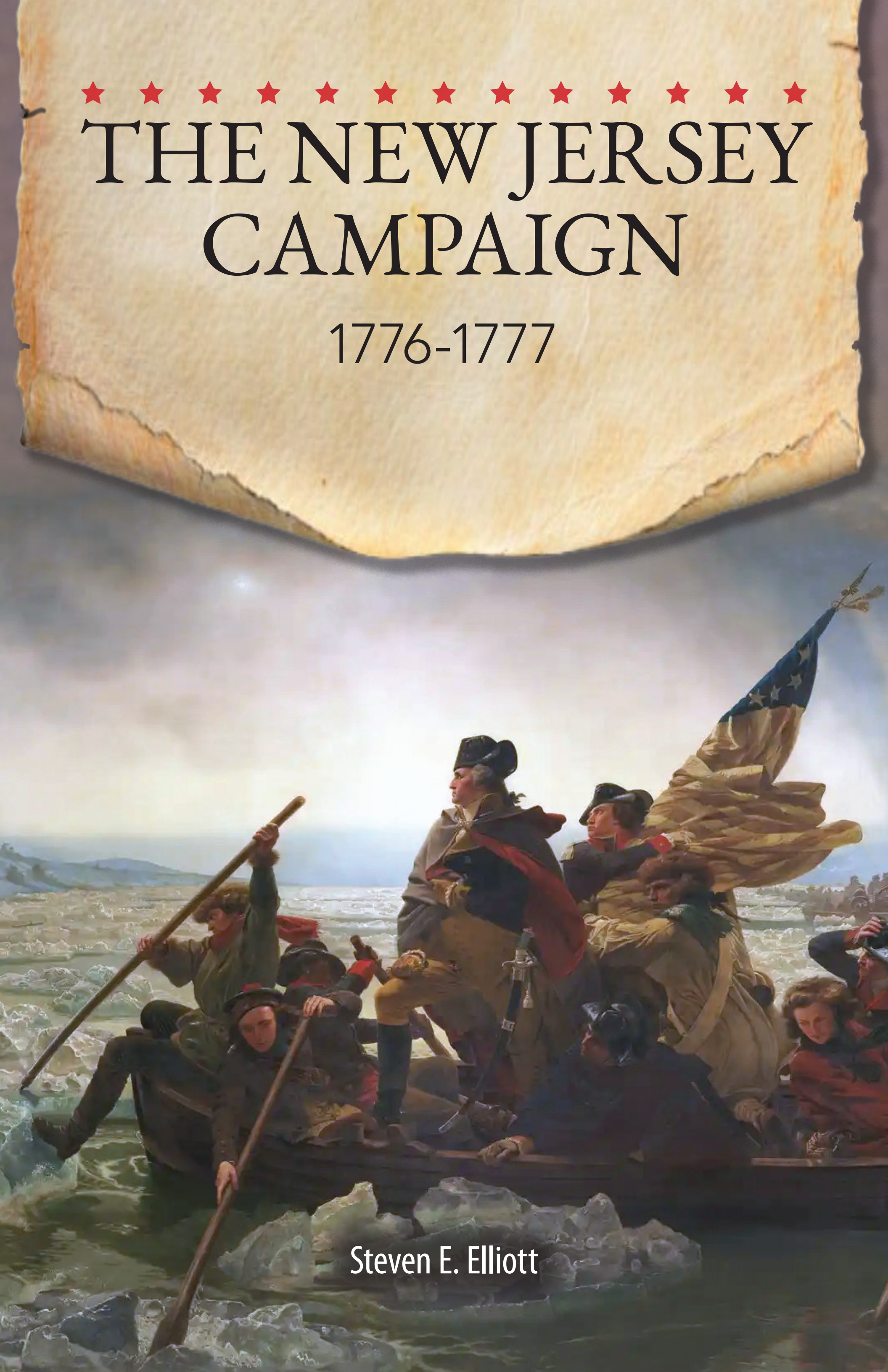
THE NEW JERSEY CAMPAIGN
1776-1777
Steven E. Elliott

The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

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THE NEW JERSEY CAMPAIGN, 1776–1777

by
Steven E. Elliott

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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-three 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 JERSEY CAMPAIGN, 1776–1777

In November 1776, the army of the British Crown under Lt. Gen. Sir William Howe could lay claim to a hard-fought, limited victory in the New York campaign. Howe's soldiers had inflicted a significant defeat on General George Washington's American patriot army at the Battle of Long Island in late August but had allowed the Americans to escape to Manhattan. After the British amphibious assault at Kip's Bay on 15 September, General Washington again avoided encirclement by withdrawing to upper Manhattan. The patriots checked the British advance at the Battle of Harlem Heights the following day. British landings at Pell's Point in mid-October forced the Americans to retreat northward again, leading to an indecisive battle at White Plains, New York, on 28 October. Despite the withdrawal, the patriot commander in chief maintained a garrison at Fort Washington in upper Manhattan. Although the revolutionaries hoped the fort could hold out, the garrison was too small to cover its defenses. General Washington realized the precariousness of the position and resolved to evacuate his troops, but the British struck first. Howe's troops seized Fort Washington on 16 November in a

deliberate attack that yielded 2,500 prisoners, marking their most significant victory of the campaign. Howe's successes around New York earned him a knighthood.

STRATEGIC SETTING

General Washington faced the tall task of halting further British offensives. The 44-year-old Virginian had assumed command of the patriot army in June 1775 and adroitly managed the blockade of Boston to a successful conclusion by March 1776. In the New York campaign, Washington had suffered several tactical reverses but consistently had avoided decisive engagements and kept the army intact. Moving forward, Washington's strategic imperative was to maintain the army in the field as a continued threat to the British and as a symbol of American resistance. Washington realized that avoiding direct engagements and instead wearing down the enemy through attrition provided the revolutionaries with their best chance for victory. Holding specific cities or states carried less value under such a strategy than preserving the existence of the army. Nevertheless, the need to maintain morale, encourage recruitment, and secure a base of operations forced Washington to seek battle, and Congress pressured him to hold key cities like Philadelphia.

In the coming phase of the war, Washington faced the recently knighted General Howe. The 47-year-old officer already had enjoyed a distinguished career. During the Seven Years' War, he had served at Louisbourg, Québec, Havana, and Belle-Isle and earned a reputation as a skilled tactician. In 1775, he had led the assault at Bunker Hill, after which he received a promotion to commander in chief of the British army in America. His campaign in 1776 had

George Washington after the Battle of Princeton, Charles Wilson Peale, 1779–1782 (*Princeton University Art Museum*)

seized control of the mouth of the Hudson River and New York City's impressive harbor. The new nation's second largest city now lay under occupation, with local loyalists emboldened and patriots cowed. Sir William could therefore set his sights on wider strategic objectives.

Howe ultimately sought to bring about a reconciliation between the Crown and rebellious colonies, and his superiors empowered him to negotiate a peace settlement. He held a moderate outlook and expressed sympathy for the revolutionaries. He believed a conciliatory approach could end the war best and wanted to avoid undue destruction and social disruption. Before the campaign, Howe had outlined a broad plan calling for the capture of New York, followed by advances from Canada into the Champlain Valley, the taking of Rhode Island, and a move into New Jersey. This strategy would maximize British advantages in sea power and logistics and deny the enemy important territory, populations, and economic centers. Against such a large, diverse, and decentralized opponent, Howe's strategy represented Britain's most viable option. In autumn 1776, it appeared that the British had successfully implemented the first stage of this plan. The northern advance into the Champlain Valley stalled after the battle of Valcour Island on 11 October, but Howe's main force remained poised to continue the offensive after its successes in New York. Across the Hudson, New Jersey beckoned as the next step in the campaign to subdue the rebellion.

Howe commanded a powerful force to conduct this campaign. In July 1776, he had landed 23,000 troops on Staten Island with the support of 70 warships commanded by his older brother V. Adm. Richard, 4th Viscount Howe. Most British army officers hailed from the upper ranks of society and had purchased their initial commissions. Nevertheless, most of these officers studied the art of war closely and made military service their career. Although the officers' elite backgrounds distinguished them from the commoner rank-and-file, they nevertheless proved capable of great personal bravery that inspired devotion and admiration from their troops. British officers might sometimes face criticism for a lack of imagination, but they seldom demonstrated an absence of courage.

Most soldiers came from the lower ranks of society. These troops had enlisted voluntarily, contrary to modern popular views, and they averaged nine years of experience. Infantry comprised the majority of King George's army. The British soldier enjoyed the support of a sophisticated fiscal and bureaucratic system that successfully

had financed and supplied a series of wars earlier in the eighteenth century. The 3,000-mile distance back to London inevitably led to interruptions in the flow of equipment and provisions, but British logisticians usually ensured His Majesty's troops had adequate supplies. Overall, the redcoats typically displayed a high level of morale.

Britain held possessions around the globe, which all required garrisons. Even though the rest of the empire remained mostly at peace, potential threats ranging from local princes in South Asia to great European rivals such as France prevented the Crown from deploying the whole of its forces to North America. Of the nearly 100,000 soldiers under arms in 1776, only two-thirds served in North America. Like its prosecution of earlier wars in the century, the British government did not conduct a potentially socially disruptive mass mobilization before 1778 and continued to rely on long-service regulars. The time and expense needed to train and equip these troops led their commanders to employ them cautiously. Britain therefore could ill-afford heavy losses. Should Howe lose an army, he could not replace it.

To provide further manpower for the American war, King George III's government hired soldiers from seven different German-speaking states in Central Europe. The rulers of these small polities signed treaties that furnished their armies to more powerful countries in return for financial compensation. During the first half of 1776, the British government signed contracts to use more than 17,000 German soldiers, and Howe had more than 9,000 serving under him at points during the New York and New Jersey campaigns.

Facing Howe, the patriot army of late 1776 was a mix of Continental soldiers, state troops, and militia units representing the states' diverse military traditions. Suspicion of standing armies remained strong and widespread in 1776, and the revolution's leaders hoped to win the war without resorting to long-service soldiers. Twenty-seven Continental regiments comprised the core of General Washington's Main Army, responsible for defending the mid-Atlantic states from the British. Despite their Continental title, most of these regiments hailed from the New England states, and their

soldiers had enlisted for only one year. These units were organized mostly as single battalions with eight companies equipped with smoothbore muskets. The 1st Continental Regiment, composed of Pennsylvania riflemen, stood as one exception. Some units carried a mixture of both types of weapons.

The states ranging from Massachusetts to Virginia also contributed their militia units and state troops to the campaign. Leadership, equipment, and motivation in these units varied, even within states. The New England states typically featured well-organized militia regiments, veteran officers who had served in the Seven Years' War, and a commitment to obligatory service for White male citizens. Quaker-influenced Pennsylvania, by contrast, relied on a voluntary defense force, known as the Military Association. New Jersey adopted a model like New England's but suffered from inferior leadership, experience, and organization. Militia units frequently confounded Continental commanders because many regiments failed to mobilize when ordered or departed from the army in the middle of a campaign. Critics failed to realize that these citizen soldiers frequently had to balance military service with their commitments to their families and communities. The spring planting and fall harvest seasons were particularly difficult times for militiamen to mobilize. By contrast, during the winter months, militiamen turned out in large numbers.

Although Continental and militia infantry made up the bulk of Washington's army, the general could also call upon a growing artillery force. In November 1775, Congress had appointed Col. Henry Knox of Massachusetts to lead the Continental Army's Artillery Regiment, with an authorized strength of twelve companies. During the fighting in New York and New Jersey, Washington also received support from state artillery units. American foundries, imports from Europe, and captured British guns provided ample artillery for the campaign. Indeed, Knox faced greater problems from a lack of trained personnel than a deficiency of weapons. Although the patriots enjoyed a relative abundance of artillery, shortages of horses and forage left the Army with only a small mounted arm. The Philadelphia Light Horse and riders drawn from

the Connecticut militia's mounted regiments provided the bulk of Washington's equestrians. These soldiers carried out reconnaissance and messaging duties but rarely intervened on the battlefield.

Combat support services also expanded significantly during 1776. In the quartermaster's department, Washington reappointed Brig. Gen. Thomas Mifflin to oversee the army's logistics shortly before the start of the New Jersey campaign. Mifflin had managed the patriots' supplies at Boston in 1775 ably but had resigned his position in May 1776 upon his promotion to brigadier general. His replacement, Col. Stephen Moylan, had not performed well during the New York campaign, and Mifflin's return to the quartermaster's department at the end of September promised competently managed logistics. Additionally, a provisional artificers regiment authorized in June 1776 provided maintenance and construction services.

The rank-and-file came from throughout American society. Enthusiasm for the cause in 1776, coupled with short-term enlistments, encouraged people to join the Army. From the New England Continentals to the Pennsylvania Associators, farmers served alongside artisans and merchants. Officers tended to hold more wealth, status, and political connections. Most soldiers were White and American-born of British origins. Nonetheless, Pennsylvania and Maryland raised a German regiment, and Dutch speakers filled out the ranks of New York and New Jersey units. Americans of Irish descent also served throughout the army. Conversely, Congress officially prohibited Black or Native American people from enlisting, although recruiters often ignored these regulations to obtain enlistees. Soldiers of color who had enlisted at the start of the war, before Congress issued its prohibition, remained in the ranks. Because families expected their soldiers to be away from home for a year at most, few accompanied the army in 1776.

The army's complex composition presented a glaring problem. Throughout the campaign, soldiers departed for home at the end of their terms, and militiamen frequently ignored their mobilization orders. The strain of the summer and fall campaigns wore out equipment, eroded morale, and led to increased sickness and desertion. Washington's Main Army dwindled in size from a

nominal strength of 31,000 in September to slightly more than 6,000 in late December. Most of the remaining soldiers' enlistments were set expire at the end of the year.

Congress recognized the impracticality of fighting the war exclusively with short-service soldiers. Despite the national government's ideological misgivings, it approved in September 1776 enlistments that would last for three years or the duration of the war. This new Continental Army had an authorized strength of eighty-eight regiments, which would be apportioned out to the states based on their population. Such a force represented a potentially powerful instrument of war, provided enough people volunteered to fill its ranks. Improved national morale and renewed enthusiasm for the cause likely would induce widespread enlistment. Thus, the fighting in and around New Jersey in late 1776 and early 1777 promised to shape the future of the Continental Army, and with it the American cause.

The 1776–1777 campaign took place primarily in New Jersey. Politically, the state had demonstrated allegiance to the patriot cause since 1775, though one hardly could characterize the state as unified or steadfast in its support. Observers still commonly referred to the state as "the Jersies" in recognition of its former status as two separate colonies, East and West Jersey. Although the two united in 1704, politics, geography, and culture continued to divide the New York–oriented East Jersey and the Philadelphia-facing West Jersey. Even in 1776, the government alternated its meeting sites between Burlington in West Jersey and Perth Amboy in East Jersey.

Jerseyans contrasted sharply with the relatively homogenous New Englanders and lacked a dominant political class like the planter elites of southern states. Residents also had enjoyed a less antagonistic relationship with Britain during the years of the imperial crisis before the war. The absence of major ports and mercantile communities minimized the effect of most British taxes, and the colony's people had generally good relations with British military garrisons. Nevertheless, some Jerseyans opposed British policies on economic and ideological grounds, and many sympathized with the plight of Massachusetts after 1773. New Jersey joined eleven other colonies in sending representatives to the First Continental Congress

in 1774 to discuss responses to the British Intolerable Acts. After the outbreak of the war in 1775, a revolutionary movement developed in the colony that sent representatives to the Second Continental Congress and elected two Provincial Congresses but did not unseat the official government. The state's diverse population included many who remained loyal to the Crown and even more who regarded the conflict with ambiguity.

Only in early 1776 did the realities of war and reports of British atrocities shift sentiments toward independence. Jersey militiamen placed Royal Governor William Franklin under house arrest in January, then arrested and imprisoned him in June. On 2 July 1776, the Provincial Congress approved a new constitution, thus separating New Jersey from British rule. Nevertheless, the document included a clause providing for the possibility of reconciliation with the Crown. Consequently, any shift in the tides of war could lead to significant changes in public support for the patriot cause.

New Jersey's demographic geography complicated its politics. Most of its significant settlements lay along a 70-mile-long corridor stretching from Bergen County in the northeast to Burlington County in the southwest. Elizabethtown, across from Staten Island, ranked as New Jersey's largest town, with around 1,000 residents in 1776. North of Elizabethtown, Newark, Bergen (now part of Jersey City), and Hackensack counted a few hundred residents in their vicinities. Below Elizabethtown, New Brunswick, more commonly called Brunswick at the time, and Perth Amboy, then better known as Amboy, stood as the principal towns along the Raritan River. South of Brunswick, Princeton lay along the main Post Road to Philadelphia, followed by Trenton at the Delaware River's head of navigation. Below Trenton were Bordentown at the confluence of the Delaware River and Crosswicks Creek, followed by Burlington. These towns possessed several important ferry crossings. Elizabethtown, Amboy, Brunswick, Trenton, and Burlington each contained barracks built during the recent Seven Years' War. These structures would supplant the billeting of troops, which had hitherto proved a major irritant to civilians; however, the barracks as a group could accommodate only about 800 soldiers. The state's public buildings

and private homes would have to accommodate thousands more. Princeton and Brunswick featured colleges, and Burlington and Amboy contained limited port facilities. Yet none could claim to be a significant political or economic center, and all lay in the shadow of the size, wealth, and political might of New York and Philadelphia.

In contrast to the towns, New Jersey's agricultural bounty made it valuable to both armies' quartermasters. Most residents worked to produce grain, meat, fruit, and vegetables that succored nearby urban populations as well as distant locales. The state's road network and central location also made it a valuable communications node. The main Post Road ran from Newark and Elizabethtown to Brunswick, where ferries carried travelers across the Raritan. The road then proceeded through Princeton to Trenton. Five ferries carried traffic across the Delaware in the vicinity of Trenton. Control of the main road thus yielded the state's main line of communications and several of its largest towns. Much of the best farmland, however, lay far to the east in Monmouth County, to the south in Cumberland, or to the west in Hunterdon County and Sussex. To occupy the entirety of such a decentralized state would have required either a larger army than Howe had, or a willingness to disperse it to great extent.

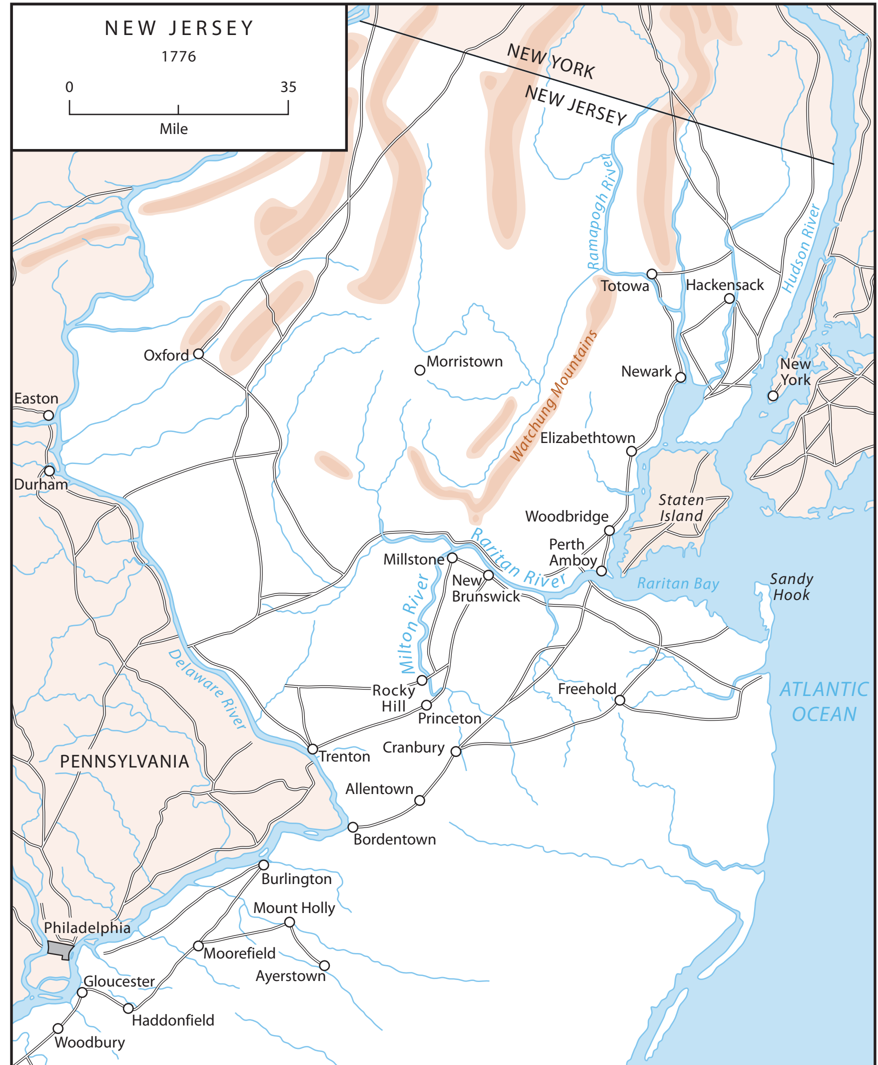
Attitudes toward the revolution varied throughout the state. The heavily Presbyterian communities in Morris and Sussex counties typically favored independence. Bergen, Essex, and Middlesex Counties, however, featured sizable Anglican minorities with closer ties to the Crown. The Dutch populations in the Hackensack and Raritan valleys fractured into pro- and anti-independence factions; so too did the farmers in rural Monmouth County. Many Quakers in West Jersey sought to avoid involvement in the conflict, as did the small minorities of Germans, Swedes, and Finns. For the enslaved Black population, who made up 10 percent of the state's residents, the war provided opportunities to obtain freedom, either through military service or escape. Overall, despite these regional variations, loyalists, revolutionaries, and neutrals inhabited all corners of New Jersey.

The state's physical geography provided advantages to both attackers and defenders. The 1776–1777 campaign unfolded in

central and northern New Jersey (*Map 1*), with peripheral operations also taking place in the Hudson Highlands and Westchester County in New York as well as the southwestern coast of Connecticut. Major roads generally ran from the northeast to the southwest between New York and Philadelphia. The most populous areas lay in the plains and hills, and the roads that traversed the piedmont terrain facilitated maneuver. The steep cliffs of the Palisades stood along the Hudson opposite New York, but beyond, the terrain remained mostly undulating from Hackensack to Trenton. Rivers presented greater obstacles. The Hudson itself was a mile wide opposite upper Manhattan, with tides and strong currents, necessitating ships to move an army to the Jersey side. Two miles to the west, the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers flowed in a generally north-south direction. Several bridges and fords crossed them, but surrounding marshes could constrain an army's movements. Twenty miles south of the Passaic, the east-west flowing Raritan River was the largest water barrier within the state. Ferries and barges carried traffic across the river at Brunswick, as did a bridge 2 miles upstream at Raritan Landing. Once an army passed the Raritan, unobstructed ground stretched to the Delaware at Trenton.

Jersey's littoral environment contrasted sharply with New York's. Whereas several wide and deep rivers had facilitated the advance of Howe's army around Manhattan, none of Jersey's rivers provided an avenue of inland advance for a waterborne army. The waters of the Arthur Kill, separating Staten Island from New Jersey, offered opportunities for flanking a defending army; however, the Passaic's navigability ended near Newark and the Raritan's around Brunswick, in both cases no more than 10 miles upstream. A defending army thereby faced limited threats of amphibious envelopment to its eastern flank, but the interior of the state stood secure from enemy vessels.

To the north and west of New Jersey's central corridor lay a more mountainous, less populous region. Fifteen miles west of New York City, the Watchung Mountains stretched for 30 miles from the Raritan River in the south to the Great Falls of the Passaic River in the north. This set of parallel 800-foot-high ridges formed an effective barrier between the populous piedmont to the east and the



Map 1

sparsely inhabited counties of Morris and Sussex to the west and north. Beyond the Watchungs, an even taller, rockier chain of hills, the Highlands, ran through Morris County northeastward to the Hudson near Peekskill in New York. The Watchungs and Highlands featured only small settlements, including Morristown and Chatham,

but behind them lay a network of roads connecting to New York, Pennsylvania, and New England. Thus, an army that seized the piedmont region would benefit from possessing good agricultural land, the largest towns, and best roads, but would remain vulnerable to an opponent that held the roads, mountains, and villages beyond the Watchungs.

New Jersey offered several strategic advantages to an army. Its unsure support for the revolution made it a good candidate for restoring royal authority. Its rich farmland would provide abundant provisions. With the cold months approaching, the state could also offer additional shelter for winter quarters. A position in New Jersey would also put British forces within striking distance of Philadelphia, the United States' largest city and de facto capital. Conversely, having lost New York already, Washington could not yield another state to enemy control without a fight.

OPERATIONS

The Invasion of New Jersey

Although most of the fighting in the 1776 campaign had occurred in New York, patriot leaders had not ignored New Jersey's defenses entirely. In July, Washington organized a new command, the Flying Camp, to provide a mobile militia reserve and blocking force against any incursion into New Jersey. He appointed Brig. Gen. Hugh Mercer from Virginia to lead this unit, which was to consist of soldiers from Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. Throughout September and October, troops arrived to raise Mercer's strength to nearly 6,000.

Discipline remained poor, however, and rainy weather coupled with inadequate quarters led to an increase in illness and a decline in morale. Mercer's overstretched troops held a 30-mile-long front from Perth Amboy in the south to Fort Lee in the north.

New Jersey's government attempted to mobilize further militia units to reinforce the Flying Camp. Brig. Gen. William Livingston served as the head of the New Jersey militia. He hailed from New York but had relocated to Elizabethtown and risen quickly in revolutionary political circles to earn a seat in the Continental Congress. Livingston lacked military experience however, and despite his efforts the Jersey militia did not distinguish themselves during the 1776 campaign. Many people avoided service. The state had enacted a ten-shilling fine for failing to fulfill one's obligation, but this penalty proved trifling for those who preferred to remain home, particularly during the harvest season. Livingston consequently grappled with widespread desertions and the wholesale failure of units from western counties to mobilize. Washington returned some Jersey militiamen from duty in New York to reinforce their home state in July, but the expansion of British operations in August forced General Mercer to send Washington troops from the Flying Camp. At the end of August, the New Jersey legislature elected Livingston as the state's first governor. He remained the official commander in chief of the Jersey militia but took a less active role in military affairs for the remainder of the campaign. The state's citizen soldiers thus faced imminent invasion with an inexperienced and overburdened leader at their head.

After the setbacks in and around New York, Washington arranged his forces to limit any further British advances into the American interior. If he could contain the enemy to New York, Washington hoped to use a quiet winter to equip and train the new three-year recruits. To do so, the Americans would need to halt any further advances by their opponents. The *Royal Navy*'s control of the sea meant that Howe could concentrate his troops rapidly to prosecute a campaign anywhere in the region. Consequently, Washington had to position his forces to cover several possible outcomes. The commander in chief brought the bulk of his army to New Jersey,

concentrating 5,000 troops at Hackensack, 5 miles west of Fort Lee on the Hudson. Thirty miles north of Manhattan in the Hudson Highlands, Washington posted a detachment of 3,000 under Maj. Gen. William Heath at Peekskill, New York. To Heath's rear, 7,500 soldiers under Maj. Gen. Charles Lee encamped at North Castle. Washington envisioned Lee's force as a reserve; it could move quickly to reinforce Heath if the British moved directly northward, march eastward to defend New England if Howe chose to attack there, or cross the Hudson and come south to join Washington in New Jersey. The dispositions afforded the patriots flexibility: any British thrust up the Hudson into the Highlands would need to worry about Washington's sizable force in its rear, whereas any push into New Jersey would open opportunities for Lee and Heath to move south. This triangular arrangement in northern New Jersey, the Hudson Highlands, and the eastern shore of the Hudson proved sound in theory; the Continental Army would adopt similar dispositions throughout the later years of the war.

General Howe initially planned only a limited operation to secure the bank of the Hudson opposite Manhattan. Following on the heels of the victory at Fort Washington, the British general sought to seize Fort Lee on the Jersey side of the river. Howe's New Jersey campaign opened on 20 November 1776 when between 4,000 and 6,000 British and German troops under Maj. Gen. Charles, 2nd Earl Cornwallis, came ashore at New Dock Landing. Loyalists provided Cornwallis with an accurate picture of the terrain and roads in the area, offering the British a chance to trap the defenders between the Hudson and Hackensack Rivers. Difficulties in bringing equipment and supplies up the steep Palisades slowed Cornwallis's advance, however, spoiling the opportunity to encircle the Americans.

To avoid a disaster like at Fort Washington, the American commander in chief instead pulled his troops back behind the Hackensack. Fort Lee fell without a fight, but most of the patriot army escaped. Nevertheless, the British captured up to 150 prisoners in the vicinity, as well as 50 cannons, 1,000 barrels of flour, and other stores and ammunition. Flush with victory at Fort Lee, Cornwallis sought to expand the scope of the operation by advancing deeper

A view of the attack against Fort Washington and rebel Redou[b]ts near New York on the 16 of November 1776 by the British and Hessian brigades, **Thomas Davies, 1776 (*American Revolution Institute*)**

into New Jersey. The advantages of seizing quarters and supplies and denying them to the enemy led Howe to authorize a pursuit further into the state. The Hackensack River was less than 200 feet across and only knee-deep, making it a poor defensive barrier. Washington therefore marched about 12 miles to the southwest to Acquackanonk on 22 November and to Newark the following day.

Holding northern New Jersey presented Washington with significant difficulties. Between Acquackanonk and Newark lay the Second River; a position behind that stream, with the Passaic River and Hackensack marshes to the east and Watchungs to the west, provided some defensive possibilities. Unfortunately, the state's extensive coastline opposite British-held Manhattan and Staten Island offered the enemy opportunities to land on the shore and outflank any patriot defense. Intelligence sources reported the buildup of a large British amphibious force in New York harbor, portending just such an attack. Howe intended for this contingent to occupy Newport, Rhode Island, and its ice-free harbor to supplement New York. The amphibious force's commander, Lt. Gen. Sir Henry

Clinton, pressed Howe to send him to land at Perth Amboy or even Philadelphia instead, but the British commander in chief held firm. Mindful of the potential menace to his flank, Washington posted regiments at Elizabethtown, Woodbridge, and Perth Amboy to monitor the coast while the general and his subordinates debated their next steps. The army could withdraw west toward Springfield and Morristown, removing the threat of a British landing in their rear and placing the army in a secure, mountainous environment. This course of action would, however, leave the state's population centers and its vital roads to Philadelphia open to the enemy. Washington decided to move his army southward across the Raritan River on 29 November.

At this point, discord in the American command disrupted Washington's plans for a coordinated defensive effort. With the Main Army on the Raritan, Washington called upon General Lee's reserve force at North Castle to move south toward Morristown. From there, Lee's soldiers could deter any British move into the Watchungs and Jersey Highlands, threaten the rear of the Crown army should it push across the Raritan, or move further south and combine with Washington's force. Lee enjoyed great prestige in late 1776. He held extensive experience in European wars and had taken credit for the successful defense of the garrison at Charleston, South Carolina, against a British expedition earlier in the year. As Washington's popularity ebbed with the loss of New York, Lee appeared well-positioned to replace him as commander in chief should he fail in another campaign. Washington showed great deference to his subordinate by initially sending him not orders but recommendations, which Lee ignored. Compounding matters further, Washington's aide-de-camp Lt. Col. Joseph Reed favored Lee and communicated directly with the general, often adding subversive commentary on the commander in chief's abilities. Lee meanwhile corresponded directly with Congress, submitting a plan that broadly conformed to Washington's thinking, but with movements Lee scheduled according to his timetable. Compounding matters further, General Heath, who assumed sole responsibility for defending the Hudson Highlands after Lee's departure, remained

loyal to Washington and refused to submit to Lee's directives because both men held the same rank.

This command discord undermined any chance the patriots had of checking the British on the Raritan. On 1 December, Washington lost 2,600 soldiers as enlistments expired, leaving him with only 3,400 effectives. Washington thus lacked the strength to halt the enemy on the Raritan without assistance from Lee. Lee, however continued to hold his force in New York, excusing his sluggish pace because of short supplies, poor roads, and a lack of cooperation with Heath. Lee's absence forced Washington to retreat. His main body camped at Princeton on 2 December, with few natural obstacles behind them upon which to anchor a defense.

Despite the reverses, Washington maintained a steady grip on the campaign by arranging for an eventual retreat across the Delaware. He ordered the gathering of all the available boats on the river near Trenton to facilitate the army's embarkation and began removing baggage and equipment to Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, Washington informed Congress that he still hoped to contest the British in New Jersey, should he be able to join with Lee's contingent. The patriots could soon expect other reinforcements as well. Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates and eight regiments from the Northern Army were on the way. Closer at hand, the Pennsylvania Associators had mobilized. Nevertheless, Washington learned that Lee had only just begun crossing the Hudson with 2,500 soldiers on 2 December, and 75 miles separated the two wings of the army.

In New York, General Howe prevaricated over expanding the scope of the campaign. He had intended only to seize Fort Lee and open the Hudson fully to navigation, but light resistance and the need for foraging grounds and quarters made expanding the operation an attractive option. It remained unclear, however, if the benefits of seizing more of the state outweighed the dangers. Despite Lee's tardiness, the British could not ignore the presence of a sizable patriot force in their rear. Cornwallis kept several regiments at Newark and Hackensack to guard his lines of communications, while his main body marked time on the Raritan, where his advance

units skirmished with the patriot rear guard near Brunswick on 1 December.

Political considerations ultimately dictated Howe's next step. As part of his conciliatory approach to ending the conflict, on 30 November the British general offered pardons to anyone who had taken up arms against the Crown, provided they came forward within the next sixty days and pledged allegiance to George III's government. At least 3,000 people agreed to do so during December. Encouraged by reports of growing support for the Crown, Howe authorized Cornwallis to resume his advance on 6 December. The patriot rear guard under Maj. Gen. William Alexander, also known as Lord Stirling because of his claim to a disputed Scottish title, clashed with the British advanced units, but by 8 December the redcoats occupied both Princeton and Trenton. Washington withdrew all his soldiers and most of his supplies into Pennsylvania, as well as all the boats available on the river.

Although the bulk of the British army concentrated against Washington below the Raritan, to the north, Lee's contingent crossed into New Jersey on the night of 3 December and reached Morristown a week later. The nearby Watchung Mountains made ideal locations for observation posts and defensive works and limited the movement of any approaching enemy force. Lee claimed that he could aid Washington more effectively by keeping his column at Morristown. From that locale, he argued, he could threaten the rear of the redcoats pursuing Washington around Princeton. Lee had recently received word that a British fleet had departed New York sailing eastward. This was General Clinton's force of 7,100 soldiers which Howe had sent to occupy Newport. Lee correctly read the situation, reasoning that the dispersal of enemy strength indicated that the British did not intend to advance on Philadelphia during the winter. Lee continued to assert to Congress, Washington, and other officers that the army did not need reinforcement unless Howe crossed the Delaware.

Washington disagreed, believing that only a concentration of all available forces could turn back the British. On 12 December, the commander in chief gained further power to direct operations.

Congress, which had evacuated from Philadelphia to Baltimore, granted the Virginian full control over "all things relative to the department, and the operations of war." On 27 December, Congress extended Washington's authority over military affairs for an additional six months. Although the government retained the power to confirm or repeal Washington's measures, ensuring ultimate civilian control of the military, the general faced minimal challenges to his command during one of the war's most critical periods. On 13 December, a party of British dragoons took General Lee prisoner at Basking Ridge, near Morristown, removing another obstacle to Washington's authority. Maj. Gen. John Sullivan assumed command of Lee's contingent and immediately followed Washington's orders to march for the Delaware, reaching this destination by 20 December.

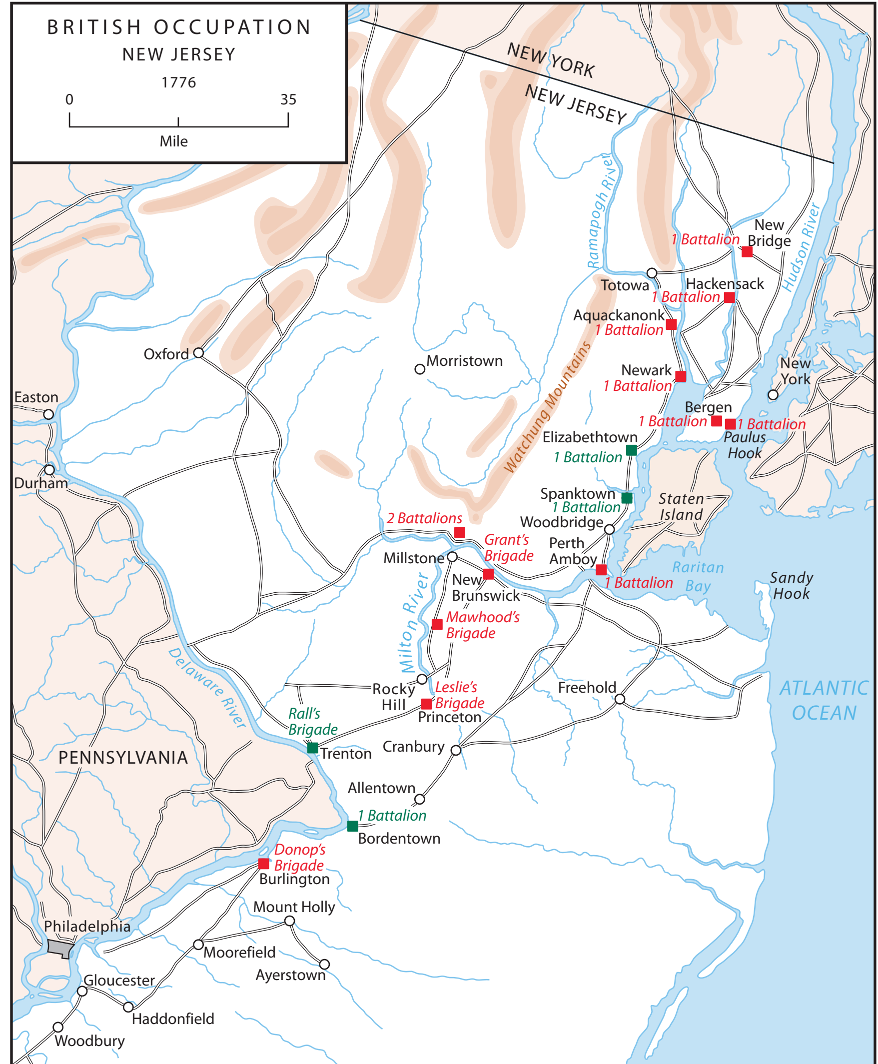
With the British appearing to threaten Philadelphia directly, Washington directed his subordinates to ready the terrain around the city for a defensive battle. He ordered Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam to survey the region to determine the finest sites from which to mount a defense if the British offensive continued. The patriots selected the vicinity of Germantown, north of Philadelphia, as the best place to make their stand. Putnam evacuated supplies from the city to Delaware, cleared boats from the region's creeks, and began constructing field fortifications. Elements of the Philadelphia Rifle Battalion and Pennsylvania Navy concurrently demolished bridges over the Rancocas and Pennsauken Creeks and the Cooper River to deny the enemy easy access to West Jersey.

As the patriots prepared their defenses, the British transitioned from offensive operations to garrison and pacification duties. General Howe issued orders on 14 December dispersing his army into a chain of cantonments stretching across New Jersey. (*See Map 2*.) A southern wing under Col. Johann Gottlieb Rall, composed primarily of German troops, positioned three regiments at Trenton, three at Bordentown, and two at Burlington. Rall assumed direct command of the Trenton garrison, with Col. Carl Emil Ulrich von Donop leading the brigade at Bordentown. To the north, Brig. Gen. Alexander Leslie commanded a full brigade of British troops as well as two light infantry battalions at Princeton. Hillsborough, Brunswick,

Raritan Landing, Spanktown, Perth Amboy, Elizabethtown, Newark, Acquackanonk, Hackensack, New Bridge, Bergen, and Paulus Hook accommodated the remainder of George III's army in the state, with each village receiving roughly one battalion. Howe appointed Maj. Gen. James Grant to command the Jersey occupation with his headquarters at Brunswick. Howe remained in New York City, while his chief subordinate General Cornwallis prepared to return to Great Britain for the winter. With Trenton sitting exposed on the Delaware, a debate arose among the British leadership over whether a rotation of small detachments or a large permanent garrison should guard it. Howe opted for a permanent garrison.

The British general's actions aligned with common eighteenth-century arrangements for winter quarters. Soldiers typically lodged in billets in towns and cities, sometimes dispersing across entire provinces. Billets provided comfortable lodging at little expense beyond the inconvenience to the local population, and also eased supply issues. In North America, however, lower population densities meant that fewer towns and villages were available to meet a large army's housing needs. The small size of the settlements forced the British and German soldiers into widely separated dispositions. Even within towns, a lack of suitable housing forced some troops into tent encampments in the countryside. The dispersed Crown cantonments raised the risk of defeat in detail should Washington attack, but Howe assumed that the fall campaign had rendered his opponent too badly damaged to hazard an offensive.

Beyond the tasks of quartering and supplying the army through the winter, General Howe also sought to use the occupation of New Jersey to further Britain's political and diplomatic advantage. The Crown entered a political vacuum that had emerged during Washington's retreat through the state; Governor Livingston had fled to Pennsylvania in late November and ceased official correspondence until January. However, administering the diverse and fractured state proved difficult. Many members of ethnic and religious minorities remained aloof from the conflict and offered little support to the British. Some of the state's enslaved Black population used the disruption the invasion caused to escape bondage; however, British



Map 2

authorities did not go so far as to target slavery officially, and thus failed to capitalize on a potential moral advantage and manpower resource. Very wealthy and very poor residents responded most enthusiastically to Howe's proclamation to secure or advance their social positions. Conversely, the average farmers and artisans that

made up the majority of the state's households continued to support the patriot cause.

The move into New Jersey also created supply problems for George III's army. In the New York campaign, the waterways around Manhattan had facilitated easy distribution of food and equipment. In contrast, New Jersey lacked a similar network of navigable watercourses, necessitating land carriage for all supplies moving beyond Brunswick and Amboy. Marching armies and wet weather deteriorated the roads, inhibiting the movement of wagons. With a logistical tail stretching back to the British Isles, the move into New Jersey placed further strain on a support system already exhausted by five months of active campaigning. The British and Germans therefore relied heavily on local foraging. Officers sought to purchase grain and cattle from New Jersey farmers, and soldiers received orders to cut firewood from the state's forests. The British offered promissory notes rather than hard currency in exchange for supplies. Some Jersey civilians refused to sell their goods for paper scrip, and many others had fled before the British advance and left behind abandoned farms and homes.

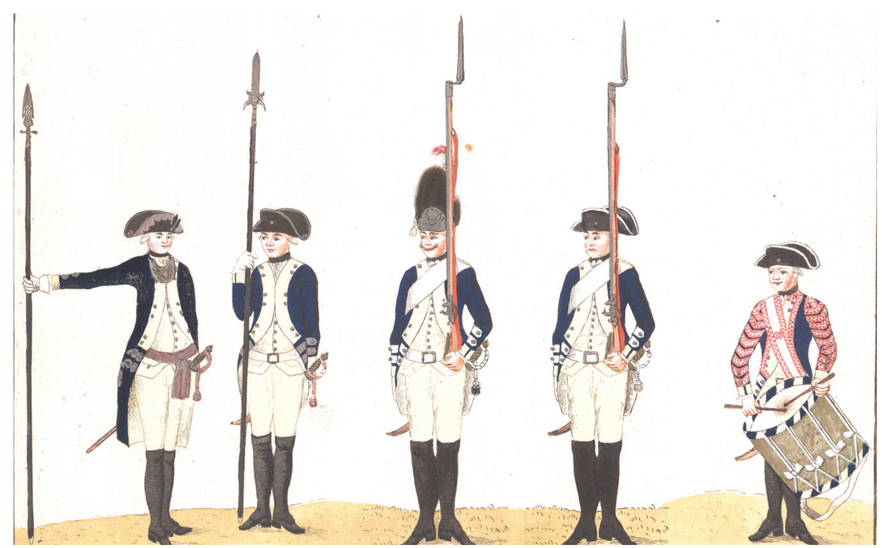
In such circumstances, discipline in many units eroded after the long campaign, and New Jersey civilians suffered from an increasingly brutal enemy occupation. The retreating patriots and advancing Crown troops both appropriated civilian property, but the Germans stood apart for the scale and severity of their marauding. The Central European military culture that influenced their conduct permitted large-scale plundering of enemy territory as one of the benefits of military service. At Trenton, for example, the Germans accumulated twenty-one wagonloads of goods they took from Jersey civilians. Drunkenness further eroded discipline among the occupiers, leading some soldiers to commit graver offenses, including sexual assault. British officers recognized that their soldiers' conduct undermined the army's operational effectiveness as well as its strategic goal of pacifying the colonies. Throughout December, however, leaders failed to enforce discipline among the rank-and-file.

The redcoats' and Germans' abuses sparked widespread resistance in New Jersey, leading Howe's troops to face increasing harassment

throughout December. Many Jersey partisans had gained experience through Continental or militia service earlier in the war. Even if they did not fight as part of a larger unit, they proved adept at disrupting enemy foraging parties. In Hunterdon County, detachments under junior militia officers harassed foraging parties and reconnoitered enemy positions. These attacks inflicted few casualties but forced the British and Germans to step up their patrols and strengthen their outposts north of Trenton. In one instance, the Trenton garrison sent a dispatch rider to Princeton escorted by 100 soldiers and a cannon to ward off partisan attacks. By mid-December, Crown soldiers in New Jersey encountered partisan activity in the southern and western reaches of the state. These actions dashed any expectations the British headquarters may have had of a quiet winter occupation of New Jersey.

In response to this nascent uprising, on 17 December General Grant ordered his subordinates to march aggressively through the countryside to gather supplies and quell enemy activity before settling into winter quarters. Redcoat and German regiments were to conduct sweeps westward toward Flemington in Hunterdon County and Pluckemin in Somerset County, as well as northwestward toward Springfield in Essex County. These operations promised to expand the Crown's reach beyond its narrow corridor of occupation and disperse any threats to the army's lines of communications.

Even as Grant acted to secure his garrisons, the movement of patriot soldiers into New Jersey and the mobilization of local militia units increased the threat to the occupiers. The first acts of American resurgence developed in the northeastern corner of the state. After receiving frequent complaints from Jersey civilians of the depredations of enemy troops, General Heath resolved to move his recently reinforced command at Peekskill into New Jersey. On 15 December, Heath reached Hackensack, where he seized supplies and boosted the local population's spirits. Upon receiving reports that the enemy planned to move up the Hudson, however, Heath decided to withdraw back toward the Highlands. Although he had failed to achieve a battlefield success, his limited offensive demonstrated that the British could not ignore northern New Jersey.



***Regiment von Knÿphausen*, J. H. Carl, 1784 (*Brown University Library*)**

Just as Heath exited, another patriot contingent entered the scene on the border of Morris and Essex Counties. These soldiers hailed from northwestern New Jersey, where the state's militia organization remained intact and provided sufficient manpower to constrain the redcoats. Under Morristown's Col. Jacob Ford, a group of Morris, Sussex, and Essex militiamen gathered to defend the Jersey Highlands. In mid-December, Ford advanced to Chatham, where the road from Elizabethtown to Morristown passed through a gap in the Watchung Mountains. In the opposing camp, General Leslie marched northward to disperse the Jerseyans as part of General Grant's broader antipartisan operation. Leslie and Ford engaged in a sharp, inconclusive skirmish late in the afternoon on 17 December at Springfield. The following morning, Ford discovered that Leslie had withdrawn quietly during the night. Ford's militia brigade continued to hold position below Chatham, keeping a watchful eye but avoiding another major action. Ford's aggressive posture and the militia's good showing convinced Continental Army leaders of the viability of holding northern New Jersey, and on 19 December, Washington honored the militia colonel's request to keep three Continental regiments in Morris County. Conversely,

Leslie interpreted Ford's actions at Springfield as a sign that he may have faced a large enemy force. Combined with Heath's advance into Bergen County, Springfield hastened the Crown's transition to a defensive posture and retirement to winter quarters. General Grant discussed with Howe the possibility of sending a stronger expedition toward Morristown, but the British commanders decided to wait until after Christmas.

Further south, Brig. Gen. James Ewing troops harried the Trenton garrison. Using small boats and relying on support from thirty pieces of artillery firing from the Pennsylvania shore, Ewing's soldiers struck the Germans guarding the South Trenton Ferry at dawn on 17 December and again the following day. On 21 December, Ewing's soldiers snuck ashore during the night and burned several buildings at the ferry site. These raids forced the Trenton garrison to turn out repeatedly to guard the riverfront. Morale suffered and exhaustion spread. Colonel Rall appealed to General Grant for reinforcements, but Grant rejected these requests. Rall's troops would have to make do on their own.

In West Jersey, the Salem, Gloucester, and Cumberland County militia regiments menaced the southernmost Crown posts at Burlington and Bordentown. Under the command of Virginia Col. Samuel Griffin, roughly 500 soldiers gathered at Mount Holly, 10 miles south of Bordentown. The Crown commander in the region, Colonel Donop, found himself in a difficult situation. Raids by galleys crewed by the Pennsylvania State Navy already had led him to reduce the garrison at Burlington, forcing him to quarter more of his troops at Bordentown. Griffin's contingent now appeared to menace that position as well. Intelligence reports inflated patriot numbers, indicating that up to 3,000 soldiers might be massing to the south, and that Washington planned to send up to 1,500 more to attack across the Delaware at Burlington. Consequently, Donop marched his command southward and skirmished with Griffin's troops on 22 December and fought a larger engagement the following day. Griffin withdrew his small party in the face of superior numbers, enabling the enemy to occupy Mount Holly. Donop kept his soldiers there for the following two days, plundering the inhabitants and

quartering in their homes. The inland town at least afforded security from the galleys and offered decent shelter for the German soldiers. Nevertheless, Donop had moved his force out of a position from which he easily could support the regiments at Trenton.

The Battle of Trenton

The American militia did not defeat Howe's army, but they did monitor and undermine the British occupation of New Jersey and lay the groundwork for a future patriot offensive. Crown forces in late December lay exhausted and divided at a time when Washington had concentrated his strength along the Delaware. The primary source of the Americans' combat power lay in the eleven brigades of infantry under Washington's command encamped in the Bucks County countryside west and north of Trenton. These brigades varied in size and composition. General William Alexander, Lord Stirling, led 673 soldiers from two Virginia Continental Regiments, the Delaware Regiment, and Pennsylvania State Regiment and German Battalion. Brig. Gen. Adam Stephen's 549-soldier brigade was composed of three Virginia Continental Regiments. General Mercer led a heterogeneous force of 838 soldiers including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maryland Continentals, Connecticut state troops, and Maryland and Virginia riflemen. The rifle-armed 1st Continental Regiment and the German Battalion from Pennsylvania and Maryland comprised Brig. Gen. Matthias Alexis Roche de Fermoy's 638-soldier brigade. Brig. Gen. Arthur St. Clair led the army's smallest brigade, with only 500 troops from New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Col. John Glover commanded the largest brigade with Washington's main body, 977 soldiers from Massachusetts and Connecticut Continental Regiments. Further south along the river, Col. Paul Dudley Sargent led 827 soldiers in a brigade consisting of Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut soldiers. General Ewing commanded 826 Pennsylvania Associators, and Brig. Gen. Philemon Dickinson took charge of 500 soldiers from Burlington and Hunterdon County, New Jersey. At Bristol, Pennsylvania, Col. John Cadwalader led 1,500 soldiers, mostly

Philadelphia Associators alongside Col. Daniel Hitchcock's 822 New England Continentals. Colonel Knox directed the 418-soldier Continental Artillery Regiment, providing crews for at least thirty guns. Capt. Samuel Morris's Philadelphia Light Horse comprised the army's primary mounted component. Elements of the 1st New Jersey Regiment, Hunterdon County militia, and assorted stragglers and volunteers from disbanded units rounded out Washington's force.

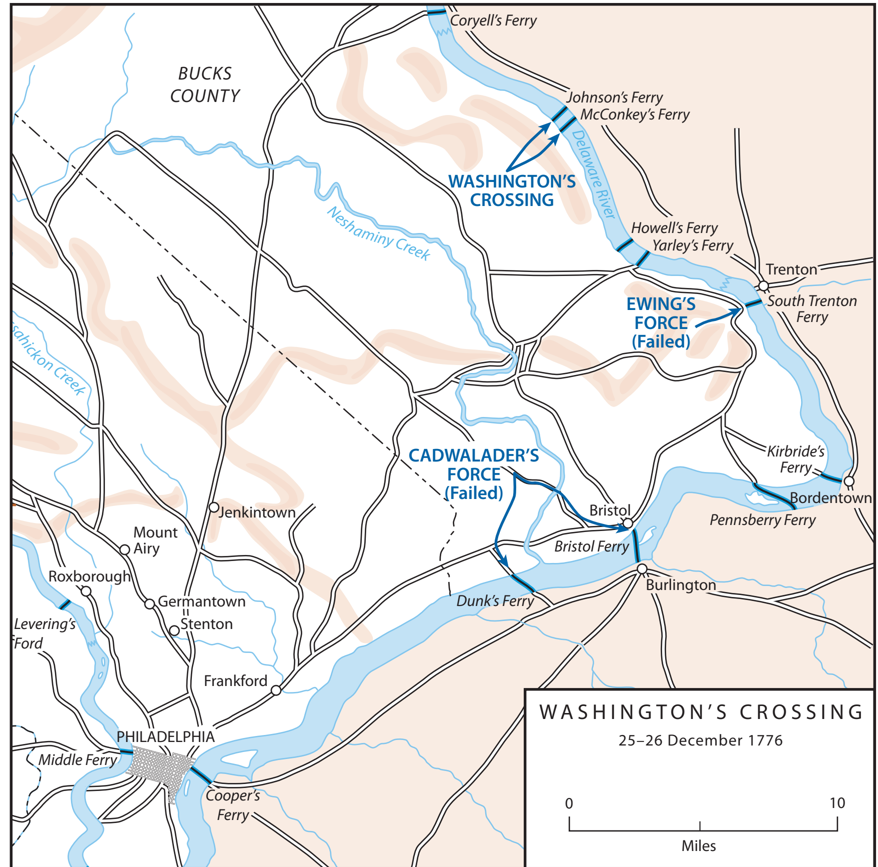
A more cautious commander might have contented himself to follow Howe's example and retire to winter quarters. Washington's troops had just endured a trying four-month campaign and suffered through much of that time with inadequate clothing and shelter. Morale seemingly had reached its nadir. While accompanying Washington's army during its retreat across New Jersey, the American radical author Thomas Paine penned his pamphlet *The American Crisis*, which declared ominously, "These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." Indeed, most of the rank-and-file expected to depart in the next few weeks when their enlistments expired, though patriot leaders hoped to raise a long-service army in the spring. With Howe's command laying docile in New Jersey, Washington could have chosen to use the winter to organize his new army and prepare defenses in Pennsylvania.

The commander in chief opted instead for a bold offensive strategy. He did not trust that Howe would remain idle and believed that acting would forestall any potential British attack. The Americans recently had received reinforcements and many units had rested for several weeks after evacuating New Jersey. They had refitted and repaired some of their equipment, drawing on stores from nearby Philadelphia. Even a small victory would raise morale and improve recruitment. An active winter campaign might induce many of the soldiers already under arms to reenlist, preserving valuable experience in the ranks. Finally, with the civilian population of New Jersey demonstrating unrest under British occupation, a counteroffensive would heighten popular support for the

revolutionary cause and undermine British attempts to reestablish Crown authority. General Howe's amnesty offer extended through January; if the revolutionaries showed no signs of retaking the state, more New Jerseyans might decide to switch their allegiances.

On 22 December, Washington held a council of war to discuss which of the nearby British cantonments to attack. At a second meeting with senior officers later that evening, the patriots developed a plan for an operation to start on Christmas night directed against Trenton (*Map 3*). Washington called for a force of 2,400 troops under his direct command to cross at McConkey's Ferry, 9 miles above Trenton, and then march to Birmingham, 4 miles north of the town. There the army would divide into two columns under Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene and General Sullivan. Sullivan's column was to proceed to Trenton along the Delaware while Greene's would march further inland to Sullivan's left. General Ewing was to cross the Delaware at Trenton Ferry and block the bridge over the Assunpink Creek, severing communications between the Trenton garrison and Colonel Donop's command further south. Colonel Cadwalader's Associators and Colonel Hitchcock's New England Continentals were to advance toward Burlington to prevent Donop from moving to assist Rall. If possible, General Putnam was to move into southern New Jersey with militia units concentrating in Philadelphia. The plan promised an overwhelming concentration of force at Trenton to ensure the success of the main assault. If the secondary operations went well, the whole enemy position along the Delaware might come undone. The plan benefited from harmony within the patriot command. Several of Washington's subordinates, including his adjutant general Colonel Reed and Colonel Cadwalader, already had suggested Washington take the offensive in the vicinity of Trenton. The nation's civilian leadership likewise supported a move against Howe. The capture of Lee earlier in the month had removed Washington's strongest critic.

Trenton itself consisted of around 100 houses distributed around a marketplace, grist mills, iron furnaces, and a barracks built during the Seven Years' War. Previous occupations and intelligence from local sympathizers provided the American army with a sound



Map 3

understanding of the town's layout and enemy dispositions. The River Road along the Delaware and a second further inland connecting to the village of Pennington to the north would provide the main avenues of approach for the army. A third road to the northeast ran between Trenton and Princeton, providing a possible route for British reinforcements. The River Road turned inland upon reaching the outskirts of Trenton and connected to Second and Front Streets. The Pennington and Princeton Roads converged on a hill at the northern end of the town center; from this confluence King and Queen Streets splayed outward, continuing southward for a quarter mile before intersecting with Second Street. King,

Queen, and Second Streets formed a narrow triangle, with Second as the base, along which most of the town's buildings lay. Queen Street continued southward over a stone bridge that crossed the Assunpink Creek, which formed the southern boundary of the town. Across the creek stood Mill Hill, which provided a strong natural defensive position.

The northern assault would need to overcome any outposts and pickets quickly and seize the high ground at King and Queen Streets. From there, the Americans could proceed down the two main roads but would need to overcome resistance from enemy soldiers fighting from houses and buildings. A large orchard east of Queen Street would afford the Germans space to maneuver against the attackers' flank. The western column moving along the river would face fewer obstacles but would need to move quickly to cut across the base of Trenton and take the bridge across the Assunpink. The slower the assault proceeded, the more time the enemy would have to escape south to Mill Hill or northeastward to Princeton.

Sound operational thinking produced Washington's plans. The Virginian realized that the risks involved in crossing the Delaware and attacking an enemy garrison meant that the reward must be worthwhile. Simply seizing a town and retreating was not worth the danger, the patriots needed to capture or destroy the enemy garrison. Moreover, any operation would need to concentrate overwhelming force against an isolated and weaker opponent; the revolutionary army could not afford a protracted siege or a pitched battle against a reinforced enemy. The general enjoyed good information on his opponents' dispositions. He learned that the enemy "lay a good deal scattered" in their cantonments and thus susceptible to defeat in detail. Raids on Trenton during the preceding weeks further indicated the enemy's vulnerability. Washington's military education provided a template for effecting a winter campaign against an enemy's cantonments. Early in Washington's career during the Seven Years' War, he had read *An Essay on the Art of War* by the French military theorist Lancelot Turpin, comte de Crissé. Crissé had warned that an enemy who

retired to winter quarters without ensuring that his opponent had also done so invited an attack on his camp. Between 18 and 25 December, Washington prepared to inflict just such an embarrassment on Howe.

Washington's assault faced Colonel Rall's tired brigade. The 56-year-old Rall had earned a reputation as a brave leader at the battle of White Plains and the storming of Fort Washington. Three principal units comprised Rall's brigade. The strongest was his own *Grenadier Regiment von Rall*, with 512 soldiers under Lt. Col. Balthasar Brethauer, followed by the *Fusilier Regiment von Knyphausen* with 429 effectives under Maj. Friedrich Ludwig von Dechow, and finally *Fusilier Regiment von Lossberg* led by Lt. Col. Franz Scheffer with 345 soldiers. Additionally, a fifty-soldier company of jaegers provided Rall with light infantrymen, whereas a twenty-trooper detachment from the British *16th Light Dragoons* represented the only mounted presence in Rall's command. For artillery, the Germans could count on the support of six light field pieces, two attached to each regiment. In total, Rall had 1,382 effectives on 26 December. Another 1,500 troops in Donop's brigade should have been at nearby Bordentown, but on the morning of Washington's attack most of these soldiers resided a day's march away at Mount Holly. Rall had also ignored Donop's orders to build redoubts to secure the town, leaving his troops vulnerable.

A disorganized force structure weakened Trenton's defenses. In British service, the German units saw their previously organic grenadier companies detached and formed into a separate unit. The regiments fought as eight-company battalions, but, at Trenton, had reorganized into an administrative formation for the winter, whereby each regiment quartered in five separate companies to facilitate training and resupply and enable officers to attend to their personal or professional affairs outside the regiment. These regiments therefore featured a high ratio of soldiers to officers. Thus, in the face of an attack, the Germans would have to gather their separately quartered companies and reorganize them into fighting platoons with an insufficient number of officers providing direction. By contrast, the expiring enlistments of the rank-and-file in the

Continental Army left many of Washington's units with a higher percentage of noncommissioned officers and officers. In the highly fluid battle that ensued, American officers would prove more adept at leading their formations.

The actual operation began on the afternoon of 25 December. The patriot brigades marched to McConkey's Ferry, 8 miles upstream from Trenton. To conduct the crossing, Washington combed the ranks for soldiers with maritime experience. Many in Colonel Glover's regiment hailed from the vicinity of Marblehead on the Massachusetts coast, and these soldiers subsequently have received credit for crewing the boats. Glover's soldiers already had rendered valuable service earlier in the war by rowing the army to safety after the Battle of Long Island. Along with this contingent, Washington recruited workers from Philadelphia's waterfront and local Jersey boatmen to handle loading and rowing. The soldiers-turned-ferrymen began to take the army across the Delaware after nightfall, which came at the early hour of 1600 in the depths of winter. The flat-bottomed Durham boats that carried the army ranged from 40 to 60 feet long, 3½ feet deep, and 8 feet wide, and promised a swift but unsteady ride for their passengers. Between sixteen and twenty-five boats were available to bring the army back to New Jersey. Joining the Durham boats were an undetermined number of 40-foot-long rectangular ferry boats that carried the artillery, horses, and wagons.

Under Colonel Knox's supervision, the army successfully crossed the river during the night of 25–26 December, in spite of the cold, snow, and ice chunks in the Delaware impeding the boats' progress. With local militiamen of the 1st Hunterdon County Regiment serving as guides, two forty-soldier advanced parties crossed first under Capts. William Washington and John Flahaven. These parties set up roadblocks and made sure the route remained clear of enemy scouts. General Stephen's brigade crossed next, providing a stronger covering force while the rest of the army transited the river. A severe storm rolled through the Delaware Valley at 2200, bringing high winds and sharp currents that impeded the Durham boats' progress. It took until 0300 on 26 December for the infantry to reach New Jersey, and the artillery took an additional hour to arrive.

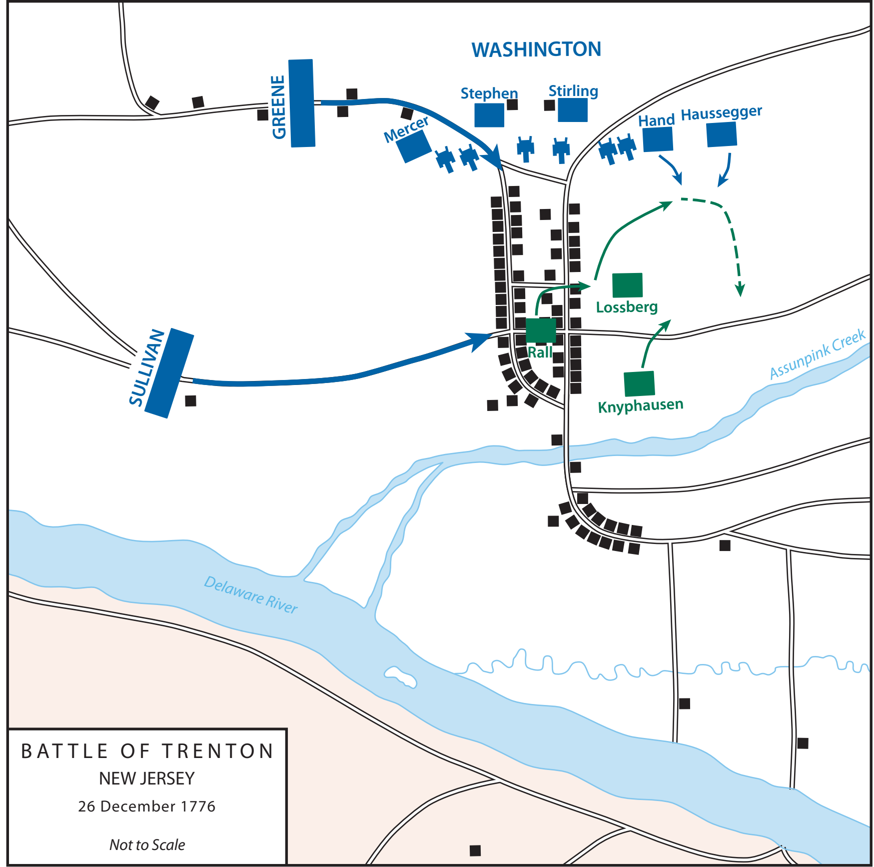
***Washington Crossing the Delaware,* Emanuel Leutze, 1851 (*Metropolitan Museum of Art*)**

The river represented the most significant obstacle to the patriots' advance, but the terrain in New Jersey also posed problems. Wind, snow, and hail continued to pelt the army, and for the first mile of the approach march to Trenton the troops had to proceed uphill. At Jacob's Creek, Washington's soldiers navigated a steep ravine that forced the artillerists to unharness their guns from the horses and manually haul them across the stream in the early-morning light. The terrain and weather improved once the army passed the creek, but it still took two hours for them to reach Birmingham, halfway between the ferry crossing and Trenton. There, the army divided into two divisions. Washington proceeded with Greene's column along the Pennington Road, from which they would strike Trenton from the north. Concurrently, Sullivan's command moved down River Road. The operation lagged four hours behind schedule because of the delays the severe weather had imposed.

Fortunately for the patriot cause, they did not face strong and alert defenders. Colonel Rall had established a ring of outposts a mile from the center of town. A company of jaegers guarded the River Road at the Hermitage, the home of Jersey militia general Philemon Dickinson, while a smaller detachment of twenty-four

soldiers, based in a copper shop, guarded the Pennington Road. Rall also placed guards along the Princeton Road and further south at the Assunpink bridge and southern ferry crossings. Small patrols and pickets monitored the ground between the larger outposts. In the town itself, one regiment always remained on high alert. The overnight storm had, however, preserved the element of surprise. Rall initially had placed the entire garrison on alert but then ordered it to stand down on account of the weather. Jaegers faced limited visibility during the night and reported nothing out of the ordinary on the morning of 26 December. Given the exhaustion resulting from the heavy skirmishes with the patriots over the past week, many of the German soldiers had little energy for aggressive patrolling.

The assault on Trenton unfolded rapidly and overcame spirited but disorganized resistance quickly (*Map 4*). Both Sullivan's and Greene's columns reached their starting points, the former 1 mile west of the center of town, the latter 1 mile north, around 0800. The western column along the River Road faced the tall task of defeating the enemy's pickets, cutting across the town center, and seizing the bridges over the Assunpink before Rall could retreat to a defensive position on Mill Hill. Sullivan achieved these goals skillfully, advancing with aggressive infantry and artillery at the head of his column. Leading the assault were Col. John Stark's New Hampshirites and forty recent New Jersey recruits, supported by two 6-pounder cannons and two 3-pounder cannons. Wet weather had dampened the infantrymen's gunpowder, forcing them to rely on edged weapons instead. The artillery used waterproof cartridges and therefore kept up a heavy fire uninhibited by the weather. The jaegers posted in the western division's path found themselves facing superior numbers and firepower and retreated swiftly toward the center of town. Near the Trenton barracks, they attempted to reorganize and delivered a volley, but under continued pressure from Sullivan's troops as well as fire from patriot artillery posted across the river, the defense quickly collapsed. The jaegers fled across the Assunpink along with twenty British dragoons swept up in the retreat. Sullivan's troops proceeded to seize the barracks and headed toward the Assunpink bridge.



Map 4

To the north, Greene's column had to push through the built-up section of Trenton along King and Queen Streets, which threatened to break up unit cohesion and also provided good cover for enemy troops. The orchard and open fields to the east of town offered a cleared area in which the enemy might assemble their scattered forces. The road to Princeton afforded another escape route. The Americans in the northern column would thus have to remain alert and nimble as they fought through town streets and buildings as well as open fields. Greene's division reached a position 800 yards from the enemy's posts and then deployed into three columns to

advance: Mercer's brigade to the west, Stephen's in the center, and Fermoy's to the east, with Stirling's brigade in reserve.

Greene, like Sullivan, attacked with great speed, relying on infantry aggression and artillery firepower. Pickets skirmished briefly with the center column before falling back to avoid encirclement. As Greene's infantry advanced into the town, Knox's artillery unlimbered on the high ground at the head of King and Queen Streets to support them. General Washington took up a position nearby from which he could observe his army's movements and best exercise command as troops attacked. In town, *Regiment Rall* and *Regiment Lossberg* attempted to assemble along King and Queen Streets. Their gunners quickly brought two 3-pounder cannons into action at the north end of King Street, exchanging fire with American cannons and providing some cover for the gathering soldiers. Nevertheless, fire from Knox's guns on the heights commanded the Trenton streets, sowing disorder among Rall's troops. American infantry moved into town, forcing the hard-pressed Germans to abandon their guns.

Washington's ability to maintain a firm grip on his troops, as well as the effective fire support provided by the patriot gunners, dictated the course of the battle. Colonel Rall assumed command only after the American attack was well underway. Rather than retreating across the Assunpink when the bridges were still open or marching toward Princeton before Fermoy's brigade could cut the road, Rall instead ordered an immediate counterattack against Greene's strong column. *Regiments Rall* and *Lossberg* got into position for the counterattack, but Rall failed to communicate effectively with the *Knyphausen Regiment,* which remained further south. The Germans managed to recover their guns briefly, but reinforcements from Stirling's brigade took them back for the Americans. Lt. James Monroe, the future president, suffered a wound in this action while serving with the 3d Virginia Regiment. Concurrently, Mercer's brigade occupied Trenton's buildings, which enabled it to fire on the enemy from covered positions, while Glover's and St. Clair's brigades of Sullivan's division had by this time moved through the lower town to the Assunpink bridges. With the town center lost, the

Lossberg and *Rall regiments* withdrew eastward to the orchard east of the town center.

Here, the last act of the battle played out, and again American command and control determined the outcome. Rall once again attempted to restore the situation by attacking northward to regain their line of communications to Princeton. Washington perceived his opponents' design from his vantage point on the northern heights and ordered the regiments under Cols. Edward Hand and Nicholas Haussegger of Fermoy's brigade to extend the patriot line to the east. This move threatened to enfilade any advance from the orchard, and effectively stopped Rall's first counterattack before it fully developed. Rall then decided to attack westward to regain the town. At this point, however, the Americans held positions on the northern heights, the town center, and the lower town, so the Germans faced fire from three directions as they attempted to attack. With noise, smoke, and fog enveloping the battlefield, coordination and cohesion broke down. Stragglers from various companies found themselves developing makeshift formations. Officer casualties degraded command and control. Individuals and small units attempted to flee toward Mill Hill but found the bridges over the Assunpink covered by enemy artillery. Rall therefore ordered a general retreat to the apple orchard but suffered a mortal wound shortly after issuing these orders. Colonel Scheffer assumed command of the brigade and attempted to lead another attack toward the Princeton Road. Facing an increasingly dire situation, however, Scheffer accepted a call to surrender the two regiments under his direct command.

Throughout the battle, Rall's third unit, the *Fusilier Regiment von Knyphausen* under Major Dechow, had failed to act effectively. Dechow apparently had misinterpreted Rall's initial orders and had remained in the southern section of Trenton. Most of the regiment had not joined in Rall's abortive attack from the apple orchard. Nor did Dechow secure the crossing over the Assunpink. When Dechow eventually did organize his troops, he found the bridge held too firmly to attack. Instead, the *Knyphausen Regiment* moved north and east along the Assunpink in search of a ford but found every

crossing site firmly held by Washington's troops. A quarter mile away from the *Rall* and *Lossberg regiments*, the *Knyphausen* soldiers laid down their arms shortly after their comrades. Only fifty soldiers successfully escaped across the Assunpink.

The battle lasted only an hour. The Germans suffered twenty-two killed in action and another eighty-three seriously wounded. A total of 896 officers and enlisted troops surrendered. Twenty-five civilian servants and the brigade band joined the military in capitulation. Washington's army also gained a materiel windfall: muskets, cartridge boxes, swords, and six pieces of artillery, sufficient to reequip several brigades. By contrast, the Americans had none killed and lost only two officers and two privates wounded in battle. An unknown number also died from exposure and exhaustion during the night march.

Although Washington clearly had won an overwhelming victory at Trenton, his subordinates operating further south had failed to cross the Delaware. During the night of 25–26 December, General Ewing had assembled his brigade opposite the South Trenton Ferry with the objective of severing communications between Trenton and Bordentown, but heavy snow and ice prevented a crossing. Trenton stood at the fall line of the Delaware River, meaning that although Washington's main force dealt with drifting ice upstream at Johnson's Ferry, Ewing faced a full tidal ice jam below the falls. Immense chunks of ice, intermixed with rocks and channels of fast rushing water, prohibited a crossing either on foot or by boat.

Twelve miles downstream from Ewing, Cadwalader's Associators and Hitchcock's New Englanders faced a different problem. Between Bristol and Burlington, the quarter-mile-wide Delaware flowed swiftly, laced with ice flows and engorged by autumn rains. The Christmas night storm blew hard and turned the waters rough. Colonel Cadwalader called off the crossing opposite Burlington because of the difficult conditions, and instead marched his command 6 miles downstream to try at Dunk's Ferry. There, ice covered the river's Jersey banks, extending 150 yards from the shore—"so thick," one soldier wrote, that for boats there was "no possibility of getting nearer." Roughly 600 infantry succeeded in

making it ashore on foot, but the soldiers could not land wagons and artillery in such conditions. After three hours, Cadwalader ordered his troops to return to Pennsylvania and marched them through miserable rain and snow back to their quarters in Bristol. Putnam likewise decided against risking a large-scale crossing amid high winds and rough water at Philadelphia.

With the battle over by midmorning, the revolutionaries faced the question of how to proceed. Washington held another council of war on the afternoon of 26 December. Officers expressed divided opinions. Some advocated continuing the campaign in New Jersey with further attacks on British posts, but others believed the army should content itself with its singular victory at Trenton and not push its luck. The patriots needed to at least evacuate their prisoners and captured stores to Pennsylvania, an operation that would face immense difficulties if the British or Germans arrived on the scene. With the failure of Ewing's and Cadwalader's crossings, the enemy forces to the south would be able to move on Trenton without interference. Intelligence from local sympathizers also confirmed a strong British presence at Princeton.

Ultimately, the climate dictated the course of action. The wintry weather that had arrived overnight worsened during the day. Deteriorating conditions on the river might prevent the army from returning to Pennsylvania. Similar problems with the region's roads would inhibit mobility if the patriots chose to remain in New Jersey. Finally, cold, wet soldiers, already exhausted from the night's crossing, were unlikely to perform effectively as snow and sleet continued to blanket the Delaware Valley. While the officers deliberated, the rank-and-file discovered a cache of rum in Trenton and proceeded to celebrate their victory. With discipline eroding, Washington realized that his soldiers had reached their physical and emotional limits for the day. During the afternoon of the twenty-sixth, the victorious but weary army returned to Pennsylvania. Fatigue, in many cases mixed with alcohol, made the daytime crossing more perilous than the previous night's crossing. Several soldiers fell out of their boats and drowned in the icy Delaware before reaching Pennsylvania.

***Trenton*, Hugh Charles McBarron, ca. 1976 (*Army Art Collection*)**

The Second Battle of Trenton

For several days following the victory at Trenton, the patriots remained unsure of how to proceed. With many enlistments set to expire on 1 January, Washington had only four more days to continue his offensive. Another success would secure the approaches to Philadelphia, gain access to additional quarters and supplies for his soldiers, bolster revolutionary control of southern New Jersey, and constrain British occupation to the northern half of the state. The general confided to Colonel Cadwalader that "if we could happily beat up the rest of their quarters bordering on or near the river, it would be attended with the most valuable consequences." Fortunately, a miscommunication proved beneficial to the patriot cause. At Bristol, Cadwalader did not know that Washington had withdrawn to Pennsylvania after the victory at Trenton. The Pennsylvania colonel therefore led his force in a second effort at crossing the Delaware on 27 December. Despite what one participant

described as a "tedious getting over," the colonel and 1,800 soldiers with their artillery and equipment reached Burlington by 2000. The patriots' boldness contrasted with their opponents' timidity. Upon receiving news of the Trenton debacle, the German troops in West Jersey had abandoned their posts. Some fled to Perth Amboy, more than 40 miles away, leaving Cadwalader's Associators to dine on abandoned supplies of mutton, beef, pork, and "rum in the king's stores." Their commander wrote to Washington, informing him that the door now lay open for a renewed campaign in the Jerseys.

When news of the enemy's flight reached headquarters, Washington held another council of war. Several senior officers opposed taking the offensive. Doubts arose over the endurance of the troops and the state of the weather. The attack on Trenton had presented a limited objective and a tight timetable, but further moves into New Jersey brought the prospect of a protracted campaign during the coldest months. Even though winter fighting occasionally occurred in eighteenth-century European warfare, such campaigns tended to wear out the equipment, uniforms, and health of even the best armies. The patriots faced the added problem of expiring enlistments. If most soldiers held to the terms of their contracts, Washington might find himself in the middle of a January campaign without much of an army. Nevertheless, several officers supported Cadwalader's idea. They perceived weakness in the enemy's garrisons and saw the flight of the enemy as an opportunity that called for exploitation. A second victory following so quickly on the heels of Trenton would redound in the Americans' favor with improved morale and, hopefully, better retention of soldiers. The officers emerged from the council of war concluding that the army should return to Jersey as soon as possible. The council of war only advised; it remained up to Washington how to proceed. The commander in chief in this case concurred with his officers and decided to again move into New Jersey.

Washington envisioned a larger offensive than his attack on 26 December. He ordered Lt. Col. Joseph Vose's three Continental regiments at Morristown to join with New Jersey militiamen in the northern counties to harass British posts. He instructed General

Heath at Peekskill to mobilize militia units in Massachusetts and Connecticut and prepare to move into Westchester County, New York. Along the Delaware, the main force prepared for a crossing on 29 December using every available ferry site. Bad weather impeded the crossing on the twenty-ninth, and although conditions improved the following day, it took until the thirty-first to bring over the artillery and wagons. The delay enabled the artillerists and artificers to repair damaged guns, some using materials from captured stocks, and to bring up new pieces. The army embarked on the second phase of the campaign with up to forty pieces of artillery, double the number that had supported the 26 December attack.

Once across the Delaware, Washington organized his forces and prepared for the upcoming contest. Expiring enlistments left him with a different order of battle from what he had on 26 December. The three brigades of New Englanders that had counted 2,600 troops two weeks earlier had only 1,400 on 1 January. Expiring enlistments hit Stirling's and Mercer's brigades hardest, leaving them with 325 soldiers from what had been a combined force of 1,500. Washington consolidated these formations into a single brigade under Mercer composed of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia troops. Stirling had fallen ill and did not take an active part in the second phase of the campaign. The departure of so many New England Continentals led Washington to consolidate the remaining troops into General St. Clair's brigade, bringing its strength to 1,400 soldiers from eleven regiments hailing from three different states. The other brigades suffered smaller decreases, but all told, Washington had lost up to 2,600 experienced soldiers. He pursued the January operation with only 3,300 Continentals. The army's small overall size at least placed a minimal burden on Washington's quartermasters. Unlike later periods of the war, purchases by patriot logisticians, captured supplies, and direct requisitions from civilians kept the soldiers fed throughout the campaign.

Fortunately, reinforcements compensated for some of the lost manpower. Pennsylvania's citizen soldiers responded enthusiastically to their mobilization orders and marched to the Delaware at the end of the December, which the state had reorganized into a 1,500-soldier

brigade. Patriot officers also convinced many soldiers to extend their terms of service. General Mifflin offered Cadwalader's Associators a generous ten-dollar bounty if they stayed in the field for another few weeks. The Associators agreed, and Mifflin extended the same offer to the New England Continentals. Washington followed this same strategy and offered bonuses to the Continentals in Greene's and Sullivan's divisions. The commander in chief resorted to an emotional appeal before the assembled rank-and-file, and successfully convinced most of the Continentals to stay on for up to six weeks. To fund the promised bonuses, Washington turned to the wealthy Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris to procure cash, which arrived in time to continue the campaign.

With the army's strength temporarily stabilized, Washington and his subordinates decided that a defensive posture would work best until the enemy revealed their intentions. Reports indicated 6,000 Crown troops remained in New Jersey, with up to 4,000 more on the way from New York. The heights across the Assunpink Creek appeared to be the ideal defensive ground in the area. The Continentals and militia would make their stand there, provided the British and Germans should attack.

As some soldiers began to dig in at Trenton, Washington dispatched other units to gather intelligence. He sent twenty-one soldiers of the Philadelphia Light Horse to reconnoiter Princeton. Colonel Cadwalader's soldiers meanwhile conducted a similar mission east of Crosswicks, while Mifflin's brigade probed toward Monmouth Courthouse. These combined efforts yielded several prisoners who provided an accurate account of British strength and dispositions, while also generating an improved understanding of the local road network and layout of Princeton. Washington continued to order similar extensive prebattle reconnaissance missions in future campaigns.

News of the disaster at Trenton had reached British headquarters in New York by 27 December. General Howe ordered reinforcements to Princeton and approved the construction of redoubts to improve defenses in that town. He dispatched General Cornwallis, who was preparing to sail to Britain, to assume operational command of

***The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777,* Jonathan Trumbull, ca. 1789–ca. 1831 (*Yale University Art Gallery*)**

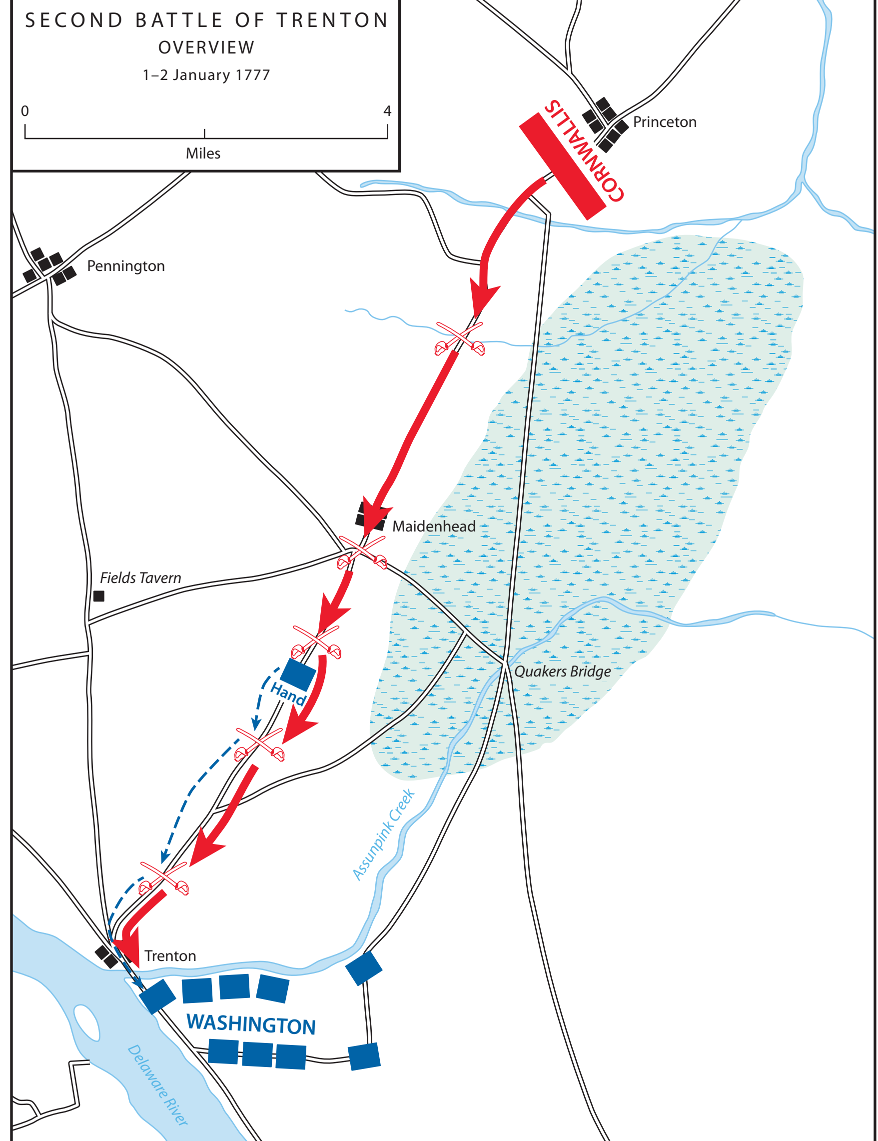
the troops in New Jersey and oversee the response to Washington's offensive. Once in motion, the British acted with alacrity. Cornwallis gathered troops from throughout New Jersey, ultimately bringing together some 10,000 troops at Princeton. The British general arrived at that town in the evening on 1 January and conferred with his subordinates. Colonel Donop proposed sending a column via Crosswicks to outflank Washington's position at Trenton. The British commander dismissed the colonel's advice, however, and opted instead for a direct march down the main Post Road to Trenton the following morning.

On 2 January, 10 miles separated Cornwallis's column and Washington's main force. Deployed forward just outside Princeton at Maidenhead stood General Leslie's brigade, with elements of four British regiments. Leading the main column from Princeton was a vanguard under Colonel Donop with one company of jaegers as well as detachments of the *16th Light Dragoons*. General Grant followed with a brigade composed of two light infantry battalions, a German grenadier battalion, and two regiments of foot. Behind Grant, Lt.

Col. Henry Monckton commanded a brigade with three British regiments. A German brigade with five battalions rounded out Cornwallis's striking force. The *Royal Artillery* provided support with twenty-four pieces ranging from 3-pounder cannons to 12-pounder cannons. Cornwallis left behind at Princeton a reserve brigade with three regiments under Lt. Col. Charles Mawhood. Concentrating this force largely had stripped the British cantonments elsewhere in the state. Two understrength battalions totaling only 600 soldiers remained to guard Brunswick, with similarly sized garrisons at Perth Amboy, Elizabethtown, and Hackensack. Newark, Rahway, Spanktown, and Hillsborough lay nearly defenseless.

As Cornwallis approached, Washington and his subordinates debated three possible courses of action: returning to Pennsylvania, withdrawing into southern New Jersey, or facing the enemy directly. Worsening conditions on the Delaware River and a lack of boats made the first option untenable. Likewise, the second would surrender the gains made during the past week and leave the army in a region lacking strong natural defenses. The third would pit Washington's soldiers against a numerically superior foe with a river at the patriots' backs. Nevertheless, the commander in chief decided to stay and fight in New Jersey. He ordered his detached units at Crosswicks to return to Trenton. Both the Crown and patriot armies marshalled their strength at Trenton for the contest on 2 January (*Map 5*).

To provide more time for the main body to erect defenses, the commander in chief deployed an advanced party along the road from Princeton to Trenton to delay the enemy. This contingent was to harass Cornwallis's column but avoid a major engagement. The covering force under General Fermoy consisted of Colonel Hand's 1st Pennsylvania Regiment (the former 1st Continental Regiment had redesignated on 1 January), Colonel Haussegger's German Battalion, and Col. Charles Scott's brigade of Virginia Continentals, as well as two cannons manned by the Pennsylvania State Artillery under Capt. Thomas Forrest. Hand's soldiers used the Pennsylvania rifle, a weapon that featured increased range and accuracy at the expense of a lower rate of fire compared to the smoothbore musket. It also lacked a bayonet. These soldiers already had garnered experience in



Map 5

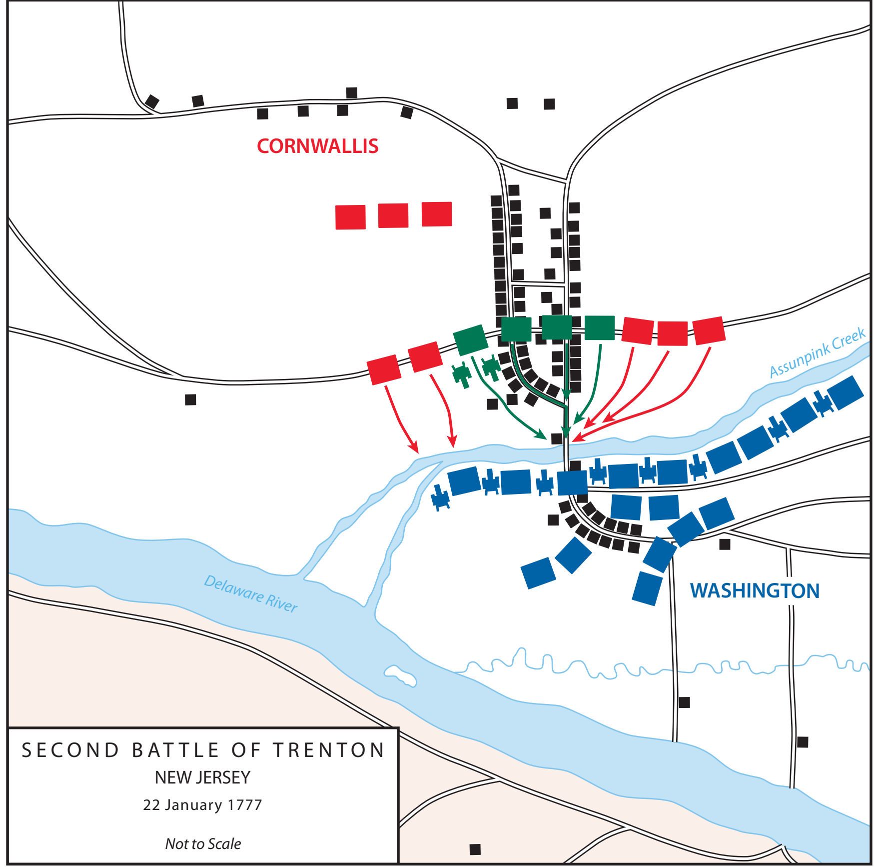
Canada and made effective light infantrymen well-suited to fighting a delaying action.

The climate proved to be a natural ally to the patriots. On the night of 1–2 January, temperatures had warmed by nearly 30 degrees.

Melting snows turned the roads to mud and surrounding farms into quagmires. The mud inhibited the British column's ability to deploy from their marching order into tactical formations. Despite the size of Cornwallis's army, the patriot covering force initially faced only the enemy vanguard while the main body remained road bound.

Throughout the running battle along the road, American officers adapted to changing conditions. During the morning, General Fermoy suffered a complete collapse of confidence and fled the scene. Command fell to the next most senior officer on the field, Colonel Hand. Fortunately for the patriots, Hand proved an effective leader. Fighting commenced on the morning of 2 January at Eight Mile Run, a small creek that cut across Cornwallis's path just outside of Princeton. Hand's infantry harassed the jaegers of the British vanguard with long-range fire. The redcoats and Germans suffered few casualties but had to slow the pace of their advance to drive back the pickets. At Five Mile Run, a small stream about 5 miles from Trenton, Hand's covering force made a firmer stand. The Pennsylvania soldiers' rifle fire harassed enemy ranks as they approached the stream. Washington rode up along with Greene and Knox to encourage the defenders and stress the importance of delaying the enemy. When Cornwallis's troops began to cross the waterway, Hand's riflemen and Forrest's artillery unleashed close-range fire that drove their foes back in disorder.

The American action had the desired effect. Cornwallis had to halt his column and unlimber his artillery to dislodge the defenders. Superior British numbers and firepower eventually pushed the patriots out of their position, but they maintained their cohesion and conducted an orderly fighting withdrawal. At Stockton's Hollow, half a mile above Trenton, Hand reformed his soldiers to make another stand with 600 troops. Once again, the revolutionaries resisted until their flanks came under threat, and then withdrew. Rhode Islanders under Colonel Hitchcock came forward from Trenton to cover Hand's troops as they retired through the town. The enemy attempted to cut off Hand's contingent, but the Americans reached the stone bridge over the Assunpink first, ably supported by Hitchcock's soldiers. Washington came forward to oversee the



Map 6

withdrawal and direct Hitchcock troops to take position along the main defensive line. Further north, British troops probed for fording locations along the upper reaches of the Assunpink, from which they could turn the right flank of the main patriot force. St. Clair's brigade of New England troops turned back these efforts and instead moved to threaten the British left, deterring further advances along the upper reaches of the creek. Washington's right flank remained secure throughout the battle.

Cornwallis's column reached Assunpink Creek around 1600 on 2 January (*Map 6*). Across the creek, Washington arrayed his army in a 3-mile-long defensive line. The Delaware River firmly secured

his left flank. The commander in chief concentrated his defenses on the three most feasible crossing points. Colonel Hitchcock's brigade guarded a lower ford near the Assunpink's confluence with the Delaware. Three Virginia regiments under Colonel Scott held the ground immediately behind the bridge, while General Ewing's brigade defended the high ground to Scott's left. Colonels Hand's and Haussegger's sharpshooters stood by to assist in the defense of the center, despite their exhaustion from the morning and afternoon fighting. General Mifflin's Pennsylvanians waited nearby in reserve. Upstream, Colonel Cadwalader's Associators and General Mercer's brigade guarded the line of the Assunpink for a mile to Henry's Mill. General St. Clair's brigade stretched for another mile to Phillips's Mill, protecting the extreme right of the patriot line.

Although Washington could call upon an impressive roster of units, low manpower levels meant that he had only about 7,000 soldiers available. Some of his most veteran troops had already been in combat throughout the day, and the remainder of his army varied in experience and training. Cornwallis's 10,000 soldiers outnumbered Washington's force, but the patriots' forty pieces of artillery surpassed the Crown's twenty-eight guns. Washington placed half of his artillery to cover the stone bridge; the defenses along the upper ford received twelve guns, and the remainder went to the lower ford. By the time Cornwallis's columns deployed into lines opposite the Assunpink, only about an hour of daylight remained. The Germans and redcoats had spent much of the day marching over poor roads and engaging in frustrating skirmishes. The British general lacked intelligence regarding the enemy's strength and intentions and had insufficient knowledge of the terrain or road network in the area.

Nevertheless, Cornwallis undertook a limited assault on the patriot lines. British light infantry and German jaegers attempted to cross at the lower ford, but heavy fire from the artillery and Hitchcock's Rhode Islanders drove them back. A stronger attack occurred upstream at the stone bridge. There, grenadiers from the regiments of Lt. Cols. Otto von Linsing and Heinrich von Bloch attempted to force their way across the bridge with the support of four artillery pieces. Riflemen in nearby houses provided covering

fire for the attackers. Yet the Germans could not overcome the heavy concentration of Knox's artillery, accurate fire from Hand's riflemen, and the sturdiness of Scott's Virginia Continentals.

With the Germans turned back, Cornwallis deployed his redcoats to storm the bridge. Washington also brought forward reinforcements from Mifflin's brigade to brace Scott's tired defenders. The British made three attempts to cross, but each time fell back under withering fire from patriot cannons, rifles, and muskets. By the end of the third British charge, darkness fully engulfed the field, bringing the action to a close. Washington likely suffered up to 100 casualties in the day's fighting, whereas the British and Germans may have lost as many as 365 killed, wounded, or captured.

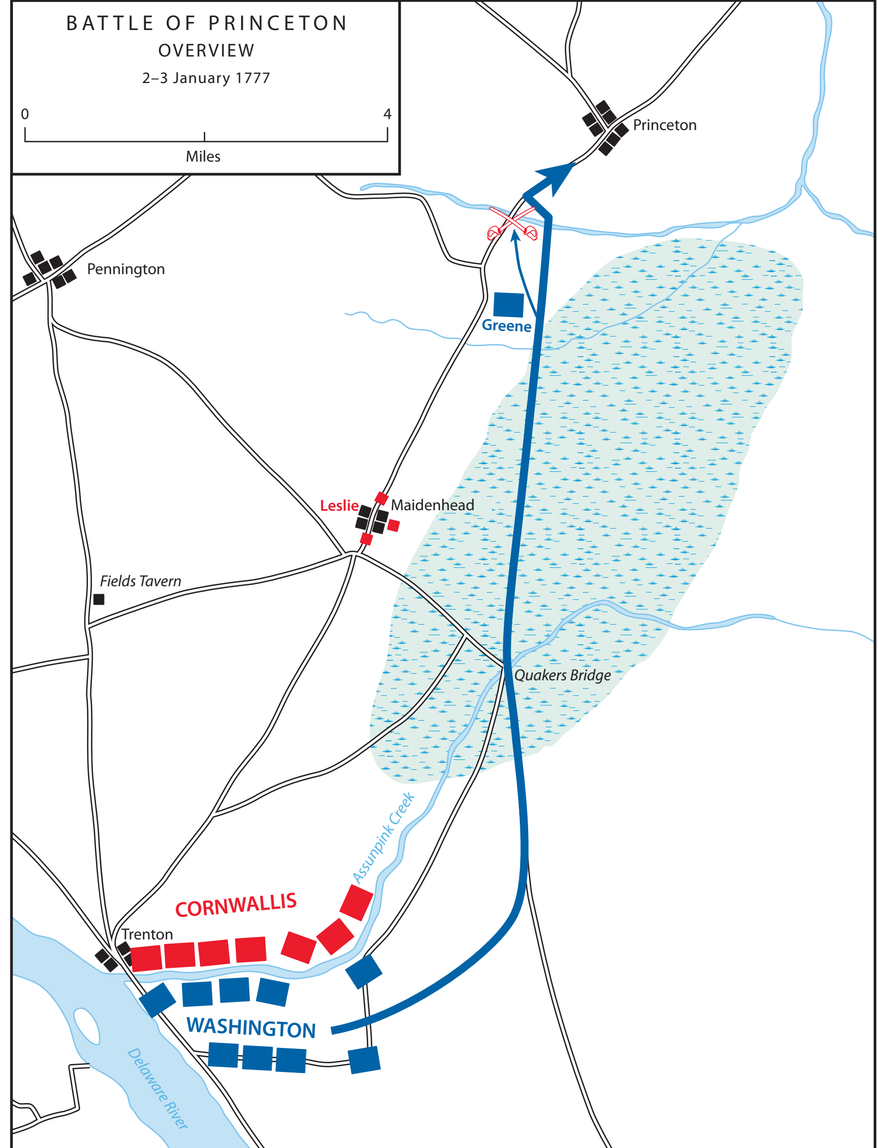
The Battle of Princeton

On the night of 2–3 January, the patriots faced the same dilemma that had confronted them the previous day. Withdrawal into Pennsylvania remained impossible because of conditions on the Delaware River. The army could stay and fight on the Assunpink, where the solid performance on 2 January raised the prospect of drawing the British into another costly frontal assault like Bunker Hill. Nevertheless, several factors conspired to weaken the patriot position from its initial status on the afternoon of 2 January. Cornwallis's force significantly outnumbered Washington's, and most of the redcoats had not been engaged in active operations for the past week. A resumption of action along the Assunpink on 3 January carried the potential for exacting a severe toll on Cornwallis's army, but recent history indicated that the patriots also would suffer significant casualties and have to retreat into southern New Jersey. The aggressive Cornwallis was likely to maintain pressure even in the face of heavy losses. A tactical draw or limited defeat would undo the morale gains Washington had achieved at Trenton and concede control of northern New Jersey to the enemy. The remaining soldiers would have to quarter in Bordentown, Burlington, and smaller villages that the enemy already had found to be inadequate for shelter and defense in the month before. Taking

the offensive, however, appeared to have even lower prospects for success. Washington's troops were outnumbered and exhausted from a week of hard marching and fighting. An assault on British lines north of the Assunpink likely would end in a decisive defeat.

To determine a way to move forward, Washington held a council of war on the night of 2 January. The meeting resulted in the adoption of a bold plan that avoided the dangers of renewing the battle along the Assunpink. During the actions on the afternoon of 2 January, General St. Clair had noted that his troops had encountered no enemy patrols along the far-right flank of the patriot line. This indicated that Cornwallis had concentrated his battalions for the assault on the left and center below Trenton while neglecting the area to the northeast of the town. The Americans therefore resolved to evacuate their defensive positions and slip undetected around the British left flank in a daring night march. By morning, they hoped to reach Princeton, 9 miles in Cornwallis's rear. From there, the army could strike another isolated British post or march northward to the relative safety of Morristown and the surrounding hills. This maneuver would avoid the problems of a direct confrontation or a withdrawal. Nevertheless, it carried dangers. Should the British discover the move, they easily could strike their opponent's column at its most vulnerable position—marching in the dark. Washington's plan also exposed his rear to the enemy and abandoned the strong position on the Assunpink. Nonetheless, the commander in chief gambled that his foe would remain quiescent long enough for the Continentals and militia to reach Princeton by morning.

The army began to move out after midnight on 3 January. The meager baggage train went south to Bordentown, while the main force marched up the Quaker Bridge Road, a secondary track paralleling the main road from Trenton to Princeton. As St. Clair had predicted, Cornwallis had not posted pickets along this route, giving the patriots a clear path. Cloth coverings over the wheels of cannons and wagons muffled the sound of the army's movements. Small parties stayed behind at the Assunpink defenses to tend campfires and make enough noise to convince the British that the army had not left. To ensure operational security, Washington directed his



Map 7

troops around the village of Sandtown where loyalist civilians might have revealed the movement to the British. The weather once again aided the patriots. Temperatures plummeted by 20 degrees during

the night, freezing the mud that had impeded Cornwallis's advance the previous day and aiding Washington's movement.

Despite favorable conditions, the local terrain delayed the pace of advance. The column paused at a narrow stone bridge over Stony Brook, a mile and a half southwest of Princeton, to allow pioneers—the combat engineers of their day—time to build a second bridge wide enough to handle artillery. Washington's soldiers did not cross the brook until after dawn. After reforming north of the bridge, the army proceeded down the Saw Mill Road, a backroad leading into Princeton from the southeast. The British *16th Light Dragoons* failed to provide good screening, and the Americans' movements went undetected.

To assault Princeton itself, Washington devised a plan like the one he had used at Trenton. (*See Map 7.*) General Greene was to command a division on the left including Mercer's, Cadwalader's, Hitchcock's, and Mifflin's brigades, totaling some 3,300 soldiers, which would advance on Princeton from the west along the Post Road from Trenton. Greene also was to send Mifflin's brigade to demolish the bridge carrying the road over the Stony Brook at Worth's Mill. This would impede Cornwallis from dispatching his forces to Princeton once he realized Washington had stolen a march on him. Meanwhile, General Sullivan was to move east along the Saw Mill Road and then attack Princeton from the south spearheaded by General St. Clair's New England Continental brigade of 1,400 troops. Washington also planned to send a third 500-strong force under Colonel Haussegger to block the northern route out of Princeton. The coordinated assault along multiple axes promised to overwhelm the enemy just as it had the Trenton garrison on 26 December.

Unfortunately for the patriots, Cornwallis had maintained three regiments at Princeton under Colonel Mawhood. On the morning of 3 January, these redcoats received orders to march to Trenton to reinforce the main Crown force. The *17th* and *55th Foot* and the *16th Light Dragoons* proceeded southward toward Trenton when they spotted the American army. The British lieutenant colonel lacked intelligence on the true size of Washington's force and likely did not know that the entirety of his opponent's army stood a few

miles away, shrouded in tree cover and fog. Mawhood could have withdrawn back to Princeton where his soldiers already had begun to erect defensive works and attempted to delay their adversary until reinforcements arrived from the south. Instead, he hastily decided to attack what he assumed was an inferior enemy party.

The main clash occurred just east of the Stony Brook and south of the main Post Road to Princeton. Southeast of the road rose high ground, later known as Mercer Heights, which dominated the surrounding territory. Mawhood reversed his column and directed the *55th Foot* to secure the heights and sent the *17th* to the fields southwest of where the American column was emerging. Equidistant between the Post Road and Saw Mill Road stood the home of William Clarke, with an adjacent orchard, and a quarter mile south was Thomas Clarke's home, where the Saw Mill Road turned sharply to the west. Patriot soldiers from Greene's division marched northward along the Saw Mill Road, to arrive on a flat plain in the vicinity of the Thomas Clarke house just as Mawhood's soldiers headed up the Post Road toward the heights. Greene ordered Mercer's brigade, at the head of the division, to intercept the British before they could reach the high ground. Mawhood's soldiers of the *17th Foot* left the road, formed into line, and began to advance southward toward Mercer's oncoming troops. The patriots had spent all night marching following more than a week of activity on short rations and covered by inadequate shelter. The British had likewise experienced a long march two days earlier. For veteran soldiers who had served throughout the fighting in New York and New Jersey, the engagement on the morning of 3 January was the culmination of a long campaign that had pushed their endurance to the limit.

The British troops initially gained the upper hand as fighting developed in the vicinity of William Clarke's orchard. A contingent of the *16th Light Dragoons* took cover in the orchard and attempted to delay Mercer's advance, but superior patriot numbers forced the dragoons back. Mawhood's main body of infantry then came forward just as the bulk of Mercer's brigade arrived. Mercer's and Mawhood's lines closed to within 40 yards, close enough for a killing volley, before exchanging fire. The Americans inflicted significant damage

***The Battle of Princeton*, James Peale, ca. 1782 (*Princeton University Art Museum*)**

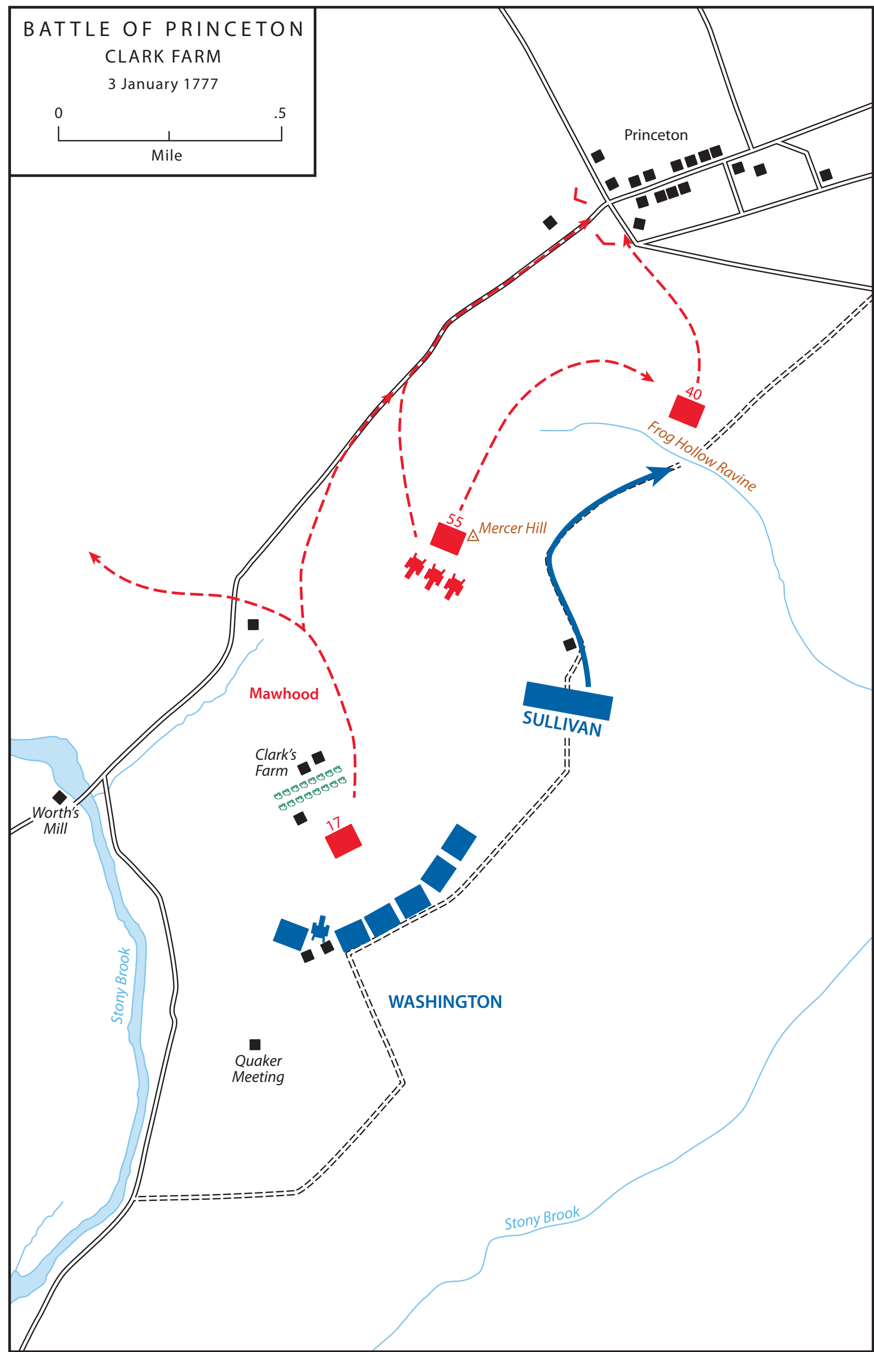
on the British, but Mawhood's troops closed ranks and advanced with bayonets fixed. Capt. Daniel Neil of the Eastern Company, New Jersey State Artillery, brought two cannons into action, but the British line pressed onward while enduring heavy casualties. In the ensuing hand-to-hand combat, the British came off best, resulting in a hasty American retreat that also spread disorder to the leading ranks of Cadwalader's brigade then marching onto the battlefield. Patriot officer casualties were particularly heavy, as the redcoats killed Captain Neil and mortally wounded Mercer.

Despite the unfavorable opening clash, the Americans proved resilient. Associator Capt. Joseph Moulder brought forward two guns whose fire slowed the enemy advance. Delaware militiamen of Capt. Thomas Rodney's Dover Light Infantry joined the fight near the cannons, while the Philadelphia Light Horse dismounted and provided additional support for the gunners. Having suffered heavy casualties, Mawhood pulled his brigade back into the orchard and extended his line to maximize the firepower of his diminished force. Washington, who had been accompanying Sullivan's division, rode

up to command the action directly. Hitchcock's brigade arrived and steadied the line, Cadwalader restored order to his ranks, and Mifflin's brigade came on the scene, giving the Americans superior numbers and threatening the redcoats with encirclement. Washington led these assembled patriot troops in a deliberate counterattack. Associator Samuel Correy described the anticipation in the ranks: "A terrible bustle ensues . . . every person strives [to see] who will be most active." Enjoying numerical superiority and artillery support, the Americans broke Mawhood's line. The remnants of the *17th Foot* fell back down the road to Trenton, with the light dragoons covering their retreat and the Philadelphia Light Horse in pursuit. Mawhood himself led the *55th Foot* toward the town of Princeton to aid the defenders at that locale.

The second half of the battle, occurring in the vicinity of Princeton itself, proceeded more smoothly for the Americans (*Map 8*). Sullivan's column found itself mismatched against only the *40th Foot*, elements of the *55th*, and wounded Germans convalescing in the town. The *55th* first attempted to halt Sullivan's force by sending a detachment to outflank the American column, but it quickly withdrew in the face of superior numbers. The British made their next stand at a prepared breastwork behind the Frog Hollow ravine, on the southern outskirts of the town. The Americans again responded quickly, unlimbering their artillery and making good use of superior numbers to threaten their opponents with envelopment. The redcoats retreated to another breastwork near the College of New Jersey, where they surrendered rather than make a hopeless last stand. Nearby, an assortment of Crown troops were posted in Nassau Hall, the main college building in town. Sturdy structures in urban locales disrupted other American advances during the Revolutionary War, but at Princeton the Crown soldiers were too disorganized and demoralized from the earlier defeats to mount an effective defense. Patriot troops quickly brought forward artillery, and, after a few cannon shots, the enemy raised the white flag.

The Battle of Princeton had lasted about two hours and resulted in another major American victory. They had defeated two enemy regiments and forced the hasty withdrawal of a third, and killed,



Map 8

wounded, or captured 400 enemy soldiers. The revolutionaries also seized enemy supplies and weapons, including two brass 6-pounder cannons. Washington lost seven officers and forty enlisted soldiers killed. The Americans could not, however, rest on their laurels. By midmorning, Cornwallis had discovered his opponent's maneuver and set his main force in motion from Trenton to Princeton. Washington sent the Philadelphia Light Horse and Moulder's artillery to guard the crossing at Stony Brook, where they clashed with Cornwallis's vanguard.

The commander in chief stood at a crossroads. He could follow his original plan and march up the Post Road to New Brunswick. The town lay 15 miles away, and the army could hope to make it there by nightfall. Brunswick promised an even larger bounty of British stores and, according to rumors, the hard currency intended for paying the British forces in North America. Because Cornwallis had concentrated most of the available redcoats and Germans opposite Trenton, little stood between Washington and the enemy posts along the Raritan. Nevertheless, the patriots could not know for sure that only a weak foe lay before them. They did know that a powerful army stood fewer than 10 miles away and marched closer by the minute. The roads were in generally poor condition, and any obstructions on the way to New Brunswick might allow Cornwallis to overtake the revolutionaries. Mawhood had already delayed the American advance, and elements of his command remained at large in the area. Washington's soldiers had been awake the entire night with little or nothing to eat, and already fought one battle. Although they had performed well, the commander in chief could not expect them to win another clash should they stumble into another enemy brigade on the road to Brunswick. Alternatively, Washington could march northward. Fifteen miles north of Princeton lay the Watchung Mountains and the secure highlands of northern New Jersey. At Morristown, the commander in chief could rest his army behind a screen of hills, removed from contact with the enemy. From there, they could still pursue limited operations against enemy posts in New Jersey and threaten the rear of any renewed overland offensive toward Philadelphia.

Ultimately, Washington chose the safer route and led his army northward. During the 35-mile march the patriots faced little opposition from the enemy but much hardship from the elements. The hard campaigning of the preceding ten days left uniforms and tentage in tatters. The morning of 4 January found the army at Pluckemin at the southwestern terminus of the Watchung Mountains, 20 miles from Morristown. Washington reached Morristown two days later, followed by his 4,000 remaining troops who dispersed into billets in homes and buildings throughout the region. For many soldiers, these quarters were the best shelter they had enjoyed in months.

The Forage War

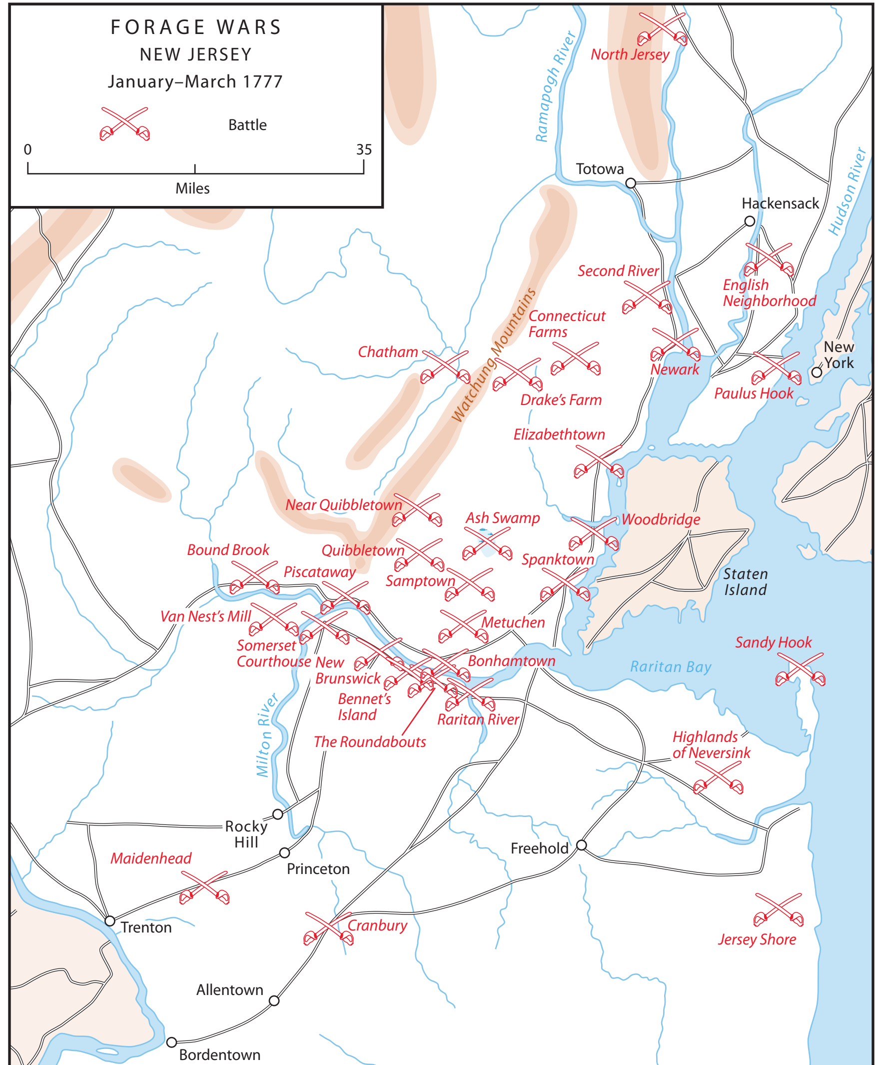
The disasters at Trenton and Princeton convinced General Howe to draw in his extended garrisons lest the patriots overwhelm another detachment. Cornwallis's humbled and tired troops arrived at New Brunswick late on 4 January, ceding most of Jersey below the Raritan to the patriots. To the north, after heavy skirmishing with New Jersey militiamen, British and German soldiers abandoned Elizabethtown on 6 January. The British also left Hackensack, opening Bergen County to advancing New York militiamen under Brig. Gen. George Clinton's command. From Bergen down to Monmouth County, whatever loyalist support that had materialized during the brief British occupation evaporated upon the redcoats' flight. Aside from Perth Amboy and New Brunswick, New Jersey remained free from Crown occupation.

The composition of the patriot army changed significantly during early 1777. Many of the soldiers who had agreed to serve an extra month during the Trenton campaign left the service at the end of January, but an enthusiastic turnout by the Jersey militia compensated somewhat for these departures. Incensed at the British occupiers, inspired by the recent victories, and free from agricultural commitments during the winter, New Jersey militiamen began to redeem their reputation from their poor showing in the fall of 1776. Reinforcements also arrived from further afield. More Pennsylvanians arrived on 6 January, followed by Virginia light

horse, Maryland infantry, and volunteers from Massachusetts and Connecticut later in the month.

Washington resolved to use these newly arrived soldiers to wage an effective winter campaign against the British using irregular tactics, a strategy known in the eighteenth century as *petite guerre* (*Map 9*). Washington declared that "he would not suffer a man to stir beyond their lines, nor suffer them to have the least intercourse with the country." He organized his units in an arc around New York, with concentrations at Princeton and the Sourland Mountains in the south, Bound Brook at the foot of the Watchung Mountains, Chatham guarding the approaches to Morristown, and Hackensack in Bergen County. Continentals and militiamen were to suppress loyalists, gather intelligence, and most importantly, interdict the flow of supplies from the countryside to British lines. Doing so would hamper enemy logistics, protect patriot farmers, and secure provisions for the Americans, all while making good use of a dispersed army that featured great enthusiasm but often lacked experience and organization. Washington minimized patriot numerical weakness; by using small parties of 400 to 500 soldiers to harass enemy foragers, the British would have to respond with larger expeditions of 1,500 to 2,000 troops to gather supplies. Doing so promised to wear out British and German garrisons. Bold commanders might also discern an opportunity to "give them a smart brush" as Washington put it.

The patriots thus engaged their opponents in a series of clashes that became known as the Forage War. Food posed a crucial problem to the British during the winter because the weather inhibited maritime supply routes. Howe could have expected to augment his stocks by provisioning his garrisons locally, but the loss of New Jersey meant his soldiers would now have to fight for their food, and Washington's soldiers stood ready to challenge them. Nearly sixty engagements ensued between January and March in New Jersey. Early actions favored the revolutionaries: Colonel Scott's Virginians seized wagons and defeated enemy foragers on 10 January near Chatham, whereas Jersey militiamen garnered victories near Springfield and Brunswick in the following weeks and outside Somerset Courthouse



Map 9

at the end of the month. In a 20 January action near Millstone, the Americans seized more than forty enemy wagons. In a larger action on 1 February, a mixed group of Continentals and militiamen totaling 700 soldiers led by Scott inflicted 100 casualties on a 2,000-strong

British foraging party outside Brunswick. At the cost of twenty-four casualties, Scott's force seized their wagons and hay.

Individual soldiers involved in these engagements often did not realize their commanders' true aims. Sgt. Thomas McCarty of the 8th Virginia Regiment believed the 1 February action had gone poorly, as he described how "there was a body of 400 men that never came up to our assistance till we retreated." McCarty had likely been a member of the advance party that had drawn the enemy out to expose them to attack and had not realized that his unit's retreat was part of a plan to induce the enemy toward the waiting party of 400. Although the sergeant may have lacked the perspective to understand the battle's outcome, his observations on the nature of combat were certainly valid. The Virginian described how several British officers "went to the field where we retreated from and the men that was wounded in the thigh or leg, they dash out their brains with their muskets and run them through with their bayonets . . . this was barbarity to the utmost."

Some units avoided such bloody engagements but pursued tiring and tedious patrols. To contest the good farmland that lay closer to the enemy, patriot soldiers conducted sweeps from their bases in the hills through the towns to the east. Chatham provided an important staging area because of its friendly population, good housing stock, and location near the pass through the Watchungs. From Chatham, company and battalion-sized contingents marched the New Jersey countryside in late January, generally passing through Westfield, Springfield, and Quibbletown. Some patrols also passed closer to British lines, making their way to Elizabethtown, Connecticut Farms, and Woodbridge, before returning to Chatham. Days spent on patrol followed by nights resting in towns or out in the open wore on patriot soldiers,even without the added stress of combat. "A mountain traveled and brought forth a mouse," Pvt. Zaccheus Town complained in his diary near the end of a mostly fruitless two-week patrol in northeastern Jersey in late January.

In early February, Washington grew concerned that Howe might attempt another advance toward Philadelphia when his army recovered from the shocks of the previous month. The commander

in chief resolved to undermine any enemy offensive by intensifying his forage-denial campaign. On 6 February, he ordered his soldiers to clear all provisions from the vicinity of British lines below the Watchungs. In particular, he sought to deny the enemy horses and fodder, reasoning that the British would need these to move artillery and supplies should the redcoats make another southern push.

The patriot evacuation of supplies compelled the British to undertake more complex operations to secure sustenance. On 8 February, Howe's army sortied from Brunswick toward Quibbletown, a crossroads village at the foot of the Watchungs 10 miles north of Brunswick. General Cornwallis led a mixed party of Scottish Highlanders, British and German grenadiers, light infantry, and dragoons, supported by several 6-pounder cannons, totaling 1,750 soldiers. Two British regiments under General Grant feinted toward Samptown, while a reinforced brigade made a diversionary move toward Bound Brook. The operation led to a sizable engagement at Quibbletown between Cornwallis's column and a 300-strong American detachment. Making good use of cover beyond the town, the patriots forced the Crown soldiers to retreat empty-handed.

The effort the British exerted in an unsuccessful operation contrasted with the limited commitment of patriot soldiers. When General Dickinson reported the action to Washington, he pronounced it as a "rout" of the British. The commander in chief declared to Continental Congress President John Hancock on 14 February that the broader operation of denying forage to the enemy had succeeded "without any loss." He described the British response as producing frequent skirmishes, but these usually led to few losses and that the enemy generally failed to prevent patriot operations.

Quibbletown stood as one of the largest actions in the winter fighting. Thereafter, improving weather on the Atlantic decreased the British reliance on local supplies, as more ships began arriving in New York harbor. The fierce and effective patriot resistance likewise deterred further forays into New Jersey, but patrols and pickets continued to clash throughout February and March. As Continental enlistments expired, Washington increasingly relied upon militia regiments to maintain pressure on the enemy. These engagements

failed to capture the attention of newspaper reports or even feature in senior officers' correspondence, but nevertheless soldiers fought fiercely. As one Virginia militiamen noted in his diary of a 1 March engagement near Brunswick, "the balls flew thicker than hail."

In New York and Connecticut, the patriots waged parallel campaigns to deny the British access to the countryside. Washington's orders to General Heath encapsulated his overall vision of foraging operations: "securing the forage, in Westchester County, for our own use, or depriving the enemy from carrying it off for theirs, is an object of so much moment, that I desire some measures may yet be fallen upon to effect one or the other." Heath did not achieve the same success in Westchester, however, as Washington had in New Jersey. The major general began operations by besieging a German-held fort at Kingsbridge in early February. Poor weather and a lack of shelter hampered the effectiveness of Heath's contingent, and an enemy sally then ejected the patriots from their siege lines. Heath then fell back to the Hudson Highlands and turned his command over to New York Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall. Heath's withdrawal opened Westchester to Manhattan-based British foragers that enjoyed easy access to the county. Westchester also lacked the natural defenses of the Highlands or Watchungs and strong loyalist sentiments hindered patriot intelligence gathering. American troops under Brig. Gen. David Wooster at New Rochelle numbered fewer than 1,000, mostly militiamen drawn from neighboring Connecticut. In the face of enemy pressure, Wooster fell back to Rye Neck on 24 February. In March, General McDougall detached troops from the Hudson Highlands to buttress defenses in Westchester, but by April, only 140 soldiers remained to guard the county and did little to halt enemy foragers.

Upriver from Westchester in the Hudson Highlands, the patriots spent the remainder of the winter and spring attempting to secure their supply depot at Peekskill. The mountainous terrain provided a strong natural defense, bolstered by the defensive works at Fort Montgomery and Fort Constitution. Nevertheless, the Hudson River afforded the British an avenue of attack that the small Highlands garrison lacked the numbers to repel. Brig. Gen. George Clinton

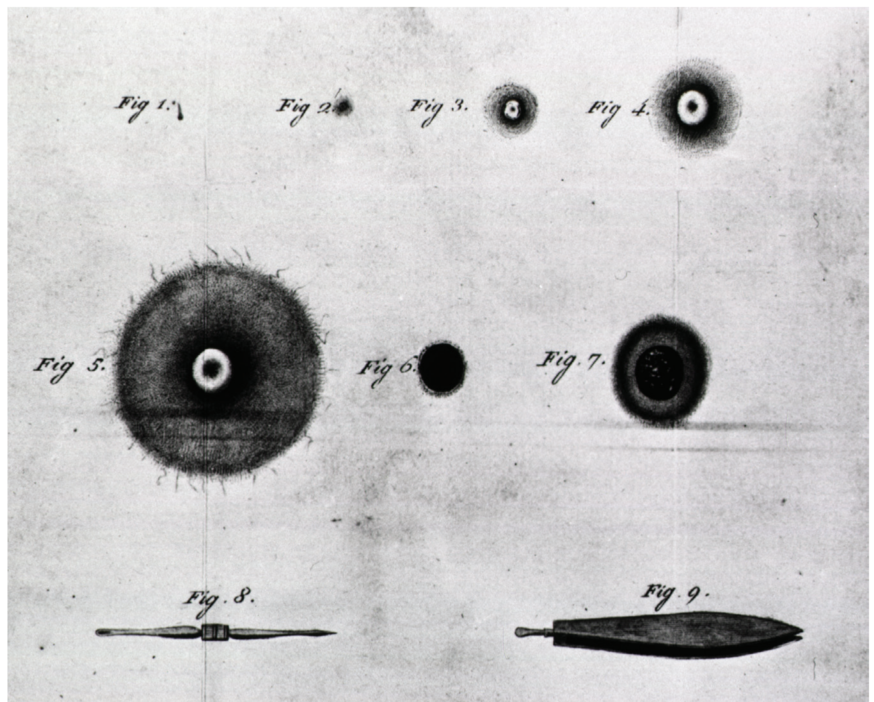
tried to mobilize New York militia in the counties along the river, but the call-up coincided with the spring planting season, leading to a low turnout. General McDougall thus had to rely on only 600 soldiers from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut to defend the entire region. Against this small contingent, the British landed 500 regulars on 23 March 1777 in a concentrated attack on Peekskill. The village's defenders withdrew in the face of superior numbers and destroyed most of the stockpiled supplies. McDougall's troops fell back toward Forts Montgomery and Constitution and skirmished with the enemy advanced guard before the British withdrew on 25 March. The small raid accomplished little beyond destroying supplies but had demonstrated the vulnerability of the Hudson Highlands' defenses. The patriots spent the next two years attempting to rectify this problem.

Fighting followed a similar pattern in nearby Connecticut. Continentals, militiamen, and detachments of state troops guarded the long Connecticut coast against British amphibious attacks. However on 25 April, Lt. Gen. William Tryon, a former royal governor, landed 1,800 redcoats and loyalists on the southwestern Connecticut coast and marched inland to the patriot depot at Danbury. The weakly guarded town fell to the British without a fight, enabling Tryon to occupy it for the night and burn the houses and supplies there. In response, 700 Continentals and militiamen under Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold and General Wooster converged on Danbury, seeking to cut off the enemy's escape. In the ensuing battle on 27 April, Wooster fell mortally wounded and his militia troops fled, while the British broke through Arnold's blocking force, losing around one hundred killed or wounded and another fifty captured and inflicting a similar toll on the patriots. Despite these casualties, Tryon successfully marched back to the coast and began embarking his soldiers and supplies. Coastal Connecticut continued to face similar raids throughout the war.

While patriot soldiers skirmished with the British throughout early 1777, Washington grappled with a potentially deadlier enemy: smallpox. This disease, carried by the *variola* virus, spread rapidly in densely populated urban environments; soldiers of the Northern

Army had contracted the illness when passing through occupied Montréal in late 1775. The American soldiers that hailed from rural environments had not been exposed to the disease in their youth and therefore lacked immunity to it. Smallpox consequently spread quickly in crowded army camps between vulnerable soldiers. *Variola* decimated the invasion of Canada in 1776, and the regiments from the north that had reinforced Washington's Main Army in December of that year brought the sickness with them. By early 1777, with soldiers quartered with equally vulnerable civilians and new units routinely passing through the area, it appeared that smallpox might devastate the patriot army. Sick rates climbed to more than 30 percent.

Washington had a remedy available in inoculation, also known as variolation, which entailed intentionally infecting a healthy person with viral material introduced through a small cut in the skin. Doing so typically yielded a milder case of smallpox which lasted up to a month but rendered the patient immune to future infection. More than 90 percent of inoculants survived. Nevertheless, inoculation remained an uncommon practice in much of North America, and soldiers and civilians alike regarded it with suspicion. The army had conducted limited inoculations in 1775 and 1776, but mostly opted for a policy of quarantine. Such cautious measures appeared insufficient in early 1777 with smallpox spreading rapidly, and on 6 February the commander in chief finally decided to implement inoculations, despite their unpopularity. He ordered all soldiers on duty in New Jersey as well as local civilians and all recruits gathering throughout the states to undergo the procedure. Inoculating recruits delayed their training and movement to the New Jersey theater, weakening the army's strength during the early spring. Washington therefore urged his subordinates to send forward recruits as soon as they had recovered their health, sacrificing unit cohesion to obtain an increased numerical presence in New Jersey. Until the recruits completed their bouts with smallpox and marched to northern Jersey, his position remained vulnerable. One New Englander remarked his militia regiment was "all there is now here" at Chatham in early March as they awaited relief by the troops undergoing inoculation. Washington had 2,543 Continentals and 976 militia under his



Engraving of smallpox instruments for inoculation, 1801 (*National Library of Medicine*)

command in New Jersey on 15 March, with the militia's terms set to expire in two weeks. Until the recruits of 1777 arrived, this tiny force enjoyed safety only through British ignorance, or as Washington admitted, "they would never suffer us to remain unmolested."

Fortunately for the patriots, wet weather left the roads in poor condition and the local waterways flooded, inhibiting enemy movements until early April. On 12 April, Cornwallis directed an operation by 4,000 British and German soldiers from Brunswick toward Bround Brook. There, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln commanded an outpost of 500 soldiers, composed of Pennsylvania Continentals and a detachment of artillery. Cornwallis's troops marched in two columns straddling either side of the Raritan River. Cornwallis planned to use his left column to fix Lincoln's troops in place, while the right column moved around the revolutionaries'

position and cut them off from Morristown. The British and Germans successfully assaulted one of Lincoln's redoubts and forced most of his command to retreat, but the larger goal of surrounding the patriots eluded Cornwallis. The Crown soldiers ultimately withdrew back to Brunswick at the end of the morning having inflicted up to 60 casualties and taken nearly 100 prisoners. A patriot contingent under General Greene reoccupied Bound Brook by the day's end and skirmished with the British on their return march. Cornwallis's expedition achieved little, despite the size of his force. Washington continued to gather strength at Morristown with little interference throughout the rest of April.

By early May, newly immunized soldiers arrived in Jersey in increasing numbers, proving Washington correct in his gamble in inoculating the army. On 20 May, Washington reported a total strength of 8,188. Two days later, he arranged these units in eight brigades from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey. Generals Greene, Stephen, Sullivan, and Lord Stirling served as division commanders directing two brigades each. Four more new brigades of Massachusetts and Connecticut troops gathered at Peekskill in New York under General Israel Putnam, the new commander of the Highlands Department. The commander in chief once again had an army capable of larger operations. To undertake the new army's organization and training, Washington sought to draw his brigades together at a single large camp. On 24 May, he dispatched General Greene to begin laying out a campsite at Middlebrook, 15 miles south of Morristown in the trough between the two Watchung ridges. Washington transferred his headquarters to Middlebrook on 29 May. From there, the next chapter of the army's development began.

ANALYSIS

The war moved into its next phase in June 1777. From Canada, a British army under Lt. Gen. John Burgoyne launched a campaign in northern New York that ultimately ended in the disastrous British defeat at Saratoga. In New York City, General Howe prepared a new offensive against Philadelphia. After a month of desultory maneuvers and skirmishes in the Raritan Valley, Howe embarked his soldiers aboard ship and moved against Philadelphia by sea. After heavy fighting at Brandywine, the "Quaker City" fell to the British, and the patriot army spent a difficult winter at Valley Forge.

After the spring of 1777, New Jersey enjoyed a reprieve from a large-scale military presence. The armies left behind a devastated state. Even though the British occupation had been brief, the daily needs of an eighteenth-century armies wrought immense problems for civilians. In a never-ending quest for fuel, Howe's troops had cut down orchards and burned fences, outbuildings, and even small houses. Patriot soldiers were less rapacious than the British, but civilians still reported the destruction of houses, shops, barns, and fences at the hands of the Continentals and militia. Billeted soldiers frequently subjected civilian households to vandalism and thievery. Even a successful campaign left deep scars on the land and people.

Despite the ongoing conflict, the 1776–1777 campaign had yielded clear benefits to the revolutionary cause. Washington had recovered New Jersey from British control, and the state never again faced a serious threat during the war. New Jersey provided valuable logistical support throughout the remainder of the conflict. Jersey farms fed the Continentals, Jersey roads and rivers provided secure communications routes, and Jersey towns and fields served as sites for quartering troops through 1783.

Just as important, New Jersey's revolutionary government maintained control of the state, and its governor William Livingston proved one of Washington's closest civilian allies. Livingston returned to New Jersey in January 1777 and rallied support for the patriot cause. At Livingston's behest, in March, the state legislature passed a new militia law that increased fines for avoiding duty, promising a better turnout in future mobilizations. Livingston also established a Council of Safety in 1777 that expanded executive authority to deal with loyalist agitation. Livingston and the council proceeded for the next year to enforce fines, and impose house arrests, expulsions, and imprisonments for the Crown's sympathizers in the state. They transformed New Jersey into a bulwark of patriot support.

Most crucially, Washington's victory rejuvenated faith in the cause and the army. In the press and, private correspondence, and via word of mouth, news of the victories along the Delaware rapidly spread throughout the United States. Inaccuracies marred many of these accounts, but the general message held true: Washington and his outnumbered band of Continentals and militiamen had won multiple engagements against the Crown's army. The good news sparked an eruption of patriotism and optimism from Georgia to New England. A Virginia planter exclaimed, "we have at last turned the tables upon these scoundrels by surprise," whereas the governor of Rhode Island noted, "the Lord seems to have smote the enemy with a panic." Maj. John Cropper of Virginia observed the renewed revolutionary spirit in Philadelphia in mid-January: "soldiers are flocking from every part which I hope will put an end to the war this winter if our people behave as well as they have." A New Haven diarist noted that news of the victories had "excited the public spirit."

Throughout the campaign, at every level, Crown commanders performed poorly compared to their patriot counterparts. Howe demonstrated little drive or aggression during the initial move into New Jersey. He failed to trap the patriots at Fort Lee, likely his best chance for a significant victory. Subsequently, he conducted a lethargic pursuit that never seriously pressured Washington's retreat. Extensive littoral waterways exposed Washington's east flank from Hackensack to Brunswick, but Howe never used his

naval superiority to exploit this weakness. He compounded his error by losing sight of his initial objectives. If the British commander had contented himself with clearing the waterways around Manhattan, then keeping his cantonments concentrated north of the Raritan would have served him better. Instead, Howe shifted from a purely military objective to a political one, the occupation of New Jersey and the reestablishment of royal authority. However, he also sent a substantial detachment to Rhode Island and maintained sizable forces in New York, diluting the strength of the army in New Jersey and undermining its ability to control the state effectively. Howe also failed to push into northwestern New Jersey, where Morristown had grown into a locus of resistance and where the patriots still enjoyed secure lines of communications to New York and New England.

General Cornwallis fared little better. He never succeeded in bringing the patriot army to battle on his terms. When he led the counterstroke against Washington after Trenton, his aggressiveness proved detrimental. He showed little imagination in dealing with the enemy party on the road to Trenton on 2 January. Once he finally got his army in position, he launched a late afternoon attack against a strong post that promised little hope of attaining victory. Throughout the day, he failed to reconnoiter the surrounding territory. Had he found the upstream fords over the Assunpink, he could have used his superior strength to push through Washington's right flank. Instead, he allowed his adversary to slip around his own left and into his rear.

Howe and Cornwallis proved no more successful in fighting small actions during the Forage War. They conducted several well-organized operations that produced tactical successes such as at Bound Brook, but they never established control over the countryside beyond Brunswick. Although waterborne raids at Danbury and Peekskill maximized the redcoats' advantages, they failed to inflict significant defeats on Washington's troops. Poor intelligence undermined British efforts throughout early 1777. Had Howe or Cornwallis known that Washington had fewer than 3,000 under arms in New Jersey by March, or that many of his soldiers lay incapacitated with smallpox, they might have struck Chatham and

Morristown and denied Washington his main base of operations in the state. Instead, the redcoats never ventured beyond the Watchungs.

Howe's subordinates also disappointed throughout the campaign. General Grant underestimated the Americans, allowed discipline to erode among his troops, and ignored warnings from of his brigade commanders. General Leslie showed little initiative during the skirmish at Springfield and did little to distinguish himself during the remainder of the campaign. At Trenton, Colonel Rall failed to institute adequate reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering measures or fortify his position, thus allowing his soldiers to suffer the surprise attack on 26 December. Once the assault began, the German colonel did not exercise firm command of his brigade. Had Rall rallied his soldiers quickly and led them across the Assunpink, he may have at least avoided a total defeat. Instead, the battle rapidly broke down into a series of uncoordinated counterattacks that led to the destruction of most of three regiments. Colonel Donop performed even worse. By marching on Mount Holly, he removed his brigade from supporting distance of Trenton. Then, he abandoned southern New Jersey entirely, opening the opportunity for Washington to continue the campaign after 26 December. Colonel Mawhood demonstrated the most competence of any of Howe's brigade commanders. He boldly attacked an enemy of unknown strength immediately upon making unexpected contact on the morning of 3 January. Although his outnumbered troops eventually suffered a stinging defeat, they had upset Washington's timetable. This engagement bought time for other elements of the British army to move north from Trenton. Washington ultimately avoided further difficulty and marched his soldiers to Morristown, but without Mawhood's interference the patriots may have been emboldened to try for Brunswick.

Conversely, Washington's subordinates performed well throughout the campaign. Colonel Cadwalader showed initiative and perseverance in getting his troops across the Delaware on 27 December, and discerned the opportunities open to the army. At Princeton, he helped steady the line after the initial panic. General Mercer showed great personal bravery in that same fight, ultimately costing him his

life. The other brigadiers may not have shined as brightly during the campaign, but most executed their duties acceptably; General Fermoy's flight during the delaying action on 2 January stands out as an exception. Fortunately for the patriot cause, Colonel Hand stepped in and immediately showed his potential for higher command. He went on to command the Western Department, lead a brigade, and serve as adjutant general later in the war. Colonel Glover excelled managing the dangerous river crossings during the campaign. Colonel Knox directed the artillery brilliantly at every battle. Like Hand, both Glover and Knox later earned promotions to general officer rank.

If the brigade officers mostly did well, the higher-ranking generals left a more uneven record. General Lee undermined his commander in chief throughout the British invasion of New Jersey by willfully misinterpreting his instructions, moving slothfully, and attempting to supersede Washington's authority by communicating directly with Congress. By contrast, Generals Greene and Sullivan both earned the confidence and trust Washington had placed in them. They showed skill and intelligence in command of their divisions at Trenton and Princeton, and both went on to hold independent commands by war's end. Further from the scenes of the main action, Generals Heath, McDougall, and Putnam all proved adequate at organizing and administering their commands in secondary theaters, though battlefield success mostly eluded them. These officers continued to carry out these unheralded duties in the Hudson Highlands and Connecticut for much of the remainder of the conflict.

For Washington, the New Jersey campaign tested all aspects of his generalship. Strategically, the campaign highlighted his skill in maximizing his army's strengths and exploiting his opponent's vulnerabilities. Whereas Howe distributed his forces in December 1776, Washington concentrated his. Using interior lines, he called in reinforcements from the dormant Canadian theater as well as the relatively secure Hudson Highlands to strengthen his attack along the Delaware. Washington increased his tempo when his enemy's slowed. Howe treated the occupation of New Jersey as the formal end to the campaign season, but Washington refused to follow suit.

Washington responded to the challenge of directing several types of operations during the campaign. He conducted a surprise river crossing under adverse conditions and followed it with a successful surprise attack on an enemy garrison. On 2 January, he used his best light troops to fight a skillful delaying action that traded space for time and ensured the British would have too little daylight to launch an effective assault along the Assunpink. He then showed great boldness in maneuvering his army around Cornwallis's flank. Finally, he moved his exhausted army to relative safety at Morristown.

Over the course of the winter and spring of 1777, Washington and his subordinates developed sophisticated methods for surprising British foragers. Commanders learned to garner intelligence from the local population regarding where British parties tended to gather supplies, allowing the patriots to set up ambushes in these areas before the redcoats' arrival. Officers frequently used small-unit attacks to draw the enemy out of their defenses. When a party withdrew after an initial attack, they baited their pursuers into an ambuscade by a larger force stationed a few miles away. Washington's soldiers also used subterfuge. Soldiers disguised themselves as farmers tending cattle herds near British lines, tempting the enemy to venture out to seize the supplies only to find a patriot covering force lying in wait. Commanders also learned to employ rifle-armed soldiers to fire on British vessels plying the Raritan. Most militia regiments lacked experience in large-scale maneuvers, but the small-unit actions of the Forage War put the onus on basic musketry drill, at which well-led militia units held their own.

Tactically, Washington mostly trusted his subordinates to execute his orders. At the Battle of Trenton, the commander in chief occupied a vantage point from which he could observe and direct the battle without the distraction of managing individual units. During the 2 January engagements, he likewise entrusted his subordinates to fight the delaying actions along the Princeton road but then intervened directly in conducting the defense along the Assunpink. Conversely, at Princeton his personal presence helped rally the troops in the Clarke orchard and carry them to victory.

Overall, Washington showed no lack of bravery but realized that as commander in chief he rarely needed to lead from the front.

Patriot success in the campaign also rested on Washington's organizational and administrative capabilities. He worked with financiers and merchants and cajoled Congress for money and supplies to ensure the campaign could continue. He followed the example of his subordinates in extending a bounty to encourage soldiers to prolong their enlistments, a problem few other eighteenth-century commanders had faced in North America. During early 1777, he implemented a nationwide inoculation program that overcame hesitancy among civilians and soldiers to produce an army protected against smallpox.

If any aspect of Washington's generalship deserves criticism, it was his boldness. During November and early December, the general sought to contest Howe's move into New Jersey. At a time when the British enjoyed numerical superiority and carried the momentum of the campaign, it seems unlikely that Washington could have won a defensive victory along the Raritan, even if Lee's troops had joined him as he had ordered. The eventual counteroffensive on 26 December began under much better circumstances, with Howe's army already dispersed into winter quarters. Nevertheless, the operation's success overshadowed the many hazards involved. Had either of Washington's divisions lost their way on that morning, or had Rall's pickets proved more effective, the patriots may have conducted an uncoordinated assault facing a better-organized defense. The Battle of Germantown in October 1777 demonstrated how a complex offensive against a well-defended enemy camp could end in a serious reverse. Washington also benefited from the elements; the failure of Ewing's and Cadwalader's crossings on the twenty-sixth showed that the patriots were fortunate to get their main body over the Delaware. During the fighting in January, good fortune continued to benefit the Americans. Better British reconnaissance might have led to a defeat along the Assunpink, or the rout of Washington's columns during their night march to Princeton. All told, boldness, decisiveness, and intelligence have tended to lead to battlefield success throughout history and Washington deserves credit for exhibiting all these

qualities. Washington knew his opponents and based his planning on that knowledge. Nevertheless, that he achieved a nearly ideal outcome in the campaign derived at least in part from good luck and the failures of his opponents in the face of his audaciousness.

The Revolutionary War continued for six more years after the spring of 1777. Washington's newly assembled army of long-service soldiers suffered through battlefield defeats and starving winters, and often went unpaid. Militiamen continued to fulfill their duty as citizen soldiers, facing frequent mobilizations and deployments to posts far from home. Civilians endured quartering, requisitions, and occasional violence from both patriot and Crown armies. Despite the vicissitudes of the war, however, New Jersey never again faced the serious threat of occupation, and Washington never again dealt with a crisis as severe as he had in December 1776. The Jersey campaign undoubtedly raised Washington's reputation as a commander as well as the confidence of his army, and the shared memory of their success would carry the revolution's soldiers through the hardships of subsequent years. Most importantly, Trenton, Princeton, and the Forage War had proven definitively to the British that George Washington and his soldiers were a formidable enemy. Washington's opponent Cornwallis put it best in 1781, following his surrender at Yorktown. Praising the Virginian's leadership in 1776, the British general supposedly remarked to Washington, "fame will gather your brightest laurels rather from the banks of the Delaware than from those of the Chesapeake."

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.

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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

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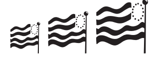

This monograph is based largely on secondary sources. Several works regarding the campaign and its main players are listed below. Primary sources consulted are Founders Online (https://founders.archives.gov/), a National Archives website dedicated to documents about the foundation of the country; Thomas Paine's *American Crisis* (No. 1) at the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.03902300/?st=text; Samuel Corey's journal at the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Zaccheus Town's diary in the Revolutionary War Collection at the American Antiquarian Association, Worcester, Massachusetts; Thomas Swearingen's diary, in the Special Collections of the University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville; and Obediah Johnson's journal, at Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

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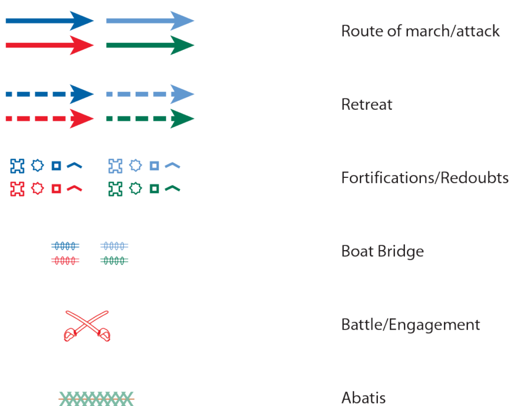

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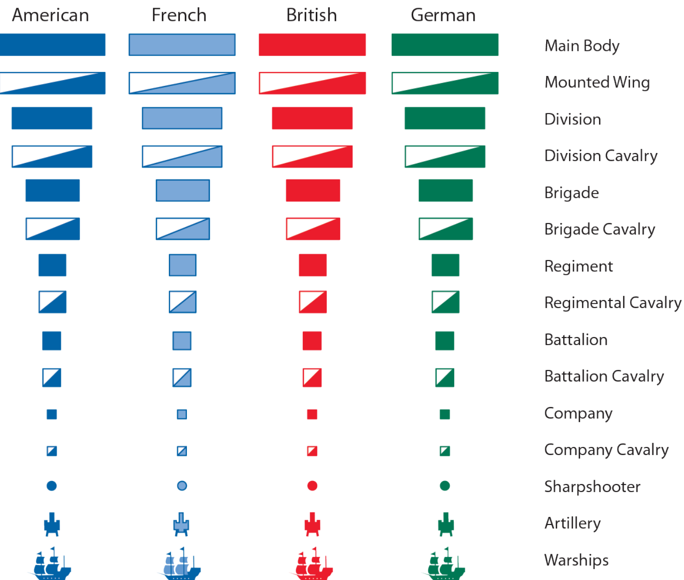

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