandon the weapons to save themselves and their teams.

Both forces also employed light dragoons, a type of mounted infantry. The scarcity of large horse breeds in America, the cost of transporting such mounts, and the uneven topography challenged the use of cavalry. Organized as regiments or separate troops, dragoons fought both mounted and dismounted and were armed with sabers, carbines, and, occasionally, pistols. Depending on time and terrain, both armies frequently detached light infantry, riflemen, artillery, and dragoons into separate battalions or combined them into corps or legions.

Fortifications

European and colonial governments constructed dozens of forts before and during the war to defend important cities, towns, and key points. Field fortifications included fort-like redoubts, arrow-shaped flèches, and crescent-shaped lunettes. These structures were built of large wicker cylinders, called gabions, which were filled with soil or rubble, and then reinforced by bundles of sticks called fascines, covered with soil and sod, and surrounded by moats. As time permitted, soldiers erected palisades (walls of vertical wooden stakes), placed fraises (sharpened stakes) at a slant on the inner surface of the moat, and laid an abatis (a network of felled trees with sharpened branches) to slow infantry assaults. For a portable obstacle, artificers would use a cheval-de-frise, which typically consisted of sharpened stakes projecting from a log or beam. To fortify harbor defenses and block rivers, engineers employed log booms connected with heavy chains and created the naval version

of a cheval-de-frise by constructing rock-filled timber boxes bearing sharpened logs.

~

Technology dictated tactics, which in turn influenced formations. The contending forces frequently deviated from the standards prescribed by regulations or government allocations as they dealt with issues of personnel, materiel, and authority. Necessity and mission spurred the evolution of regulations, tactics, and equipment during the war. That was particularly the case for the new army of the United States. As the war progressed, American soldiers attained a high level of proficiency that earned the confidence of those they served and the respect of both allies and enemies.

"The Course of human Affairs forbids an Expectation, that Troops formed under such Circumstances, should at once posses the Order, Regularity & Discipline of Veterans—Whatever Deficiencies there may be, will I doubt not, soon be made up by the Activity & Zeal of the Officers, and the Docility & Obedience of the Men. These Quali[ties,] united with their native Bravery, & Spirit will afford a happy Presage of Success, & put a final Period to those Distresses which now overwhelm this once happy Country."

—George Washington, in an address to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, 4 July 1775

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The following primary and secondary sources were consulted during the preparation of this monograph.

"American Battlefield Trust." 2024. https://www.battlefields.org.

"American Revolutionary War 1775 to 1783." 2017. https://revolutionarywar.us.

Atkinson, Rick. *The British Are Coming: The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775–1777.* New York: Henry Holt, 2019.

Atwood, Rodney. *The Hessians: Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Baer, Friederike. *Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Bolster, W. Jeffrey. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Brooks, Noah. *Henry Knox, a Soldier of the Revolution: Major-general in the Continental Army, Washington's Chief of Artillery, First Secretary of War Under the Constitution, Founder of the Society of the Cincinnati; 1750–1806.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900.

Carp, Benjamin L. *The Great New York Fire of 1776: A Lost Story of the American Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023.

Chase, Philander D., ed. *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*. Vol. 5, *16 June–12 August 1776*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993

———. *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*. Vol. 7, *21 October 1776–5 January 1777*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997.

Chase, Philander D., and Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., eds. *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*. Vol. 6, *13 August–20 October 1776*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

DePauw, Linda Grant. "Women in Combat: The Revolutionary War Experience." *Armed Forces & Society* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 209–26.

Eelking, Max von. *The German Allied Troops in the North American War of Independence, 1776–1783*. Trans. by Joseph George Rosengarten. Albany, NY: Josel Munsell's Sons, 1893.

Egle, William Henry. *Some Pennsylvania Women During the War of the Revolution*. Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing, 1898.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Paul Revere's Ride*. New York: Oxford University Press,1994.

———. *Washington's Crossing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Ford, Worthington Chauncey, ed. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*. Vol. 14, *April 23–September 1, 1779*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909.

Fortescue, John, ed. *The Correspondence of King George the Third from 1760 to December 1783*, vol. 3, *July 1773–December 1777*. London: Macmillan, 1928.

Gotham Center for New York City History, City University of New York. "New York City Revolutionary Trail." 2024. https://nycrevolutionarytrail.org.

Green, J. P. *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hannigan, John. "Patriots of Color in Massachusetts." Minute Man National Historical Park. 2014. https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/john-hannigan-patriots-of-color-paper-1.htm.

Harrison, Cy. "Three Decks–Warships in the Age of Sail." 2010–2024. https://threedecks.org.

Herrera, Ricardo A. "George Washington, Popular Sovereignty, and the Legitimacy of Revolution." In *George Washington: Foundation of Leadership and Character*, edited by Ethan Fishman, William Pederson, and Mark Rozell, 219–27. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001.

Howe, William. "Orderly Book, 1776–1778." William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan. https://findingaids.lib.umich.edu/catalog/umich-wcl-M4806.1how_al_4bf70b448ac8351a147acff1dd8b1c0b9a791980#contents.

Kemble, Stephen. *The Kemble Papers, 1773–1789*. Vol 1. New York: New York Historical Society, 1883.

Lockhart, Paul D. *The Whites of Their Eyes: Bunker Hill, the First American Army, and the Emergence of George Washington*. New York: Harper, 2011.

Lowell, Edward J. *The Hessians and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884.

Lydenberg, Harry Miller. *Archibald Robertson, Lieutenant-General, Royal Engineers: His Diaries and Sketches in America, 1762–1780*. New York: New York Public Library, 1930.

Mann, Marissa, and Clio Admin. "'The First Line of Defence'–1776." Clio: Your Guide to History. https://theclio.com/tour/2064/12.

Morgan, William James, ed. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. Vol. 5, *American Theatre, May 9, 1776–July 31, 1776*. Washington, DC: Naval History Division, 1970.

———. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. Vol. 6, *American Theater: August 1, 1776–October 31, 1776; European Theater: May 26, 1776–October 5, 1776*. Washington, DC: Naval History Division, 1972.

O'Shaughnessy, Andrew Jackson. *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

Pettit, Marylin H. *The Battle of Brooklyn, August 27–29, 1776: A Walking Guide to Sites and Monuments*. New York: Old Stone House of Brooklyn, 2012.

Roberts, Andrew. *The Last King of America: The Misunderstood Reign of George III*. New York: Viking, 2021.

Schecter, Barnet. *The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution*. New York: Walker, 2002.

Selesky, Harold E. "Battle of New York." In *Oxford Companion to Military History*, edited by John Whiteclay Chambers II et al., 499–500. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Seymour, Joseph. *The Pennsylvania Associators, 1747–1777.* Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2012.

Smith, David. *New York, 1776: The Continentals' First Battle*. Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2003.

Stember, Sol. "New York at War: Where the Sites Are." *New York Times*. 6 July 1975. https://www.nytimes.com/1975/07/06/archives/new-york-at-war-where-the-sites-are-new-york-at-war-where-the.html.

Wright, Kevin. "New Bridge in the American Revolution." Bergen County Historical Society. 2024. https://www.bergencountyhistory.org/newbridge-revwar.

Wright, Robert K., Jr. *The Continental Army*. Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1983.

MAP SYMBOLS


Route of march/attack


Retreat

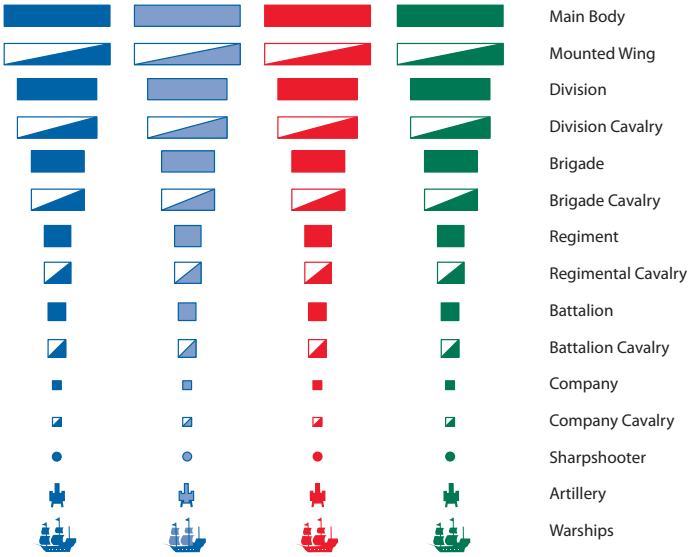

Fortifications/Redoubts


Boat Bridge


Battle/Engagement


Abatis

MILITARY UNITS



THE AUTHOR

Ricardo A. Herrera is Visiting Professor, Department of National Security and Strategy, U.S. Army War College. He is the author of *Feeding Washington's Army: Surviving the Valley Forge Winter of 1778* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022) and *For Liberty and the Republic: The American Citizen as Soldier, 1775–1861* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). A graduate of Marquette University (PhD, 1998) and the University of California, Los Angeles (BA, 1984), Herrera has taught at Mount Union College and Texas Lutheran University. Before becoming a historian, Herrera spent five years in sales and served three years as an armor and cavalry officer in the U.S. Army.


CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY
EDUCATE INSPIRE PRESERVE
1918
UNITED STATES ARMY
REVOLUTIONARY WAR 250TH ANNIVERSARY