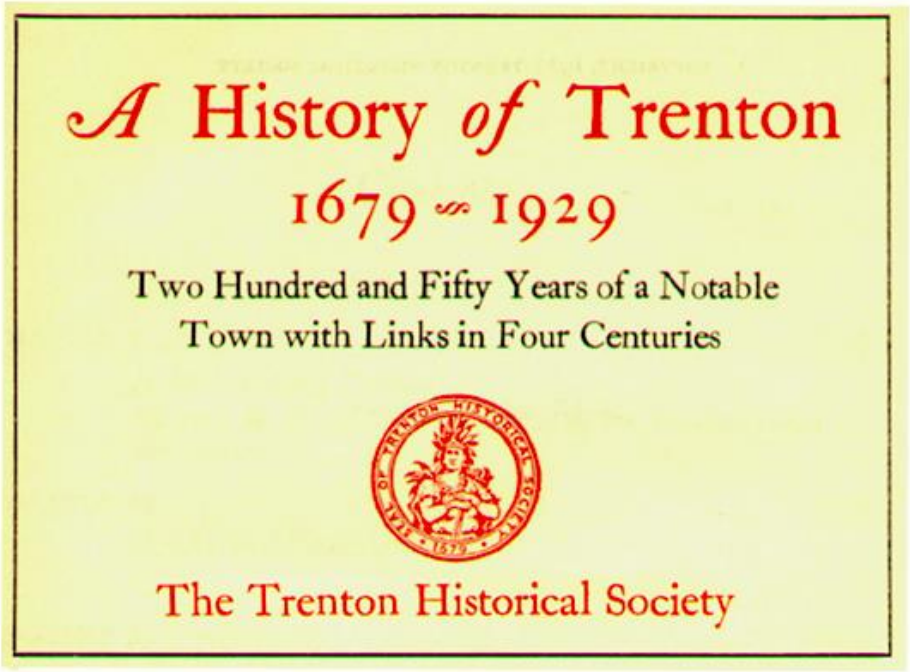

CHAPTER III

The Two Battles of Trenton

BY FREDERICK L. FERRIS

I. The First Battle

"NOWHERE in the annals of warfare," says General William S. Stryker, "can be found a counterpart of the winter campaign of Washington and his army in 1776-77 -that army which left the vicinity of New York a ragged, starved, defeated, demoralized band, which passed through the Jerseys and over the river, then dashed upon the Hessian advance, punished the flank of the British line, doubled on its own bloody tracks through the village of Princeton, and at last marched into quarters an army of victors." [1]

[1] *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton* (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), p. 1. This is the definitive work dealing with Revolutionary events in Trenton and vicinity. General Stryker was a painstaking and scholarly author who devoted his spare time for twenty-seven years to preparation for his great task and rewrote his manuscript five times. Professor William Starr Myers, of Princeton University, editing the same author's posthumous work, *The Battle of Monmouth,* has borne testimony that he found Stryker as an historian "accurate, sound, judicial and scholarly." Sir George Otto Trevelyan, Baronet, in his authoritative work, *The American Revolution*, says of Stryker's commentary on Trenton and Princeton: "A better book on the subject could not be compiled." Living on the scene of the memorable engagements here, General Stryker from childhood was steeped in local Revolutionary lore.

He gathered much of his knowledge almost first-hand from the families of survivors. Quite inevitably, therefore, the author of the present chapter has found it necessary and desirable to lean heavily upon Stryker's immortal account of the Battles of Trenton as both a factual and an interpretative guide.

DARK DAYS FOR THE PATRIOTS

This is a simple statement of fact. Disaster after disaster had come to the Americans during the summer of 1776. The defeat on Long Island was followed by the indecisive engagements at Harlem Heights and White Plains; and then ensued the collapse of Fort Washington and Fort Lee. Having lost 329 officers and 4,430 men in his unsuccessful attempt to defend the lower Hudson, Washington found himself in command of a force of not more than 4,000 poorly equipped, discouraged troops, facing a situation which demanded quick action but offered the smallest promise of success.

It would have been absurd further to resist the British. It would have meant annihilation to linger near New York. Washington, accordingly, ordered a retreat through the Jerseys, not knowing whether he would be forced to continue on to Virginia or even beyond the Alleghany Mountains themselves. Appealing to Governor William Livingston, of New Jersey, for reinforcements, he wrote: "The critical situation of our affairs and the movements of the enemy make some further and immediate exertions absolutely necessary."

Anxious to avoid being caught between the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers, Washington started the march southward on November 21, posting his force at Newark within the next two days. Five days later this position was abandoned, and the Continentals resumed falling back before the pressure of the British host. That the pressure was being persistently applied is indicated by the fact that the enemy advance-guard entered Newark even while the American rear-guard withdrew.

Upon reaching Brunswick on November 29, the patriot army was joined by a small force under Brigadier General Lord Stirling, but the recruits for which Washington kept hopefully looking failed to materialize until the army reached Trenton, and at the latter point it was only a small detachment of New Jersey militia which "volunteered to assist the forlorn cause." [2]

[2] Stryker, p. 18. This detachment included men from the Hunterdon and Middlesex brigades, under command of Colonel Isaac Smith and Colonel John Neilson, respectively.

After doing considerable damage to the bridge over the Raritan River, the Americans proceeded to Princeton, arriving on the morning of December 2 and pushing on almost immediately to Trenton where the army was posted the same day.

Cornwallis, reaching Brunswick, sought General Howe's permission to press on and attack Washington before the Delaware could be crossed. But Howe delayed, and the British thus lost what was for them a rare opportunity to end the war at a stroke. Washington, indeed, attributed the success of the retreat to "nothing but the infatuation of the enemy."

Meanwhile the shores of the Delaware were being combed for boats. They were obtained in sufficient number, and on December 7 and 8 plied from one side of the river to the other, transporting the Continentals, gun and baggage, to the Pennsylvania shore.

Nor was the movement premature, for Cornwallis was already on his way to Trenton, being able, on December 9, to attempt a crossing, and meeting with failure only because the Americans by this time had obtained all the available boats and placed them, under a strong guard, on the opposite side of the stream.

THE RIVER CHECKS THE BRITISH

It was the river, in other words, which checked the British pursuit. Inertia and delay quite literally had permitted the patriots to escape from the clutches of General Howe. For the enemy, there remained nothing to do but wait until the Delaware should freeze sufficiently to permit a crossing. Joseph Galloway, a Tory, later stated that there was ample material in Trenton for the building of rafts, pontoons or boats, and that, just as Howe's men had failed to bring with them a single boat from the Raritan, so now there was no effort made to construct suitable craft. [3]

[3] Stryker, p. 37. See also Trevelyan, *The American Revolution* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), pp. 21-2. "How provoking it is," remarked an experienced British officer, "that our army, when it entered the Jerseys, was not provided with a single pontoon! Unless the object was Philadelphia, entering the Jerseys was absurd to the last degree. If we had six flat-bottomed boats, we could cross the Delaware." Galloway's statement was made before the British House of Commons, June 18, 1779.

The British General, moreover, was quite content to halt operations for the winter. With this idea in mind, he ordered the formation of several cantonments, which Cornwallis proceeded to establish at Elizabeth-Town, Brunswick, Princeton, Trenton and Bordentown. Hessian troops were assigned to the latter points. And so, in addition to having a series of outposts sadly lacking in coordination, the British had foreign mercenaries unfamiliar with the very language of the patriots stationed at the towns closest to the place where Washington and his army were quartered.

Three regiments of Hessian Infantry, a detachment of Artillery, fifty Hessian yagers and twenty light dragoons were stationed in Trenton under command of Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall. The infantry regiments were headed, respectively, by Rall, Von Knyphausen and Von Lossberg. The entire force numbered about 1,400 men.

Howe's plan called for the placing of 1,500 men at Bordentown, and, on December 11, Colonel Von Donop left Trenton with the advance detachment, progress being somewhat impeded, however, by operations of the militia in Burlington County.

No one knew better than did Washington that the American predicament called for action. Congress was depressed. So were the people. On December 18, the commander-in-chief wrote to his brother: "If every nerve is not strained to recruit the new army with all possible

expedition, I think the game is pretty nearly up . . . . You can form no idea of the perplexity of my situation. No man, I believe, ever had a greater choice of difficulties, and less means to extricate himself from them." [4]

[4] Ford's *Writings of George Washington*, Vol. V, p. 109. "The trials of Washington," observes the historian Bancroft, "are the dark, solemn ground on which the beautiful work of the country's salvation was embroidered."

But Washington, in whom the country had the utmost confidence in spite of current pessimism, did not for a moment weaken in his high resolve.

Throughout the week before Christmas there was much discussion of a proposed movement on the Hessian outposts at Trenton and Bordentown. Colonel Joseph Reed, adjutant general of the Continental army, was one of the first to urge a crossing of the Delaware, and soon there was general agreement that some such stroke was precisely the thing to bolster up American hopes.

"If you ever expect to establish the independence of these States," said Colonel John Stark at one of the staff meetings on this weighty matter, "you must teach them to place dependence upon their firearms and courage." [5]

[5] Stryker, p. 85. An interesting popular account of the formulation of plans for the surprise attack on the Hessian outpost at Trenton is contained in Rupert Hughes' *George Washington, 1762-1777*, pp. 575-8.

Washington, always quick to sense strategic wisdom, did not hesitate to gamble with fate.

"VICTORY OR DEATH!"

On Christmas Eve, detailed plans for the crossing of the Delaware and the attack on Trenton were formulated. The final council of war was held at the headquarters of Major General Greene. In addition to Greene and Washington, there were present Generals Sullivan, Mercer, Lord Stirling, Colonel Knox and other officers.

It was decided to make an ambitious three-fold offensive Christmas night. Washington was to cross at McKonkey's Ferry, some nine miles north of Trenton, and march down upon the Hessians with his force of approximately 2,400 men. General Ewing's division was to negotiate the stream at Trenton Ferry, directly opposite the village, with a view of cutting off Rall's retreat and preventing Von Donop from sending up reinforcements from his station at Bordentown. Ewing commanded a force of 92 officers and about 1,000 men. Cadwalader, with 1,800 men, was to cross somewhat further to the south and proceed directly against Von Donop. With Rall and Von Donop defeated and the Continentals in control of Trenton as well as the enemy cantonments in the vicinity of Bordentown, it was planned that the entire army should advance on the British strongholds at Princeton and Brunswick.

Christmas night was chosen for the attack by reason of the Hessians' well-known leaning toward unrestrained Yuletide celebrations. Hearty drinking and a momentary lapse of discipline were counted on, and not in vain, as the natural consequences of the Teutonic seasonal observance.

Marching orders for the descent on Trenton from McKonkey's Ferry were issued by Washington on Christmas morning. An express rider was dispatched to bring Dr. Shippen and surgical assistance, though subsequent events were to prove how little this medical aid was needed.

Early in the afternoon of Christmas day, the first regiment began to move, and within an hour all parts of the northern expedition were on their way to the Delaware. Unity of action had been facilitated by Washington's order that all officers should set their watches by his.

Each man had three days' rations and forty rounds of ammunition. In these respects, there was adequacy. As for clothing and footwear, shivering infantrymen and a bloody trail in the snow told a different story. "Sunshine patriots" could not have faced this ordeal.

"What a time to hand me letters!" exclaimed Washington, when, as he himself was about to swing into his saddle for the ride to the ferry, a note was given him with the information that General Gates had reported sick. To the commander-in-chief, it seemed that, at the zero hour of national destiny, the pen was scarcely mightier than the sword.

CROSSING THE DELAWARE

Rugged, horny-handed seafarers from Marblehead, Mass., had charge of the boats. They rendered yeoman service. With jagged cakes of ice floating swiftly along the Delaware channel, theirs was a difficult task. A severe snow and hail storm, accompanied by a biting wind, added to the arduous job of transporting the chilled but determined army to the Jersey shore.[6]

[6] "Had not Colonel John Glover's splendid regiment of seafaring men from Marblehead, Mass., lent a willing and skilful hand, as he had promised they would;" says Stryker, pp. 133-4, "the expedition would no doubt have failed."

Washington had anticipated getting the force across before midnight, so that the attack on the drowsy Hessians could be made prior to the break of day. But on this dark, stormy night facility of movement was out of the question. It was four o'clock on the morning of December 26, 1776, before the Continentals were ready to start on their march along the Jersey shore toward Trenton. The last man had reached the eastern bank at three. During the latter part of the crossing venture, Washington, awaiting transport of his horse, had sat on a box once used as a beehive. What a background for high resolve and earnest meditation - blinding snow,

piercing wind, the grunts of artillerymen with their cumbersome burdens, the stentorian shouts of Colonel Knox.

"Victory or Death!" had been given out as the password; the necessity for absolute silence, obedience and order had been impressed on the men. At length, four hours behind schedule, came the command, "Shoulder your firelocks !" The weary tramp along slippery roads began.

THE CONTINENTALS MARCHING ON TRENTON

Neither the delay nor the weather could weaken Washington's grim purpose. Existing conditions, he later wrote, "made me despair of surprising the town, as I well knew we could not reach it before the day was fairly broke. But as I was certain there was no making a retreat without being discovered and harassed on repassing the river, I determined to press on at all events."[7]

[7] Ford's *Writings of George Washington*, Vol. V, p. 132.

Meanwhile, General Ewing had found it impossible to get a boat launched at Trenton Ferry, and Colonel Cadwalader, after landing some 600 men on the Jersey side at Dunk's Ferry, a few miles below Bristol, was confronted by an icy barrier which made further progress impossible. He therefore recalled those already across and bowed before the elements.

CONFIDENT REVELRY

If there was chill misery at McKonkey's Ferry, there was warm cheer in Trenton. The Hessians who were not required to remain on picket duty gathered around their fires, drinking and singing. Colonel Rall was no man to stand aside and watch others celebrate. He, too, was out to make a night of it.

Rall was full of confidence, despite the fact that a Continental advance on the Jersey shore of the Delaware was considered likely by his superior officers. On December 24, General Grant dispatched a letter to Von Donop at Bordentown, advising that he be upon his guard "against an unexpected attack at Trenton." And General Leslie, on the same day, sent a patrol to Trenton with word that an attack on either Trenton or Princeton was imminent.

"As the American officers had anticipated," says Stryker, "the Hessian troops at Trenton, carelessly confident in their own military strength, entered eagerly into the Christmas revelry as they did at home, and all day and far into the night they continued their merrymaking, with some feasting and much drinking with the people of the town."[8]

[8] *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, p. 117.

As late as Christmas morning, Colonel Rall received word from General Grant that a detachment under General Lord Stirling might be expected to attack the village sometime during the day. The advice was without foundation, but it should have sufficed to keep Rall alert. Instead, the confident Hessian, working on the theory that "these country clowns can't whip us," made a cursory inspection of some of the guards on the outskirts of town and then returned, late in the afternoon, to the house of Stacy Potts, on King Street, where he maintained headquarters.

Scarcely had the Hessian commander joined his genial host in a game of checkers when firing was heard. The village was immediately thrown into a state of alarm. The troops fell in. Rall marched his regiment to the junction of Pennington and Maidenhead Roads, but he soon received news from Captain Von Altenbockum that the Americans, who had attacked a picket on the Pennington Road, had been driven off and, after careful search, could not be found.

Rall was inclined to brush the incident aside as wholly trivial. Not so Major Von Dechow, who was impressed by the latent possibilities and urged upon Rall the desirability of sending out patrols to all the ferries and along all the roads. Certainly a more vigilant commanding officer than Rall would have done something besides permit officers and men to return to their drunken revels.[9]

[9] Colonel Rall is seriously censured for negligence in the finding of the Hessian Court Martial, recorded by Stryker, pp. 411-19. Lack of prudence, underestimation of the fighting capacity of the Continentals and failure to designate alarm places are especially emphasized, but the conclusion is somewhat softened by the following remark: "Colonel Rall having been mortally wounded and died of the wounds received at the attack on Trenton he cannot be held to answer these charges, and a decision cannot be justly rendered against him." For almost six months, the Hessian court was in session intermittently at Philadelphia and New York, the final report being sent to the Prince of Hesse, September 23, 1778.

The party which attacked the Pennington picket was a small detachment from Stephen's brigade which had been engaged, without Washington's knowledge or permission, in scouting through Hunterdon County. General Stephen, according to the commonly accepted version, was subsequently censured by Washington for allowing the rovers to operate in a way which came so close to warning the enemy against the imminence of a major attack. As a matter of fact, however, the episode was fortunate for the Continentals, by reason of Rall's inference that this was the movement which had been predicted by General Grant. Thus, far from being forewarned, the Hessians were lulled into a sense of security which proved to be their undoing.

After this flurry, Colonel Rall, instead of resuming his checker game with Potts, went to the home of Abraham Hunt, at the corner of King and Second Streets. Hunt was the rich merchant of the town and was always ready to welcome guests with bounteous good cheer. Whether, as some patriots then suspected, he had leanings in the direction of Toryism, Hunt certainly aided the Continental cause on Christmas night, 1776, for the merriment which he provided with open-handed generosity continued until early morning and served to get Rall so drenched

with intoxicating beverages that he was in the poorest of conditions when Washington and his determined band finally stormed the town.

COLONEL RALL DINING AT THE HOME OF ABRAHAM HUNT

Even while the Hessian commander was making the most of his fool's paradise, another warning arrived - and it, too, was spurned. A Pennsylvania Tory came to Hunt's door to tell Rall of the movements of the American army. Refused admittance by a negro servant who was loath to interrupt the evening's jollification, the informant wrote a note which was duly delivered to the roistering Hessian leader. Without so much as reading the missive, Rall tucked it into his vest pocket.

Later, dying of wounds, Rall said of the note, "If I had read that at Mr. Hunt's, I'd not be here."

And so, drinking and card-playing continued to occupy the attention of the Hessian leader at the very moment when Washington's loyal army of cold and bleeding patriots was being organized for a stroke that was to mark the turning-point of the Revolution.[10]

[10] A graphic picture of the contrasting situations of the patriot and Hessian forces is contained in excerpts from the diary of an officer on Washington's staff, set forth by Stryker, pp. 361-2.

PLAN AND CONDUCT OF THE BATTLE

Washington's carefully laid plans called for a separation of the Continentals into two divisions for the march toward Trenton. Upon being organized in column formation, the army proceeded as a unit to Bear Tavern, about a mile from the river, and thence to Birmingham.[11] At this point, now known as Trenton Junction, "General Washington stopped for a moment, and partook of the hospitality of Benjamin Moore, while the column was halted, and the men made a hasty meal."[12]

[11] The route of the Continentals from Bear Tavern has been subject to controversy. Dr. Carlos E. Godfrey has adduced considerable evidence tending to show that the army divided at Bear Tavern, Greene's division crossing from this point to the Scotch Road. There are those, on the other hand, who hesitate to brush aside too readily the theory which has given little Birmingham its fame. How explain away, they ask, the account of the march given by General James Wilkinson, who participated therein, and the version adopted by General Stryker, who was familiar with Washington's marching orders, and the Forrest diary which support the presumption in favor of Bear Tavern? Stryker prints these documents in an appendix to his history, yet he clearly states that the Continentals divided at Birmingham. Why? We can only surmise. One supposition is that, after crossing the Delaware, Washington learned of the short route that connected Birmingham with the Scotch Road, well-posted local guides giving him

the information, and gladly took advantage of the opportunity to keep both divisions together, and thus avoid a surprise attack upon either between Bear Tavern and the village. The entry in Forrest's diary, argues the same side, may easily have been a slip of the pen, written with the original marching orders in mind. It is significant that General Stryker did not think it necessary even to explain away the documents and maps now advanced to establish a different theory. Again, if the so-called Pennington Road route had been followed, it would have carried Generals Washington and Greene with one division past the Ewing Presbyterian Church. Yet the church annals contain no reference to what would surely have been a choice bit of parish history, nor did the members of the congregation pass on to their descendants so striking and revered a legend. On the contrary, the Rev. Eli F. Cooley, whose pastorate began in 1823 and who spent many years in historical and genealogical research among the families of his charge, wrote a series of sketches upon Revolutionary incidents for the *State Gazette* in 1842-43, in which he deliberately described the division of the army at Birmingham. Persons interested in this issue will find Dr. Godfrey's argument thoroughly developed in a paper read before the Trenton Historical Society, March 20, 1924.

[12] Stryker, p. 141.

Before reaching Birmingham, where the column was scheduled to divide, Captain John Mott informed Major General Sullivan that the storm was causing the priming powder to become damp.

"Well, boys," shouted the determined Sullivan, "we must fight them with the bayonet."

Washington, also informed of the condition, sent his aide-de-camp to "tell the General to use the bayonet and penetrate into the town; for the town must be taken and I am resolved to take it."[13]

[13] Stryker, p. 140. It is urged by those who believe the army marched as a unit until reaching Birmingham that this verbal exchange would scarcely have been feasible if the division of forces had taken place at Bear Tavern.

The column left Birmingham in two divisions, the first under Major General Sullivan along the River Road and the second under Major General Greene along the Scotch Road. General Washington accompanied Greene's division.

Sullivan was supported by the brigades of Brigadier General St. Clair, Colonel Glover and Colonel Sargent and the batteries of Captains Neil, Hugg, Moulder and Sargent; Greene, by the brigades of Brigadier Generals Stephen, Mercer, Lord Stirling and de Fermoy, Captain Morris' Philadelphia troop of light horse and the batteries of Captains Forrest, Bauman and Hamilton.

Birmingham is little more than four miles from Trenton, the distance by the River Road being somewhat less than that by the route of Greene's division.

Daylight appeared before the tattered Continentals, many of them without shoes, had covered half the distance from Birmingham. But their courage was kept at high pitch by Washington's reiterated, "Press on, press on, boys!"

Colonel Rall, about this moment, left the convivial scene at Abraham Hunt's, plodded to his headquarters, flung his clothes aside - the telltale note still tucked away in his vest pocket - and confusedly lunged into bed to dream of even better Yuletide celebrations in far-away Hesse.

A Hessian patrol ventured forth about five o'clock as far as Captain John Mott's house, on the present site of the New Jersey State Hospital, only to return with the report that the enemy was nowhere in sight. "An hour later and a march a mile farther," says Stryker, "would probably have changed the condition of affairs in Trenton at eight o'clock, and Washington would have found a foe ready to receive him." [14]

[14] The Battles of Trenton and Princeton, p. 146.

Shortly before eight o'clock, the advance party of Greene's division came upon the Hessian picket post on the Pennington Road. Lieutenant Wiederhold's sentinels challenged the Americans, and when it was evident that the approaching force consisted of Continentals, the guards ran from the house, shouting, "The enemy! The enemy! Turn out! Turn out!"

THE ATTACK ON TRENTON

Three volleys were fired by the Americans. Wiederhold was forced to retreat, and, though soon joined by Captain Von Altenbockum's company, came so close to being surrounded and cut down that a hurried withdrawal was necessary.

When a young Hessian officer fell, mortally wounded, during the retreat down the Pennington Road, Captain Samuel Morris, of the Philadelphia light horse, showed a desire to stop and aid his dying foe. A sharp order from General Greene checked the display of sympathy. This was no time for anything but a vigorous advance.

Shortly after Greene's division routed the upper picket, General Sullivan reached the Hessian outpost at the Hermitage, residence of General Philemon Dickinson, on the River Road at the outskirts of Trenton. Captain John Flahaven's detachment caused the Hessians stationed there to retreat, a movement in which they were forced on by Colonel Glover's brigade.

Meantime, the firing had proved to be an effective alarm for the force in town. The retreating pickets were being driven "pell-mell" into Trenton, and, as the Americans swept on, it became

evident to the Hessian officers that there was no time for delay. All would be lost if defensive organization were not effected speedily.

THE OLD BARRACKS

Lieutenant Jacob Piel, attached to the Von Lossberg regiment, was quick to act when the firing was heard. He dispatched a detail to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, and then went directly to Colonel Rall's house. Awakened by the knocking at his door, Rall shouted from an upper window, "What's the matter?" Piel mentioned the firing. "I'll be out in a minute," said Rall. He had been on the street but a second or two when the American guns began to sweep the streets of the town.

Sullivan had reached Trenton ahead of Greene and Washington, and the commander-in-chief of the Continentals was greatly relieved thereby, as is shown in the following account by a member of his staff:[15]

[15] Stryker, p. 363.

General Washington's face lighted up instantly, for he knew that it [the boom of a cannon] was one of Sullivan's guns. We could see a great commotion down toward the meeting-house, men running here and there, officers swinging their swords, artillerymen harnessing their horses. Captain Forrest unlimbered his guns.

Washington gave the order to advance, and we rushed on to the junction of King and Queen Streets. Forrest wheeled six of his cannon into position to sweep both streets. The riflemen under Colonel Hand and Scott's and Lawson's battalions went upon the run through the fields on the left to gain possession of the Princeton road . . . .

It was on the spot where the Trenton Battle Monument now stands that Captain Forrest's six-gun battery and the second company of the Pennsylvania artillery unit began combing Queen Street, while the New York artillerymen, commanded by young Alexander Hamilton, sent volley after volley down King Street.

THE OPENING OF THE BATTLE OF TRENTON

General Washington took up a position on the high ground at what is now Princeton Avenue. This point gave him an excellent opportunity to watch developments and to direct the course

of the engagement. Tradition has it that his chestnut sorrel horse was severely wounded and that another animal had to be procured. [16]

[16] Stryker, p. 160.

The various units of the Hessian forces were formed, meanwhile, more or less successfully, but the attack of the Americans had been so much in the nature, of a surprise, and Colonel Rall was in so befuddled a condition, that it was quite impossible to secure coordination in the defending ranks.

Poor Rall was unable even to give intelligent replies to subordinate officers coming to him for instructions. “Forward! Forward!” he exclaimed repeatedly without himself having a very clear idea as to where or for what purpose.

“These are the times that try men's souls,” the onrushing Americans are said to have shouted, taking a certain ironical delight in thus adapting to military purposes the clarion call coined by Thomas Paine.

THE ENEMY LOSE CONFIDENCE

Rall’s men lost confidence in their leader. They lost confidence in themselves. They began falling back in confusion, unable to stand against the deadly shots of the Americans who had wisely found vantage places in houses and cellars where their powder could be kept dry and their firing directed with uncanny accuracy.

With General Sullivan’s division rapidly taking possession of the southern part of the town, the regiments of Rall and Von Lossberg withdrew to the low ground known as “The Swamp,” between what are now Stockton and Montgomery Streets, north of Perry.

“Forward march!” cried the confused Rall. “Attack them with the bayonet!”

The Hessians momentarily responded, but soon they were in disorderly retreat. Despite the fact that their colors had been displayed, their ranks re-formed, the band forced to play and order brought, for the moment, out of chaos, the Teutonic mercenaries could not face the withering fire of the American rifles.

It was under such discouraging conditions that Colonel Rall fell, frightfully wounded by two Continental shots. Leaderless, his troops virtually abandoned the fray and retreated to the apple orchard at the eastern edge of the village. [17]

[17] See Trevelyan’s *The American Revolution*, pp. 108-9, for a stirring description of the brilliant futility displayed by Rall’s brigade during this final attempt at recovery.

In the southern part of town, the Von Knyphausen regiment was making a futile attempt to escape by way of the bridge over the Assunpink Creek which already had proved to be a safe avenue of retreat for some of the Hessians. But General Sullivan, anticipating such a move,

had blocked the way with well-placed infantry and cannon, so that the Hessians, hemmed in on all sides, finally engaged in a parley with their aggressive antagonists and surrendered.

Rall had been shot from his horse on Queen Street in front of the house of Isaac Yard. After reclining on the ground momentarily and suffering much pain, he was assisted by two soldiers into the Methodist Church, at Queen and Fourth Streets.

In the meantime, the Rall and Von Lossberg regiments could see from their position in the orchard that they were virtually surrounded by the excited and determined Americans. Lieutenant Colonel Scheffer and Major Von Hanstein received one of Washington's aides-de-camp, probably Lieutenant Colonel Baylor, and at last decided to recognize the inevitable and lay down their arms. Standards were lowered, guns grounded, and officers' hats placed on the points of swords as an indication of surrender.

"The patriot troops," according to Stryker, "tossed their hats in the air, and a great shout resounded through the village, as the surrender was made, and the battle of Trenton closed." [18]

[18] Stryker, p. 185.

As defeat came swiftly to his soldiers, so death came with anything but laggard steps to Colonel Rall. The proud Hessian commander lay in the Methodist Church until after the surrender. Then he was placed on a bench and carried to headquarters on King Street, the house of Stacy Potts. Here, while being disrobed, Rall saw the note which he had tucked away and which brought forth his well-known remark of regret.

Generals Washington and Greene called on the mortally wounded Rall, conversed briefly with him and took his parole of honor. In response to a request from Rall, Washington assured him that the prisoners would receive kind treatment. Rall died the following evening, December 27, 1776. German records tell of his burial in the Presbyterian churchyard, East State Street, but the exact location of his grave is unknown. [19]

[19] Colonel Rall was born in 1725. He served with distinction in the .Seven Years' War and performed creditably in some of the earlier engagements of the Revolutionary War, including the Battle of Long Island and the capture of Fort Washington. He was a lover of colorful military display, but was, nevertheless, a man of marked personal bravery. "His memory has been cursed by German and English soldiers, many of whom were not fit to carry his sword," said Captain Johann Ewald, the one Hessian writer who fails to hold poor Rall up as an object of censure.

FRUITS OF VICTORY

"This is a glorious day for our country, Major Wilkinson," General Washington remarked to this gallant young officer when informed of the Hessian surrender. And indeed it was a glorious day. What had been a well-nigh hopeless cause was transformed by a remarkably executed stroke into one which commanded confidence.

As modern battles go, the losses on neither side were great. The Americans went virtually unscathed, two officers and two privates wounded being the official report of Washington. Reports of the Hessian casualties vary slightly. In the *New Jersey Archives*,[20] the number of men and officers killed is given as 35; wounded, 60; captured, 948. Washington placed the total number killed, wounded and captured at 918, but his return was made out the day after the battle and hence could scarcely have been as accurate as later compilations.

[20] Second series, Vol. IV, p. 450.

However, it was not in point of enemy troops put out of action that the first Battle of Trenton contributed so markedly to the American cause. Serving as a patriotic tonic, it did much to revive the hopes of the army and to give Congress and the people generally a revitalized vision of better days to come. At a single stroke, a poorly clad, ill-fed mob of discouraged campaigners had been changed into a confident band which justified the spreading confidence that the cause of national independence was far from a state of collapse. The battle proved, moreover, that the highly touted German mercenaries were by no means invincible, and that Continental tradesmen and merchants who could shoot were infinitely more effective in battle than gaudily uniformed professionals who could drill. In addition, the justifiable feeling spread that George Washington was an able strategist and that in point of leadership the American Army need not bow its head before any foreign band.[21]

[21] cf. Trevelyan, pp. 119-20. If the Hessians had earned their evil reputation for brutality, they were sufficiently mild and docile in captivity to win the hearts of their conquerors. "They had been poor soldiers at Trenton," is the dry comment of Trevelyan, "but they made most excellent prisoners."

The rebirth of patriotic ardor inevitably had an effect upon enlistments, sorely needed by Washington in view of the fact that the army had just about reached the point of dissolution through expiration of terms. Word winged its way throughout the Colonies that a glorious victory had been won in Trenton. And, as in the case of Connecticut, men began flocking to the colors by the hundreds, anxious to participate in this revived burst of national zeal.

Truly it was a turning-point in the fight for freedom. Coming when and as it did, there is no doubt whatsoever that the first Battle of Trenton opened the way to ultimate victory.

INTERLUDE

"In justice to the officers and men," said General Washington, in his report to the Continental Congress, "I must add that their behavior upon this occasion reflects the highest honor upon them."

It was no exaggeration. And, not only did the Continentals behave well in battle but they behaved well in victory. The Hessians in New Jersey had won for themselves a reputation for barbaric conduct.[22] They had seized personal property and were accused on all hands of conduct unseemly if not actually criminal. It would have been natural for a conquering American army to bear down upon them without mercy. Instead, the Hessians were treated

with every consideration, both by the military and civil conquerors into whose hands they had fallen through that "unfortunate affair" on the eastern shore of the Delaware.

[22] Stryker, p. 222.

The battle over, Washington without undue delay ordered the prizes collected, the troops lined up and the march back to the ferry begun, soon after the middle of day. In contrast with the grim body that had tramped the nine miles some six hours earlier, it was indeed a joyous host.

At McKonkey's Ferry, the prisoners of war were sent across first. Nor was the crossing much easier than it had been the night before. One boatload of German officers came near being lost and it was only after a hard battle with the icy current that the Pennsylvania shore was reached.

After the whole detachment had returned to their former camps and barracks, headquarters for the army were established near Newtown, to which point the enlisted men of the Hessian army were marched at once. On December 28 the American officers entertained the Hessian commanders at dinner, and pleasantries were exchanged with good feeling predominant on both sides.[23]

[23] Stryker, pp. 208-9.

The Hessian prisoners at Newtown signed a parole of honor, and Washington more than made good his promise to Rall by allowing them to keep their personal baggage without examination.

Soon after giving their parole, the Hessian officers were sent to Philadelphia, the enlisted men following afoot on December 30. They were all treated hospitably, as was the case, also, after they were scattered throughout the western counties of Pennsylvania and parts of Virginia. Many of them preferred to remain in America when the war was over, settling in the German communities of the Keystone State.

Receiving word from Adjutant General Joseph Reed to the effect that Trenton was deserted, Washington resolved to recross the Delaware and reestablish himself in New Jersey. General Greene, with 300 men, took the town, and Washington himself followed on December 30 in advance of the main body.

Upon reaching Trenton, Washington established headquarters at the home of Major John Barnes, a loyalist, on Queen Street near the Assunpink Creek bridge, where he remained until January 2. He then moved to Jonathan Richmond's tavern to the south of the bridge.

During these days, while Trenton was again the scene of intensive military activity, General Cornwallis was in New York busily planning a return trip to England for the purpose, in part at least, of informing the King of the great success being attained by the British army in New Jersey. But he was to receive a rude awakening.

General Howe, informed of the "unhappy affair" at Trenton, quickly ordered the prospective voyager to resume command of his forces. Cornwallis promptly cancelled his arrangements and, on January 1, joined General Grant at Princeton, the latter already having moved with his force from Brunswick, leaving about 600 men to guard the supplies.[24]

[24] Stryker, p. 247.

Washington, meanwhile, had received extraordinary powers from the hands of Congress, in session on December 27 at Baltimore. His position now was not only that of commander-in-chief of the Continental army but also that of virtual dictator. "Happy it is for this country," read the letter informing Washington of the Congressional resolution, "that the General of their forces can safely be entrusted with the most unlimited power, and neither personal security, liberty nor property be in the least degree endangered thereby."

"Instead of thinking myself freed from all civil obligations, by this mark of confidence," Washington wrote to the Congressional notification committee, penning his letter from the Richmond Inn, Trenton, January 1, "I shall constantly bear in mind, that as the sword was the last resort for the preservation of our liberties, so it ought to be the first thing laid aside, when those liberties are firmly established."

II. The Second Battle

IT WAS a motley army which made ready, on the high ground at the south side of Assunpink Creek, to meet the anticipated advance of the British. Experienced soldiers who had become accustomed to the smell of powder were not only diminished in number but quite exhausted as a result of the rigors of recent campaigning. The green troops, recruited in the flush of victory over the Hessians, were lacking in discipline though determined in spirit and ready to render the fullest measure of service to the American cause. [25]

[25] "His army," says Trevelyan of Washington's force at the second Battle of Trenton, "was a medley of unequally sized and very dissimilar fragments, of which the best were the smallest." *The American Revolution*, p. 129.

THE BRITISH FORCES MARCH FROM PRINCETON

The British forces, divided into three columns, started the march from Princeton before daybreak on January 2. General Cornwallis was in command. General Leslie's brigade was ordered to remain at Maidenhead, and Grant's brigade, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Mawhood, was left in Princeton as a rear-guard, with the understanding that it was to proceed to Trenton on January 3. After making these precautionary arrangements, Cornwallis had about 5,500 men for the expected engagement with Continental troops in Trenton.

On the first day of the new year, Washington's forces had been augmented, as a result of orders from headquarters, by the divisions of General Cadwalader and General Mifflin. The two bodies had joined at White Horse Tavern and advanced as a unit to Trenton.

Washington had sent scouting parties to obtain the position and, if possible, the intentions of the enemy. With the desired information at hand, he ordered out a detachment under Brigadier General de Fermoy for the purpose of taking a position somewhat to the south of Maidenhead and offering at least temporary resistance to the British advance.

Before the detachment came in contact with the redcoats, General de Fermoy himself returned to Trenton, but Colonel Edward Hand, assuming command, decided to fall back on the town as slowly as practicable and endeavor to impede the British in every possible way. In this, he achieved marked success with his able regiment of Pennsylvania riflemen. So persistently did the Americans dispute the territory at one point that the enemy battalions of Von Linsingen and Block were drawn up in order of battle, fully convinced that the major engagement which they had anticipated was about to begin.

The condition of the roads was another factor which contributed to a fulfilment of Washington's plan that the British be delayed all day. Mild weather had caused the ground to thaw, and the heavy mud was an obstacle of serious proportions for Cornwallis and his heavily equipped army.

Finally falling back upon the town in their battling retreat, the Americans offered another bit of stiff resistance at the ravine which led down to Assunpink Creek. Here earthworks and a number of guns enabled the Virginia troops, commanded by Captain William Hull and reinforced by General Greene, to hold out against the British until about five o'clock in the afternoon.

Washington was well pleased with the hindrance and delay which had been forced on the approaching enemy, and when Cornwallis's main column began marching down Queen Street, the American commander was prepared to meet the onslaught from the strategic position in which the main Continental army was posted to the south of the Assunpink. [26]

[26] Warren Street at the time did not extend below Front Street. The Assunpink was bridged only at King (Broad) Street, and this single-arched crossing was "scarce sixteen feet wide," so that not without difficulty were the American skirmishers, who had helped all day to check the enemy's progress, able at the last moment to crowd through the passage, their retreat being protected under cover of friendly fire from the south bank of the creek. See also Stryker, p. 261.

It was well after five o'clock, and growing darker moment by moment, when the British line reached the bridge and made its first futile effort to storm the span and gain the other side.

Continental batteries, under Captains Moulder, Forrest and Read, together with infantry fire from the American positions to the east and west of the bridge, proved sufficient to stave off three British advances. In the dusk, accurate firing was extremely difficult, but the Continentals had a great defensive advantage in being able to concentrate on the bridge and keep up withering volleys, throwing out a screen of shot and shell which the redcoats were quite unable to penetrate.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF TRENTON

General Washington, meanwhile, is said to have remained on horseback at the American end of the bridge, ignoring personal exposure, as he also did later at Princeton, in order to encourage his men. [27]

[27] Stryker, p. 264. This fact in itself indicates the importance which Washington attached to holding the bridge against the British and thus staving off a fight to the finish with Cornwallis' formidable force.

Hessian troops made a vigorous attempt to cross the stream at a point somewhat to the west of the bridge, but Colonel Hitchcock's brigade, which had thrown up temporary breastworks on

the Bloomsbury farm, checked the movement abruptly by means of a well-directed curtain of lead.

Commenting on the failure of the British to make other similar efforts, Stryker says: [28]

It will always appear singular that the invaders did not attempt to cross the creek at some of the many fording-places on the east of the town, such as Henry's Mill or Phillips Ford, the one a mile, the other two miles, above the mill-dam at the bridge. It was impossible for General Washington to protect the whole stream, and had the British forced the American right and driven them toward Trenton Ferry and the river, nothing could have saved the entire army. A determined advance along the line and a half hour's fight would have decided the battle. The American army would have been well-nigh annihilated, and with it the fate of America and the hopes of freemen.

[28] *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton,* p. 268.

The rapid approach of darkness and Cornwallis' conviction that the American forces were bottled up in such a way as to prevent escape may have been responsible for this singular tactical omission, as well as for the British General's neglect, later that night, to send out patrols and scouting parties and to establish picket-lines on the Continentals' exposed flank.

That he would "bag the old fox" in the morning was the confident forecast of Cornwallis.

"If Washington is the General I take him to be, his army will not be found there in the morning,"was the cautious rejoinder of Sir William Erskine, Baronet, Colonel and aide-de-camp to the King. [29]

[29] Stryker, p. 268.

HEAVY BRITISH LOSSES

It is hard definitely to estimate the British losses at the bridge over the Assunpink. The official reports make no mention of them, though authentic statements by a number of eye-witnesses picture them as being very heavy. The American losses are known to have been slight.

General Washington's official report contains the following description of the engagement:

After some skirmishing the head of their column reached Trenton about four o'clock, whilst their rear was as far back as Maidenhead. They attempted to pass Sampink Creek, which runs through Trenton, at different places, but, finding the fords guarded, they halted and kindled their fires. We were drawn up on the other side of the creek. In this situation we remained till dark, cannonading the enemy, and receiving the fire of their fieldpieces, which did us little damage.

"We kept possession of the bridge," said Captain Thomas Rodney of Delaware, "although the enemy attempted several times to carry it but were repulsed each time with great slaughter." [30]

[30] *ibid.*, p. 266, note.

As to the importance of the second Battle of Trenton in relation to the patriot cause, it is unquestionably true that this later engagement, sometimes known as the "Battle of the Assunpink," was of even greater moment than the surprise attack on the Hessians the week before. Had the forces of Lord Cornwallis been successful in their attempts to storm the bridge, Washington might have found his army split asunder and the struggle for national independence brought to a sudden, unfavorable end.

Most historians of the Revolutionary period have slighted the event, [31] despite the fact that there is an abundance of available evidence which tends to elevate the second Battle of Trenton to a plane of major significance.

[31] This is doubtless due, in large part, to the dearth of official records as to killed and wounded. It should be remembered, however, that the battle took place toward dusk, that Washington and his army left for Princeton during the night and that Cornwallis hurriedly withdrew early the next morning to pursue the Continentals. Under these circumstances, detailed casualty lists are scarcely to be expected. What probably happened is that the British dead were left where they fell, the exigencies of the moment preventing either identification or enumeration.

In the *Connecticut Journal* of January 22, 1777 - published less than three weeks after the engagement - appears the following graphic description:

Immediately after the taking of the Hessians at Trenton, on the 26th ult., our army retreated over the Delaware, and remained there for several days, and then returned and took possession of Trenton, where they remained quiet until Thursday, the 2nd inst., at which time, the enemy having collected a large force at Princeton, marched down in a body of 4,000 or 5,000, to attack our people at Trenton. Through Trenton there runs a small river, over which there is a small bridge. Gen. Washington, aware of the enemy's approach, drew his army (about equal to the enemy) over that bridge, in order to have the advantage of the said river, and of the higher ground on the farther side. Not long before sunset, the enemy marched into Trenton; and after reconnoitering our situation, drew up in solid column in order to force the aforesaid bridge, which they attempted to do with great vigor at *three* several times, and were as often broken by our artillery and obliged to retreat and give over the attempt, after suffering great loss, supposed at least *one hundred and fifty killed*. [32]

[32] Quoted in the *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey*, Barber and Howe, pp. 299-300.

This, it will be noted, indicates that the number of British killed was nearly five times as great as the casualty list for the first Battle of Trenton.

AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

Another account which lends emphasis to the memorable fight at the Assunpink bridge was written by an eye-witness and printed in the *Princeton Whig* of November 4, 1842:

When the army under Washington, in the year ‘76, retreated over the Delaware, I was with them. At that time there remained in Jersey only a small company of riflemen, hiding themselves between New Brunswick and Princeton. Doubtless, when Washington reached the Pennsylvania side of the river, he expected to be so reinforced as to enable him effectually to prevent the British from reaching Philadelphia. But in this he was disappointed. Finding that he must achieve victory with what men he had, and so restore confidence to his countrymen, it was then that the daring plan was laid to recross the river, break the enemy’s line of communication, threaten their depot at New Brunswick, and thus prevent their advancing to Philadelphia; which was only delayed until the river should be bridged by the ice. But Washington anticipated them. I was not with the troops who crossed to the capture of the Hessians. It was in the midst of a December storm, that I helped to reestablish the troops and prisoners on the Pennsylvania shore. The weather cleared cold, and in a few days we crossed on the ice to Trenton. Shortly afterward a thaw commenced which rendered the river impassable, and consequently the situation of the army extremely critical.

In the morning of the day on which the battle of the Assunpink was fought, I, with several others, was detached under the command of Captain Longstreet, with orders to collect as many men as we could in the country between Princeton, Cranbury, and Rhode Hall, and then unite ourselves with the company of riflemen who had remained in that neighborhood. We left Trenton by the nearest road to Princeton, and advanced nearly to the Shabbaconk (a small brook near Trenton), when we were met by a little negro on horseback, galloping down the hill, who called to us that the British army was before us. One of our party ran a little way up the hill, and jumped upon the fence, from whence he beheld the British army, within less than half a mile of us. And now commenced a race for Trenton. We fortunately escaped capture; yet the enemy were so near, that before we crossed the bridge over the Assunpink, some of our troops on the Trenton side of the creek, with a field-piece, motioned to us to get out of the street while they fired at the British at the upper end of it. Not being on duty, we had nothing to do but choose our position and view the battle.

Washington’s army was drawn up on the east side of the Assunpink, with its left on the Delaware River, and its right extending a considerable way up the mill-pond, along the face of the hill where the factories now stand. The troops were placed one above the other, so that they appeared to cover the whole slope from bottom to top, which brought a great many muskets within shot of the bridge. Within 70 or 80 yards of the bridge, and directly in front of, and in the road, as many pieces of artillery as could be managed were stationed. We took our station on the high ground behind the right, where we had a fair view of our line, as far as the curve of the hill would permit, the bridge and street beyond being in full view. The British did not delay the attack. They were formed in two columns, the one marching down Green-street to carry the .bridge, and the other down Main-street to ford the creek, near where the lower bridge now stands. From the nature of the ground, and being on the left, this attack (simultaneous with the one on the bridge) I was not able to see. It was repelled; and eye-

witnesses say that the creek was nearly filled with their dead. The other column moved slowly down the street, with their choicest troops in front. When within about 60 yards of the bridge they raised a shout, and rushed to the charge. It was then that our men poured upon them from musketry and artillery a shower of bullets, under which however they continued to advance, though their speed was diminished; and as the column reached the bridge, it moved slower and slower until the head of it was gradually pressed nearly over, when our fire became so destructive that they broke their ranks and fled. It was then that our army raised a shout, and such a shout I have never since heard; by what signal or word of command, I know not. The line was more than a mile in length, and from the nature of the ground the extremes were not in sight of each other, yet they shouted as one man. The British column halted instantly; the officers restored the ranks, and again they rushed to the bridge; and again was the shower of bullets poured upon them with redoubled fury. This time the column broke before it reached the center of the bridge, and their retreat was again followed by the same hearty shout from our line. They returned the third time to the charge, but it was in vain. We shouted after them again, but they had enough of it. It is strange that no account of the loss of the English was ever published; but from what I saw, it must have been great.[33]

[33] Barber and Howe, pp. 300-1.

In addition to these weighty bits of evidence, C. C. Haven, Trenton historian who was a faithful and earnest student of local Revolutionary lore, quotes General Wilkinson, John Howland, Major General Greene and one A. Cuthbert, son of a Revolutionary officer, all of whom lay stress on the magnitude of the military action at Assunpink bridge.[34]

[34] Haven, *Thirty Days in New Jersey Ninety Years Ago*, pp. 35-47. For additional comment on Mr. Haven, see Chap. XV, below. An interesting article on this man who contributed so much to a more complete understanding of the second Battle of Trenton was written by John J. Cleary and published in the *Trenton Sunday Times-Advertiser* of November 11, 1923. In the article appear several verses of a poem, probably written by Edward S. Ellis, once superintendent of the Trenton public schools, which show the esteem in which Mr. Haven was held. Three of the verses follow:

Now tier on tier our patriots ranged themselves upon the ridge,

And now again the redcoats charged upon Assunpink bridge;

Three times Cornwallis' hosts, with ringing shout and shell,

Came rushing down upon us like the very hosts of hell!

But artillery and musketry we poured in deadly rain,

And often as they yelled and charged, we beat them back again,

Until the victory was ours! All hail our Washington !

Assunpink's battle has been fought, Assunpink's battle won!

And honor the historian whose patriotic pen

Has told these deeds with vivid power, unto his countrymen;

Whose four-score winters with their frosts have only fanned the flame,

And with our Country's good and true we proudly link his name.

Howland, who participated in the battle and who subsequently became president of the Historical Society of Rhode Island, made the following observation:

Night closed upon us, and the weather, which had been mild and pleasant through the day, became intensely cold. On one hour - yes, on forty minutes, commencing at the moment when the British troops first saw the bridge and creek before them - depended the all-important, the all-absorbing question, whether we should be Independent States or conquered rebels ! Had the army of Cornwallis, within that space have crossed the bridge or forded the creek, unless a miracle intervened, there would have been an end of the American army. [35]

[35] Haven, *Thirty Days in New Jersey Ninety Years Ago*, p. 39.

When these descriptive and interpretative statements are considered in the aggregate, it becomes plain that the second Battle of Trenton was, for the Continental army, a defensive operation of vast import. Whereas in the surprise of the Hessians Washington was the aggressor engaged in attacking what was at best a mere outpost, in the clash at the Assunpink he was defending against a formidable British army under the most competent leadership. That he was able to emerge victorious may be said, without any exaggeration, to have been a saving factor for the patriot cause.

WASHINGTON'S POSITION STILL PRECARIOUS

But in spite of the success of the moment, Washington's position was decidedly precarious. To face the foe on the morrow would be almost suicidal. To retreat toward Bordentown would assure ultimate defeat. Here was a situation to test the capacity of a commander and to call forth all the shrewdness which some of the British leaders were by this time attributing to the Continental chief.

The shrewdness asserted itself. Washington called a council of war at the house of Alexander Douglass, headquarters of Brigadier General St. Clair, the General's own quarters at the Richmond tavern having been abandoned because of the proximity of the enemy. Before this gathering of Continental leaders, Washington outlined his plan of strategy. [36]

[36] An illuminating account of this and attendant events was given by Counsellor William J. Backes before the Caliphs on December 28, 1915, and was reported in the *Trenton Sunday Times-Advertiser* of January 2, 1916. The Douglass House stood on the site of the present

German Lutheran Church, South Broad Street. It has since been sold and removed to Mahlon Stacy Park. Dr. Carlos E. Godfrey delivered an accurate and informative address on the second Battle of Trenton before the Caliphs on January 2, 1919. It was at this meeting that steps were taken to form the Trenton Historical Society. An account of the proceedings, together with Dr. Godfrey's address, was published in the *State Gazette* of January 3, 1919.

This plan, one of the boldest strokes in military history, called for a decamping movement, a forced march that night through the woods around Trenton and a surprise attack on Princeton, from which point, as already noted, most of the British forces had been withdrawn for the purpose of moving on Trenton. The virtue of the scheme lay not only in the possibility it offered for avoiding a finish fight with the splendidly equipped army of Cornwallis but also in its appearance as an offensive drive rather than as a hopeless retreat. Washington well knew that his inexperienced troops needed encouragement and a taste of victory if they were to maintain their spirits. The proposed attack on Princeton was exactly the right medium.

Orders to this effect, therefore, were given, though men and subordinate officers below the rank of Brigadier General were not informed as to the end in view, the element of secrecy being so effectively obtained that some of the Continental officers who had gone to the rear for much needed rest were left behind and forced to find their commands as best they could the following day. [37]

[37] Trevelyan, p. 133. Referring to Chapter XV of General Stryker's classic work, Trevelyan says: "The account there given of Washington's flank-march is illustrated by the local knowledge of a neighbor, and the oral traditions accessible to the member of an old Revolutionary family."

Camp fires were kept burning on the high ground along which the Continentals were posted. Throughout the night, these fires were visible from the British positions, and the sound of earthworks being thrown up to the south of the creek added to the realistic effect of the camouflage. At the bridge and at various fording places, American guards paced to and fro. If ever an army was completely fooled, it was this army of the complacent Cornwallis.

ON TO PRINCETON

Under cover of darkness, the flank movement began. The heavier guns and surplus supplies were sent out under General Stephen, who, with a strong guard, was to take them to Burlington by way of Bordentown. Not long after midnight, the main army began to move, headed by an advance party under Major Isaac Sherman, of Connecticut, and including the brigades of Brigadier General Mercer and General St. Clair. Washington and his staff accompanied the latter division.

The route lay along the Sand Town Road, near what is now Hamilton Avenue. Much care was exercised lest the enemy should hear the movement and become alarmed. The wheels of the gun carriages were wrapped with pieces of cloth; the need of absolute silence was impressed upon officers and men. Before reaching Sand Town, a small group of houses at the present location of Mercerville, the army veered to the north and crossed Miry Run, a stream running

in a westerly direction into Assunpink Creek. From this point, the route was north by east across Quaker Bridge and thence due north to Clarksville, across Stony Brook, where three brigades under General Sullivan split from the main army that they might enter Princeton from the east.[38]

[38] See map, Stryker, p. 279. The Sons of the Revolution have marked this Trenton-Princeton route with granite obelisks, out Hamilton Avenue, through Greenwood Cemetery and via the Quaker Creek road.

A fortunate change in the weather facilitated the movement. Whereas Cornwallis in his march on Trenton had been impeded by the mud, Washington's forces were benefited by a drop in the temperature which froze the roads and made it comparatively easy to transport even the artillery. But the wooded sections through which the troops were forced to pass were something of an obstacle, for the Continentals suffered "many a fall and severe bruise," according to John Howland, of Colonel Lippitt's Rhode Island regiment, in their encounter with the trees.[39]

[39] Stryker, p. 276.

Lieutenant Colonel Mawhood, meanwhile, started for Trenton with the 17th and 55th Infantry and fifty light horse. Upon approaching Stony Brook, the British discovered the advancing forces of Washington and immediately attacked a detachment of several hundred men under General Hugh Mercer as the latter was carrying out Washington's orders to destroy the bridge at Worth's Mill in order to thwart the anticipated pursuit by Cornwallis.

In this engagement, which took place in an orchard, General Mercer received numerous wounds from British bayonets.[40] His men were momentarily demoralized, but soon Washington and Greene came up with the main army, and, with their commander-in-chief personally waving them on to victory, the Americans made their superior numbers felt and forced the British to retreat. As the redcoats fell back upon the town there was some additional fighting, a final stand being made in Nassau Hall, where, it is said, an American cannon-ball entered the building and crashed through a portrait of George II. Before the structure itself was badly damaged, the British showed a white flag at one of the windows and the Battle of Princeton was brought to a close.[41]

[40] Suffering intensely, General Mercer lived until Sunday, January 12. Death came in spite of the efforts of an American surgeon, sent by special order of Washington and allowed to pass through the British lines by Lord Cornwallis.

[41] See "The Battle of Princeton," an address delivered by Professor Thomas J. Wertenbaker, of Princeton University, at the annual meeting of the New Jersey Historical Society at Newark, N.J., October 31, 1928. This admirable address has been published in the *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, New Series, January 1929, Vol. XIV, No. 1.

Cornwallis awoke at Trenton only to discover that the "old fox" had escaped. Not much time was lost sizing up the situation, and early in the morning the British commander had his men

on the way back to Princeton, "running, puffing and blowing, and swearing at being so outwitted."

After getting control of the town, Washington wisely decided to leave Princeton at once and to head north toward the desirable position at Morristown. His men were too tired, as a result of steady campaigning, to risk an attack on the British base at Brunswick.[42] And to delay at Princeton would be to face the necessity of meeting Cornwallis and the strong force at his disposal. Even with quick action, however, Washington's rear-guard was still within sight of Princeton as the advance detachments of British Infantry were approaching the southern entrance of the town. Nevertheless, Washington was able to reach Somerset Court House unmolested and to continue on to Morristown without another clash of arms.

[42] "For two nights and a day," says Stryker, "they had had no sleep, and many of them had carried their arms without intermission for nearly forty hours on the march and in battle . . . . General Washington declared that if he had had but 800 fresh troops, he could have made a forced march, destroyed their stores and magazines, taken their money-chest, and possibly have put an end to the war." *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton*, p. 300.

"THOSE WONDERFUL DAYS"

To say that the Battles of Trenton, culminating in the brilliant stroke at Princeton and the march to Morristown, marked a turning of the tide of war in favor of the Continental cause is to state what must be admitted by the student of "those wonderful days in New Jersey.' Never was a military outlook more discouraging than that which Washington faced toward the end of the year 1776. Never was a military recovery more successful than that finally written into the record with the dawn of the year 1777.

When Washington and his army retreated from New York to their vantage point across the Delaware from Trenton, the great city of Philadelphia was threatened with Hessian pillage and destruction. When, a few weeks later, the patriots reached Morristown, the Quaker City was safe.

THE TRENTON BATTLE MONUMENT

When the British mercenaries were strongly encamped in a line running from Amboy to Bordentown, New Jersey at large was quite helplessly ensnared in the enemy mesh. When the winter campaign of 1776-77 ended, the Colony, with the exception of the British posts at Brunswick and Amboy, was free from hostile control.

When the Continentals were fleeing before the well-equipped host from Europe, the English cause gained in vigor while that of the patriots inevitably suffered from the blight of defensive

discouragement. But with the close of the campaign, these conditions were quite reversed, and the psychological advantage lay with the Americans by virtue of "two lucky strokes."

As for the effect of the campaign upon the military prestige of George Washington, it was Lord Cornwallis himself, who, after the capitulation at Yorktown, remarked: "When the illustrious part that your Excellency has borne in this long and arduous contest becomes matter of history, fame will gather your brightest laurels rather from the banks of the Delaware than from those of the Chesapeake."[43]

[43] Trevelyan, p. 143. "At that moment, and before that audience," adds this British commentator, "Washington's generalship in the Chesapeake campaign must have represented an exceptionally high standard of comparison."

Henry Cabot Lodge in *The Story of the Revolution*, pp. 146-7, library edition, 1919, Charles Scribner's Sons, makes the following significant comment: "With a beaten and defeated army operating against overwhelming odds, he had inflicted upon the enemy two severe defeats. No greater feat can be performed in war than this. That which puts Hannibal at the head of all great commanders was the fact that he won his astonishing victories under the same general conditions. There was one great military genius in Europe when Washington was fighting this short campaign in New Jersey - Frederick of Prussia. Looking over the accounts of the Trenton and Princeton battles, he is reported to have said that it was the greatest campaign of the century. The small numbers engaged did not blind the victor of Rossbach and Leuthen. He did not mean that the campaign was great from the number of men involved or the territory conquered, but great in its conception, and as an illustration of the highest skill in the art of war under the most adverse conditions."