Shaping Operations: How Special Operations Provided an Opportunity for Washington's Surprise Attack on Trenton, December 1776

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ABSTRACT:
The United States Congress passed legislation in 1986 that created the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Prior to this legislation, US Navy SEALs, US Army Special Forces, US Army Rangers, US Air Force special operations forces, and US Marine Reconnaissance had conducted special operations for decades. Though it appears that special operations have existed in the United States military only since World War II with the advent of the elite Marine Raider Battalions, the truth is Americans conducted special operations-style missions since they adopted irregular warfare tactics when fighting the indigenous people of North America during the colonial era. In the American Revolution, Continental regulars and militia units conducted irregular warfare to shape the operational environment and accomplish specific tactical, operational, and strategic level objectives. Though irregular warfare (today, a doctrinally small component of special operations) was prevalent throughout all theaters of the Revolutionary War, this study seeks to expose the crucial irregular warfare actions and activities which led General George Washington to boldly cross the Delaware River on Christmas night 1776 and attack the Hessian garrison at Trenton.

Keywords: special operations, irregular warfare, asymmetric warfare, partisan warfare, guerrilla warfare, shaping operations, American Revolution, George Washington, Trenton, Princeton, Christmas Campaign, 1776, Crossing the Delaware

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Lastly, I must thank my wife, Sarah, and my children. They endured many hours of me harboring away so that I could research, think, and write. They have made countless sacrifices throughout my military career and now as I complete my master's degree. I am indebted to them.

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List of Key Personnel[1]

AMERICAN

Colonel John Cadwalader. One of the wealthiest merchants in Philadelphia, Cadwalader led the regiment of the Philadelphia Associators (militia) during their initial call to duty as Washington ordered the defense of Philadelphia. His men were instrumental in the irregular warfare and espionage which shaped the operating environment for Washington's attack on Trenton (265).

Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson. Dickinson strongly supported independence in opposition to his brother John, a member of the Continental Congress who advocated reconciliation rather than Revolution. Philemon led the mobilization of the Hunterdon County, New Jersey militia which was instrumental in shaping the operating environment for Washington to attack Trenton (191-192).

Brigadier General James Ewing. Ewing commanded Pennsylvania militia. His troops distributed a relentless barrage of firepower across the Delaware, directly at the Trenton garrison in mid-December. Their raids inflicted terror into the sentries of the garrison which had a psychological effect of mental exhaustion, not knowing when the next attack would happen.

Colonel Samuel Griffin. A Virginia colonel who had been wounded during the retreat through New Jersey and found himself with a small force in southern New Jersey. He mobilized militia from southern New Jersey to increase his combat power and threatened the British left flank throughout December. His action to pull Hessians away from a position of mutual support to the garrison at Trenton was arguably what allowed Washington to achieve such a complete and decisive victory at Trenton on December 26, 1776 (198).

John Hancock. The President of the United States' Continental Congress. George Washington was accountable to the resolves of the Continental Congress and his commission as the commander-in-chief of the American Continental Army was by Congressional authority. Washington owed frequent reports to Congress and so many regarding the war's situation were addressed to John Hancock.

Major General William Heath. Heath was the commander of the Continental forces guarding the Hudson River north of New York City into upstate New York. His position kept the line of communication between the middle colonies and Canada in American control. After considering that Howe's primary objective was Philadelphia, Washington sent Heath to Morristown, New Jersey to provide additional combat power and gather support from militia in the event there would be an opportunity to envelop the British.

Major General Charles Lee. Charles Lee was a British officer who defected to the Patriot cause and was radical in his views for American liberty. He was aggressive in his military decisions while hot tempered when situations were not addressed according to his understanding. If he would have acted with a bias for action when Washington called on him to join him in New

[1] Several of these short key leader descriptions are derived from Fischer's *Washington Crossing* where Fischer provided portraits and short descriptions for each key person involved in the events of which he wrote. For those descriptions cited here page numbers are given as an in-text citation above. David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004). The descriptions with no citation are derived from sources used throughout the text of this paper.

Jersey rather than tarrying there for ten more days, Lee's corps may have given Washington's army the necessary reinforcements to hold out and make a stand in New Jersey. Lee was slow to move to Washington's aid and constantly questioned his decisions. He then became complacent and was captured by the British on December 13.

Major General Thomas Mifflin. "A Pennsylvania merchant and politician turned militia general," Washington placed Mifflin in charge of the stores and provisions around Philadelphia. As the nation's capital and the population center closest to the fighting, a coordinated effort was necessary to ensure the British would not gain access to the cities provisions if they were able to defeat Washington and sack the city (271).

Major General Israel Putnam. Washington placed Putnam in charge of the defense of Philadelphia early in December (82).

Colonel Joseph Reed. Reed was Washington's military secretary during the retreat through New Jersey and the shaping operations throughout December 1776. He was instrumental in giving Washington sound advice with valuable intelligence to accompany it. It was Reed who recommended an action at Trenton (202).

General George Washington. George Washington served as the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army from his commission in June 1775 through the duration of the war (7-12).

BRITISH

Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis. Surprise attacked Fort Lee which initiated Washington's retreat through New Jersey. Cornwallis commanded the British and Hessian troops in New Jersey. He underestimated Washington and assumed he would just show up in force and defeat Washington on the conventional battlefield. Washington never gave him that chance.

Major General James Grant. "[H]ighly skilled in the art of pleasing his superiors but was despised by men who served under him. He had a particular contempt for his American enemies and German allies" (184). After taking over the command of the British and Hessian forces in New Jersey following Cornwallis' pending departure to Great Britain, Grant constantly underestimated the situation from his comfortable headquarters in Brunswick. Regardless of the reports and requests from Rall in Trenton, signifying a real threat from the Americans, Grant took no action to give assistance to Rall or address his concerns.

General William Howe. British Commander-in-Chief who commanded the British invasion of Long Island and the seizure of New York City. He placed Cornwallis in command of the New Jersey campaign and was certain he would be in Philadelphia and the war would be over by the winter or spring of 1777 at the latest (71).

Colonel Thomas "Lord" Stirling. Stirling led two battalions of the Forty-second Foot Regiment in New Jersey in 1776-1777 and fought with the Hessians at the Battle of Mount Holly on December 22-23, 1776 (198-199).

HESSIAN

Colonel Carl Emilius Ulrich von Donop. Commander of the Jäger Corps in America. Donop commanded the Hessian forces which pursued Washington through New Jersey and comprised one of Cornwallis' two columns during that pursuit. When he reached the Delaware, Donop deployed his troop in Trenton and down to Bordentown. He planned to stretch his left flank to Burlington to prepare for the crossing to sack Philadelphia but American galleys in the river opposed that plan with a heavy barrage of canon fire. (56).

Captain Johann Ewald. Ewald was a company commander of Hessian Jägers which were the light infantry, irregular warfare force of the Hessian troops. Ewald wrote a diary of his experience in the war as a lessons learned document for his two sons. He wanted them to learn in the event they were in command of troops. Many historical works use Ewald's diary when researching this period of the war.

General Leopold Philip von Heister. Heister was the commanding general of the Hessians fighting in America. His headquarters was in New York City and since Colonel von Donop was the commander of the Hessians in New Jersey, he reported to Heister often.

Colonel Johann Rall. Rall assumed command of the garrison at Trenton. Following his death during the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776, a British investigation into what went wrong placed all the blame on Rall's decision making. Rather than learning from how they could have supported Rall's deteriorating defense better, the British and Hessian leaders sought the easy way out of finding fault in such a preventable military disaster and blamed the dead guy.

Chronology of Irregular Warfare Actions

Dec 10: Donop marched to Burlington with about 500 men to reconnoiter the town and confirm or deny whether it was a good position to quarter troops. Burlington would allow him to extend his left flank south, closer to Philadelphia and Dunk's Ferry, which would be a suitable position to control the river until Howe was ready to cross and make his offensive against Philadelphia. However, a heavy barrage of canon fire sent Donop back to Bordentown leaving him no option but to remain in Bordentown and quarter some of his force in Black Horse.

Dec 10: Lord Stirling provided intelligence to Washington regarding the British position at Pennington from their own scouts and from a prisoner.

Dec 12: American galleys in the Delaware River began ambush by fire tactics against the Trenton garrison after spies provided information concerning the Hessian occupation of Trenton.

Dec 13: Heath sent out a reconnaissance patrol to gather information around Hackensack, New Jersey.

Dec 14: Cadwalader's men sent on reconnaissance and surveillance missions and provided Cadwalader information which he reported to Washington the next day.

Dec 15: Americans ambushed Rall's patrol of six light horse dragoons ten miles north of Trenton and mortally wounded one.

Dec 16: Americans ambushed a Jäger patrol north of Trenton leaving one lying mortally wounded.

Dec 17: Ewing's men raided the Jäger post south of Trenton.

Dec 17: Heath sends out reconnaissance patrols and receives reports on December 18 of skirmishes in the vicinity of Springfield, New Jersey.

Dec 18: Ewing's men raided the Jäger post south of Trenton again. Rall decides to reinforce the post.

Dec 18: American patrol ambushed one of Rall's patrols four miles north of Trenton. Jäger patrol reports that "100 Americans" gave them a "hot fire."

Dec 19-21: Ewald reconnoitered Burlington to confirm or deny the status of the American galleys controlling that part of the Delaware River. From there, he moved around the area between Burlington and Mount Holly to assess the area and gather information on Griffin's force.

Dec 20: Americans captured three Hessians and shot one from his horse in a skirmish with one of Rall's patrols.

Dec 20: After Washington instructed Heath to return to his position in Peeks Kill, New York but to make an effort to harass the enemy during his march back to New York, Heath surprised a small enemy force in Tampan, New Jersey where he took twenty-two prisoner and killed several others. He was able to slip away as the British reconsolidated to fight.

Dec 21: American patrol ambushed two Dragoons of Rall's regiment on the road between Trenton and Princeton killing one Hessian and one horse.

Dec 22: Griffin's advance guard threatened Donop's garrison at Black Horse.

Dec 23: Battle of Mount Holly. Not an irregular warfare action but an event shaped by irregular warfare which in turn finished the shaping of the operational environment giving Washington his opportunity to attack.

Dec 24: Washington sent a trumpeter, possibly Colonel Joseph Reed, to investigate Donop's location.

Dec 24-25: Dickinson's spy gathered information on Trenton and surrounding areas and reported directly to Washington on Christmas morning.

Dec 25: Forty to fifty Americans attacked one of Rall's outpost, wounding six men and then vanished into the woods.

Post Trenton:

Dec 30: Reed led a patrol and they had a minor engagement on the outskirts of Princeton. Surprised twelve Dragoons and captured eleven while one was able to evade back to British lines.

Dec 30: Cadwalader had a spy out who reported that he witnessed Reed's patrol capture the eleven British soldiers.

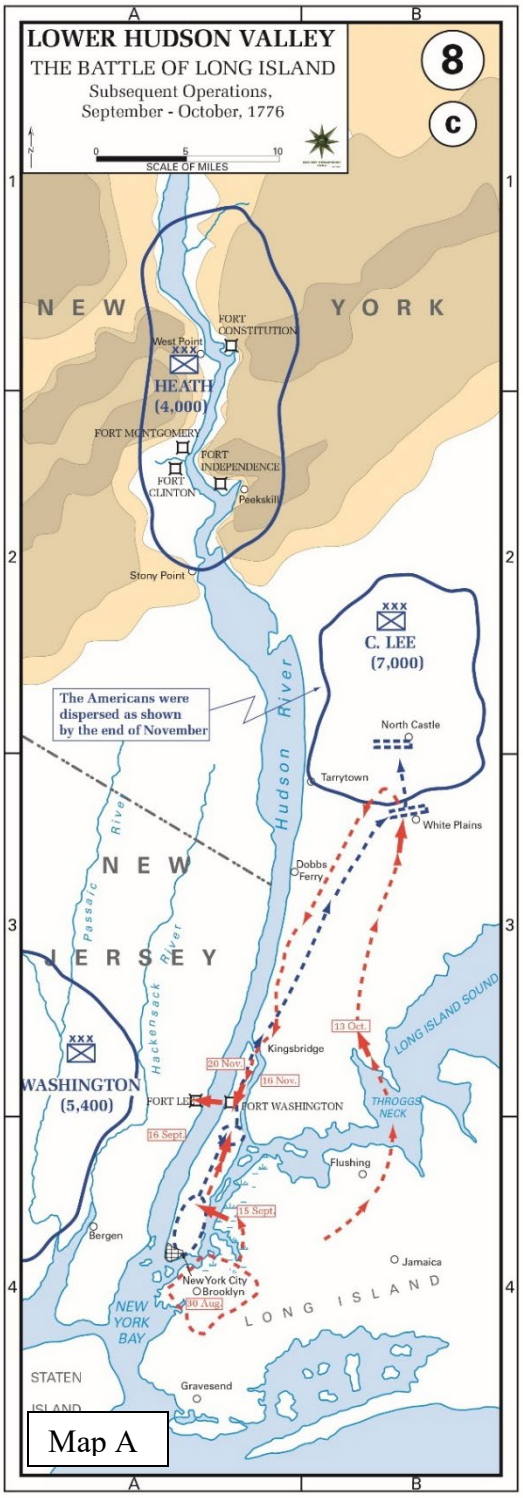
Dec 31: A spy, not specifically employed to spy for the Americans but with Whig sympathies, entered the American camp and gave them valuable information regarding the British thoughts and intentions for the Americans in Trenton.

Jan 1: Washington sent a force to conduct reconnaissance by fire and delay any British troops attempting to move towards from Princeton to Trenton.

Introduction

1776 was an eventful year filled with both success and failure for the American forces engaged against the British army during the early period of the American Revolution. They defended a British invasion in the south at Charleston with a gallant stand at Fort Moltrie.[2] Though a Canadian expedition had ended in defeat, the Americans still controlled the line of communications from Montreal to New York City and the middle colonies with their occupation of Fort Ticonderoga. Henry Knox's epic movement of artillery and munitions from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston through the Appalachian Mountains during harsh wintery conditions in December 1775 enabled the Americans to defend Boston Harbor and press the British to seek a different location for a lodgment.[3] The British departed Boston in March 1776 and refitted their force at their base of operations in Nova Scotia. This location, however, would not support a land war in any of the colonies which became the first thirteen states of the newly declared 'United States of America' later that summer. The British needed to find a new lodgment. In June, the first ships of the greatest navy in the world were seen off the southern coast of Long Island where General George Washington, the commander-in-chief of the American Continental Army, had his headquarters following his relocation from Boston a few months prior.

[2] Sam Willis, *The Struggle for Sea Power: A Naval History of the American Revolution*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2015), 110-111.
[3] Robert L. Tonsetic, *Special Operations During the American Revolution,* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2013), 40.



The British landing on Long Island was rather uncontested.[4] Washington had little choice but to withdraw to Manhattan. Throughout August and September, the British pushed the Americans out of New York City and had secured a new base of operations from which they might threaten the existence of the American independence movement. As summer turned to fall, Washington continued to withdraw north up to White Plains. He occupied defendable ground but the British commander-in-chief, General William Howe, decided that he had extended his army far enough and so chose to return south. Howe's next target was Fort Washington which controlled the Hudson River several miles north of Manhattan.[5] Washington transferred over 5,000 soldiers to the west side of the Hudson River and left General Charles Lee, a former British officer, in command of the contingent north of White Plains.[6] Washington knew he must retain Fort Washington if he was to maintain control of the

[4] Willis, *The Struggle for Sea Power,* 123-127.
[5] Dave R. Palmer, *George Washington's Military Genius*, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 139-141.
[6] See Map A on page 3. United States Military Academy at West Point, "Operations Along the Hudson River, September – October 1776," *The American Revolution War*, accessed May 02, 2022, https://www.westpoint.edu/academics/academic-departments/history/american-revolution.

Hudson River. Despite a strong garrison at Fort Washington, its commander, Colonel Robert Magaw, surrendered to the British on November 16, 1776. A few days later, British Lieutenant General Lord Earl Cornwallis, nearly surprised the 3,000 troops at Fort Lee which initiated Washington's perilous retreat through New Jersey.

As Washington fled through New Jersey, his army lost many supplies and the soldiers' combat strength weakened. Many soldiers became ill and could not fight. His army was no longer a capable fighting force and could only be concerned with its survival. Washington sent messages of distress out to mobilize the New Jersey militia and defend the state. There was little response. He continued his retreat until the Delaware River provided him some respite. The situation caused Washington to greatly distrust the militia and to view them as an unreliable military option. Nonetheless, he had no other choice but to continually seek a rapid call to arms from the New Jersey and Pennsylvania militias. When he crossed to the west side of the Delaware River on December 7-8, 1776, the army with him was a third of its strength since Fort Lee had fallen eighteen days earlier. The British forces on the other side of the Delaware were strong and their supply lines firmly intact all the way to the ports. Washington was in no position to attack. His only option was to use irregular warfare tactics.[7]

Irregular warfare was not a foreign concept of fighting for the Americans. Since they began to settle in North America, they had to adapt to fighting the indigenous people of the

[7] Current United States military doctrine defines irregular warfare (IW) as "a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)." Joint Staff, Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02: *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), 137. For this paper, irregular warfare is defined by the tactics and principles used which align with current special operations doctrine. These tactics include ambushing, raiding, reconnaissance, surveillance, and other swift actions conducted by clandestine means with the intent to withdraw from action before facing a superior enemy force.

continent who were skilled at the art of concealment, small unit tactics, ambush, and raiding.[8] Though small unit tactics could not carry victory in a pitched battle against one of the strongest and most disciplined armies in the world, it could cause discontentment within the ranks of such an army and help to shape the operating environment for a situation where large units could project enough power to gain a tactical victory. Washington was a veteran of the French and Indian War, and he understood the art of irregular warfare and when, where, and how it should be applied. The militia was slow to respond but they did respond to Washington's distress. He and others knew that the militia was the force of choice for irregular warfare. Though Washington had begun irregular actions with his formal general orders on December 12 in which he assigned defensive sectors to his subordinate commanders, a letter from the Pennsylvania Council to him on December 25 expressed the strength of the militia in irregular warfare. Militia units from the back country of Pennsylvania had petitioned the state council for authorization to conduct scouting patrols and prosecute an irregular war.[9] The council could not have known of Washington's plans to cross the Delaware River that night and attack Trenton, but they were certainly aware of the irregular warfare that the Americans carried out from ten miles north of Trenton down to Mount Holly between December 12-25.

Irregular warfare has existed for as long as war. In any contest, a significantly inferior force must adapt their tactics to address a threat offered by a superior force. Those tactics follow

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[8] Tonsetic, *Special Operations,* 7-19. See also John Grenier, *The First Way of War*: *American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

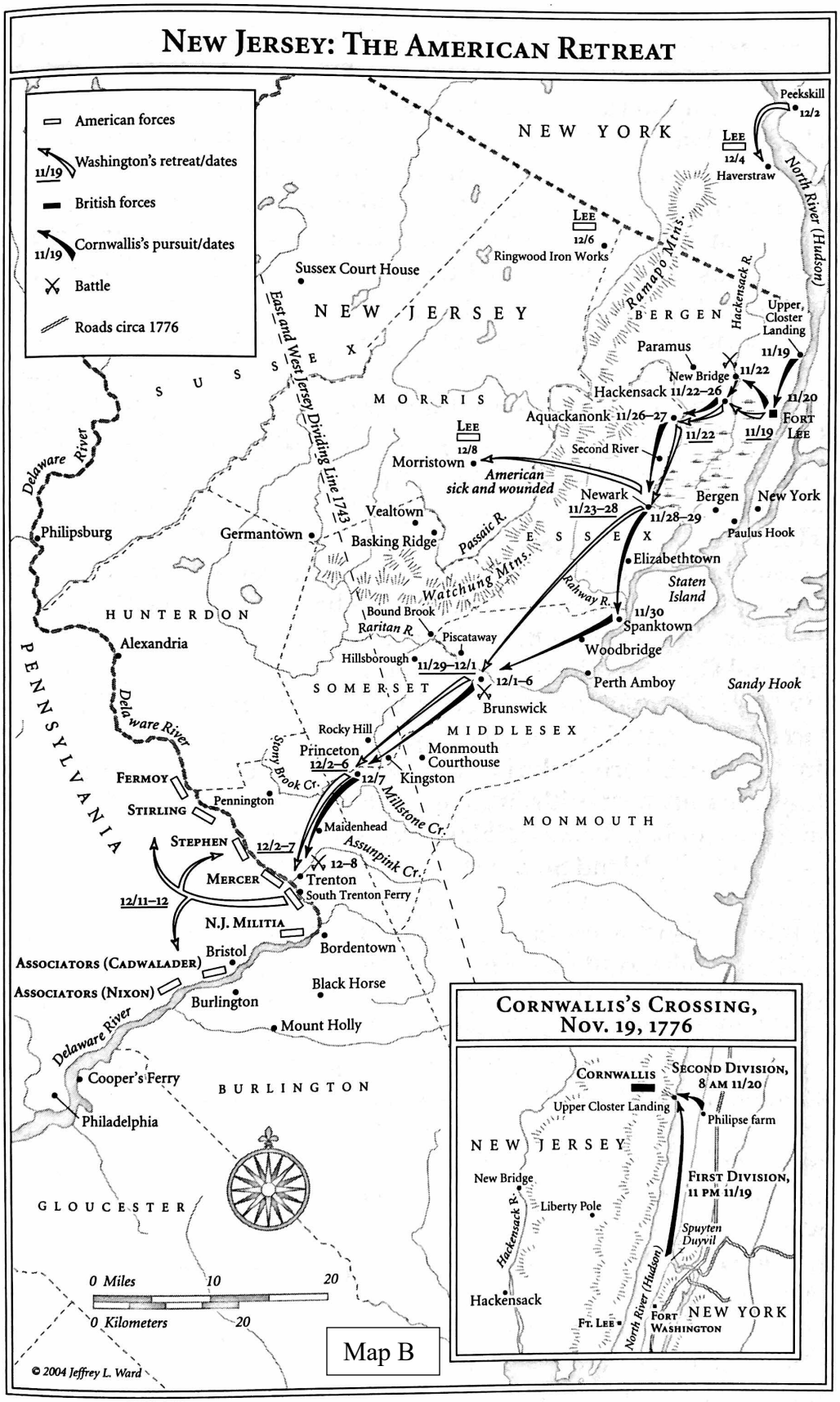
[9] The Pennsylvania Council extended the petition from the militia to Washington for him to have the decision on how he wished to best use the militia. The letter read in part, "…we think it our duty to acquaint you likewise that there are several Companies of our back Country Militia that have applied to us for Liberty to act as scouting parties of irregulars—this mode of waging war they say is more adapted to their genius and they presume upon the circumstances of the Enemy that they will have some success." "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 25 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0345. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, 441.]

timeless principles, though they evolve with the equipment and situation of each military affair. Since World War II, the United States military has labeled these types of actions as "special operations."[10] More recently, while a student at the Naval Postgraduate School, retired US Navy SEAL, Admiral William McRaven, identified the principles of special operations in his book, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*. The principles of special operations that McRaven presented were: "simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose."[11] Between December 12-25, and into the Christmas Campaign, Washington's army conducted special operations. It executed simple ambush and raid tactics with speed and surprise to the extent that the Hessians—the soldiers from Hesse-Cassel in Germany whom the British government hired to add to their ground forces—did not know when or from where the next attack would come.[12] Washington's forces used the utmost security when planning their operations and through the clandestine nature of their approaches and withdraws. They all shared the same purpose—to defend their homeland and gain the liberty and independence they so desired.[13]

In the same way, the United States' twenty-first century special operations forces (SOF) shape the operating environment to provide US policy makers military options in different theaters around the globe. These operations vary from training, advising, and assisting foreign militaries who maintain the stability of certain areas of the world to combat operations against

[10] Joint Publication (JP) 3-05 defines "special operations" as "operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk." Joint Staff, Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05: *Special Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2011), GL-12.
[11] William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice,* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996), 8.
[12] Great Britain hired soldiers from all the German states to fill the ranks of his army but those from Hesse-Cassel eclipsed the number of soldiers hired from all the other states combined by nearly 4,000. David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51-65 and 195-196.
[13] William S. Stryker, ed, *Documents Relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey*, Vol I, (Trenton, NJ: The John L. Murphy Publishing Company, 1901), 248, 263, and 267.

enemies of the US. In combat environments, USSOF shapes the battlefield through the conduct of ambushes, raids, reconnaissance, and surveillance—among other types of missions—as Washington's army did in December 1776. Washington's success in the Christmas Campaign, which included the American victories at the first Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776, the Second Battle of Trenton on January 2, 1777, and the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1777, turned the tide of the war and gave Americans a renewed sense that they were truly capable of securing their independence from Great Britain. The shaping actions of the Continental Army and militia in mid-December 1776 presented Washington with the opportunity he desperately needed to attack the Hessian garrison at Trenton and a victory which led to the strategic success that utterly changed the course of history.


NEW JERSEY: THE AMERICAN RETREAT
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Mount Holly
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© 2004 Jeffrey L. Ward
Map B
CORNWALLIS'S CROSSING, NOV. 19, 1776
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Ft. Lee
Fort Washington
North River (Hudson)
NEW YORK

Historiography

The historiography of the American Revolutionary War is vast. Much of the military historiography focuses on the major battles and campaigns and how such events affect society, politics, and economics—often areas of study considered when historians study armed conflict. Depending on the scope of their research, some scholars provided analysis on the irregular warfare waged by militia units or Continental units such as Ranger and Rifle Companies. Present military doctrine includes the use of special operations forces (SOF) selected, trained, and deployed to conduct direct action raids, special reconnaissance, and irregular warfare around the globe. Americans executed many operations and activities during the Revolutionary War that would be classified today as "special operations." Historians address irregular warfare in American Revolutionary War historiography but primarily when discussing the war in the south between 1780-1781.[14] Randy Flood dismissed its significance altogether in the northern theater.[15] In 2013, Robert Tonsetic was the first to present key events in the war through the lens

[14] This paper presents the several pieces of scholarship which either covered the entire war or specific aspects of the war in the northern theater. A few works which covered the war in the southern theater were John Richard Alden's, *The South in the Revolution,* John Buchanan's*, The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* and Russell Frank Weigley's*, The Partisan War: The South Carolina Campaign of 1780-1782.* Alden's and Buchanan's are more comprehensive accounts of the war in the south while Weigley's compares the partisan war in the south with irregular warfare aspects of the Vietnam War. John Richard Alden, *The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789,* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1957). John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* (New York: John Wiley, 1999). Russell Frank Weigley, *The Partisan War: The South Carolina Campaign of 1780-1782*, (Columbia, SC: Published for the South Carolina Tricentennial Commission, by the University of South Carolina Press, 1980).

[15] Randy Flood is an American Revolution Historian. He is the co-founder of The Real American Revolution Multimedia Center and host of "The Real American Revolution" to educate citizens about the Revolution. At the time of this interview, he served as an historian with the American Revolution Museum in Yorktown, Virginia. Flood, when asked by the interviewer, Liz Covart in an October 31, 2017, interview as part of the *Ben Franklin's World* podcast, claims that today's special operations forces evolved from the partisans of the southern campaign such as Francis Marion, Andrew Pickens, and Harry Lee. He acknowledges that there were units which conducted irregular warfare in the north such as Daniel Morgan's Riflemen but claims that George Washington was not interested in specialized units or irregular warfare tactics. He was most concerned with the "honorable" conventional tactics for fighting the British. This is entirely false as any study of the militia units along the Delaware River in December of 1776 and throughout the "forage war" in early 1777 would show. "Episode 158: The Revolutionaries' Army. Randy Flood discuss specialized units in the American Revolution between 54:32-56:52 minutes," interview by Liz Covart, *Ben Franklin's World,* October 31, 2017, https://benfranklinsworld.com/episode-158-revolutionaries-army/.

of official special operations doctrine in his book, *Special Operations During the American Revolution*. Through this perspective, and this case study of the irregular warfare actions and activities which shaped the operating environment before the Battle of Trenton, historians offered insight into how military and national leaders utilize SOF in conjunction with military campaign plans.

There are many works which covered the War in its entirety dating back to David Ramsay's *The History of the American Revolution* first published in 1789.[16] Since the 1960s, Revolutionary War scholarship expanded with the increase of scholars committed to its study. A few notable examples first published in the 1970s and 1980s are Don Higginbotham's *The War for Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practices, 1763-1789*, and John Shy's *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*. In his work, Higginbotham explored military policy and attitudes towards the war rather than an analysis on the battles and campaigns. He argued that the effects of the war had a profound impact in shaping future civil and military institutions.[17] Whereas Higginbotham's approach chronicled the war, Shy posed general theories of revolutionary wars' effects on societies and specifically examined the effects on American society.[18] Higginbotham and Shy discussed actions which involve the militia, but the efforts of irregular warfare were not their focus.

As recent as 2007, John Ferling produced a full account of the war with a focus on the major battles and campaigns, key military and political leaders, and the politics throughout the war. In, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence,* he argued that

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[16] Ramsay, David, and Lester H. Cohen. *The History of the American Revolution*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc, 1990), 1:vii-viii, accessed March 8, 2021, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e089mna&AN=520698&site=ehost-live&custid=s3915890&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover

[17] Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practices, 1763-1789* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1983), xv.

[18] John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence,* Revised Edition (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), vii-ix and 1-7.

victory was, in the words of George Washington, "little more than a miracle."[19] Similar to Higginbotham, Ferling chronicled the war with a focus on the political decisions, military strategies, and battlefield success which led to American victory. Though his argument may be accepted by many historians as accurate, he missed the opportunity to explain the large role of irregular warfare on the success of major battles and campaigns. His focus on the militia is limited. It is understandable that research covering the entire war may leave out the small details of irregular warfare operations and activities, but historians must be careful not to minimize irregular warfare's effects on the strategic objectives.

Although the comprehensive histories of the war did not contribute much effort to detailing the irregular warfare activities, works covering specific battles, campaigns, or locations did. Richard Ketchum offered a compelling argument that the British surrender at Saratoga was the turning point of the war. As many historians did, Ketchum adopted his conclusion due to the subsequent entrance of France into the war. Ketchum used most of his book to set the scene for the major battles at Freedman's Farm and Bemis Heights in the fall 1777. He wrote of Benjamin Whitcomb's Rangers and other activities of the militia but did so to account for their presence but not to analyze their effect on the larger campaign.[20] In 2005, Barbara Mitnick compiled essays on New Jersey's involvement in the war covering many different subjects in history. In the essay titled, "The 'Cockpit' Reconsidered," Mark Lender argued that New Jersey was the most active colony of the war in terms of the number of engagements, many of which were militia forces between 1778-1782.[21] Five years later, Michael Adelberg provided a more detailed look into the war in New Jersey with *The American Revolution in Monmouth County:*

[19] John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 562.
[20] Richard Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York: A John Macrae/Owl Book, 1999), xi, 101-102, and 161.
[21] Barbara Mitnik, *New Jersey in the American Revolution* (Brunswick, NJ: River Gate Books, 2005), x and 54-60.

The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction. Adelberg brought Lender's essay a step further and argued that Monmouth County was the most combat active county in New Jersey during the war. He made a bold claim that, "in no part of the military frontier was civil and irregular warfare more intense than in Monmouth County."[22] Adelberg certainly provided evidence to the irregular warfare operations and activities in Monmouth County and how they affected the larger conventional situation but unfortunately, he presented no footnotes or bibliography.

Efforts to provide insight into the lesser-known irregular warfare activities during the American Revolutionary War may assist reviews of these activities considering current special operations doctrine. Mark Kwasny's *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783,* is a comprehensive account of the irregular operations and activities throughout the Northern Theater. In it, he argued that the leaders of the Revolution's ability to coordinate the different activities of local and state militias with the national efforts of the Continental Army was decisive in securing victory.[23] Despite a thorough account of the irregular activities in the north, Kwasny left out the entire western frontier which was where Glenn Williams filled an important gap in scholarship with *Year of the Hangman: George Washington's Campaign Against the Iroquois.* Williams argued that the 1779 Campaign against the Iroquois accomplished strategic objectives which significantly contributed to victory in the war. He detailed the expeditions of Colonel Broadhead from Pittsburgh and General John Sullivan's Continental elements executing the irregular activities of raiding and ambushing throughout western Pennsylvania and New York.[24]

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[22] Michael S. Adelberg, *The American Revolution in Monmouth County: The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction. (NJ),* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010), 13.
[23] Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1996), xv.
[24] Glenn F. Williams, *Year of the Hangman: George Washington's Campaign Against the Iroquois* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2005), xi.

The best account of how irregular warfare presented Washington an opportunity to cross the Delaware River and attack Trenton is David Hackett Fischer's *Washington's Crossing*. Fischer gave, arguably, the best, most detailed account of the events from the British arrival in New York to when Washington moved to winter quarters in Morristown, New Jersey following his victory in the Christmas Campaign. However, Fischer's history is merely to offer the significance of Washington's decision to cross the Delaware within the context of the history of American and Western Civilization. His chapters titled, "The Occupation" and "The Opportunity" provided detailed accounts of the many small skirmishes of raiding, ambushing, and reconnoitering which American militia and Continental troops executed during the two weeks before Washington crossed the Delaware to attack Trenton. Fischer's research and writing was exceptional; however, he did not present the irregular warfare actions as special operations as did Tonsetic.[25]

It is understandable why the scholarship on irregular activities is limited and at times completely absent. Men who conducted small skirmishes, raids, and ambushes did not regularly report each engagement and some reports may have been consumed by more prominent engagements in the surrounding areas. Therefore, the primary sources from which historians gathered information from the war may not always provide evidence for the effects of irregular activities on larger battles and campaigns. Some of these irregular actions were "chance" contact with the enemy and likely not recorded.[26] Additionally, viewing the irregular operations and activities of the war through the lens of official special operations doctrine could not have been possible until the 1980s when Congress established Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)

[25] David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[26] When referring to contact with an enemy force, chance contact is where neither force intended to engage the other, but one rather stumbled upon the other's position and so an engagement ensued.

and United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).[27] Given the exceptional employment and reliance on SOF throughout the Global War on Terrorism as a main effort within the National Security Strategy of the United States, it is appropriate to examine the actions of their ancestors' contributions towards the national objective of the Continental Congress in 1776—independence. Tonsetic began this examination in 2013 with his publication of *Special Operations During the American Revolution.* He connected the irregular operations and activities during the war with current special operations doctrine and argued that present day SOF and irregular units of the Revolutionary War adhered to the same principles of warfare.[28] A parallel review of Tonsetic with McRaven's *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* provided a gateway into understanding the American Revolutionary War's irregular actions in light of current special operations activities around the globe.[29]

[27] Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Public Law 99-433. U.S. Statutes at Large 100 (1986), accessed March 6, 2021, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/dod_reforms/Goldwater-NicholsDoDReordAct1986.pdf.
[28] Robert L. Tonsetic, *Special Operations During the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2013), 247-249.
[29] William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996).

Chapter 1

A Mere Handful

When George Washington crossed the Delaware River from Trenton into Pennsylvania, on December 8, 1776, he was in a desperate situation and believed the Rebels' cause to be nearing the end of its gallant attempt at independence. His army had surrendered or fled in front of attacking British ranks from Manhattan, across New Jersey, and then across the Delaware River. At times, his officers were able to mount enough combat power to delay the pursuing British but in no way did Washington gain any victory during the fall 1776 prior to the Christmas Campaign. After Colonel Robert Magaw surrendered Fort Washington on November 16, the Commander-in-chief saw no good tactical reason to retain Fort Lee on the west side of the Hudson River. In a letter to John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, Washington set his plans for forfeiting Fort Lee and retreating through New Jersey.[30] Though his situation was turning desperate after the fall of Fort Washington, he believed that the army's movement through New Jersey would gather the support of the New Jersey militia and create a situation where he could mount a counterattack. Following December 8 when he established a defense on the west bank of the Delaware River, his faith in the New Jersey militia was all but extinguished. However, he found himself in a position of relative advantage to that of Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis and the British army after crossing the Delaware, securing or destroying the boats, and establishing a defensive posture in the event the British attempted a crossing. Washington's retreat, though demoralizing, saved the Continental Army and led to an

[30] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 19-21 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0128. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, 180–186.]

opportunity to take the offensive. What that operation would be and how the opportunity would come was merely a dream in early December 1776.

Today, the massive George Washington Bridge in New York City connects the historic sites of Fort Lee on the west and Fort Washington on the east. In 1776, the two forts commanded the control of the Hudson-North River, which represented the strategic line of communication between the middle colonies and Canada. From across the river at Fort Lee, Washington wrote to Hancock following the fall of Fort Washington to describe the significance of its loss. Washington considered the fort to be worth every pain and expense to defend it. He placed Magaw in charge with 1200 men and officers with orders to defend the post "to the last extremity."[31] Washington reconsidered his order to Magaw given the small garrison he had to defend the fort and instructed General Nathaniel Greene to use his best judgment in reinforcing it.[32] Magaw was in a good defensive position on the high ground, surrounded by water on three sides, behind fortified earthworks, and with the fire support of the fort's cannons. The question was not could Magaw hold out the defense but rather, what were the British willing to sacrifice to occupy this strategic point.

On November 15, Lieutenant General William Howe, the British Commander-in-Chief, sent a message to Magaw demanding the surrender of the fort. Magaw rejected the demands as he understood what his commander-in-chief expected and prepared for the British onslaught. At 10:00 am the next day, the first British assault up the southern approach to the fort began. Washington witnessed the action from across the river as Magaw's men made a heroic stand and repulsed the attack. However, the British used this main attack as a feint to divert Magaw's attention away from a Hessian force crossing the Harlem River to the north and east to attack a

[31] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 16 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0118. *The Papers of George Washington*, 162–169.
[32] Ibid.

more vulnerable part of the defense.[33] The British ability to achieve three-to-one odds in the attack allowed for the forces necessary to breach the fort's defenses.[34] Washington witness the main attack from the south. As much as he hoped Magaw would repel the British, he could not have realized the amount of combat power that the British applied to occupying Fort Washington. The level of coordination among British forces was so significant that it was General Howe, himself, who gave the signal to commence the attack.[35]

The fall of Fort Washington was a devastating loss in a series of defeats in and around New York City. The inability of the Americans to hold ground around the port of New York against the invading Royal Army brought much grief and desperation to their cause. If any one event sealed Washington's decision to retreat through New Jersey, it was the fall of Fort Washington. When he wrote to Hancock on the afternoon of November 16, he asserted that the loss of men and officers, of who many were exceptionally trained, would be severely felt. He added that the loss of "Arms and Accoutrements" stressed the situation even further making it imperative to gather more stores for the new troops.[36] A few days later, Washington wrote Hancock again maintaining that Fort Lee was no longer tactically significant to retain given the Americans' loss of Fort Washington. Washington then presented his plan for retreating through New Jersey. He aimed to retain as much of the army's stores as possible and reconsolidate at Brunswick. At this point, Washington was confident in the mobilization of the militia of New Jersey by order of Governor William Livingston to impede the British plans to forage off the

[33] Ibid. See also Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 16, where he specifically describes the southern attack as a feint.
[34] "Battle of Fort Washington," *Washington Heights NYC*, accessed February 19, 2022, http://www.washington-heights.us/battle-of-fort-washington/.
[35] Ewald, *Diary*, 16.
[36] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 16 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0118. *The Papers of George Washington*, 162–169.

countryside.[37] As the camp at Fort Lee was preparing for their withdraw, Lieutenant General Cornwallis attacked on November 20. If the surrender of Fort Washington inflicted a terrible wound in the Continental Army, the sacking of Fort Lee was salt in that wound. Washington affirmed that the British objective was to contain the rebel army between the North and Hackensack Rivers. The Continental Army was initially prepared to defend this narrow strip of land. However, given the superiority in numbers of Cornwallis' force and the high ground they had already acquired, the Americans wisely decided to withdraw. Unfortunately, this hasty action caused the men to abandon much equipment and stores.[38] Howe noted in his letter to Lord George Germain, the British Prime Minister, that the Americans did not detect Cornwallis' approaching movements during the days leading up to the attack. He claimed that Cornwallis would have achieved complete surprise if it was not for countrymen in the area who noticed them and reported the British movement to the Americans at Fort Lee. Absolute surprise would have enabled Cornwallis to surround the fort and take another 2,000 prisoners plus all the stores. Instead, the Americans quickly withdrew, and Cornwallis was left with all the fort's artillery, all the army's tents with campfires still burning, and much food and stores.[39]

Following the loss of the two forts, the Americans withdrew to Newark on the south side of the Passaic River in the evening of November 21.[40] At this time, Washington had approximately 5,000 troops in Newark with him. Washington knew that his force was inadequate to address the pursuing British. His letters to General Charles Lee, a British lieutenant colonel who had joined the American cause and was appointed as a major general, as

[37] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 19-21 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0128. *The Papers of George Washington*, 180–186. The information cited here was likely written on the November 19.
[38] Ibid. The information cited here was written on November 21.
[39] K. G. Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783*, Vol XII, (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1976), 263.
[40] See Map B on page 8. David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127.

well as letters to Governor John Trumbull of Connecticut, Governor William Livingston of New Jersey, and to Hancock, expressed his desperate need for additional manpower and supplies. Given the drastic change in the situation since Washington provided instructions to Lee on November 10, he wrote Lee on November 21, directing him to cross over to the west side of the Hudson River and prepare to support Washington's army.[41] Lee acknowledged this request but did not cross the Hudson until December 2 at which time Washington had already retreated as far as Princeton.[42] Lee hoped to gather better clothing, shoes, and supplies for his men as well as receive 2,000 soldiers from Major General William Heath for his new mission into New Jersey.[43] Following Washington's request for troops and supplies, Governor Trumbull replied to him on November 30, that the Connecticut General Assembly approved the raising of four battalions who would march to support Washington's campaign through March 1777, or longer if Washington deemed it necessary.[44] This, of course, would take time and not address Washington's immediate concern in New Jersey but would rather strengthen the positions north of New York City. Washington's more immediate call for support was to Governor Livingston. On November 21, Washington informed Livingston that since his numbers were inadequate, and the "flying camp" from Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey were about to finish their enlistments at the end of the month, he asked Livingston to call on a number of militia from New Jersey to oppose the British. Washington believed that if the weather stayed favorable, the

[41] This letter was actually written in Colonel Joseph Reed's handwriting and preceded a personal letter from Reed to General Lee. "From George Washington to Major General Charles Lee, 21 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0137. *The Papers of George* Washington, 193–195.
[42] William Heath, *Memoirs of Major General William Heath*, (New York, NY: Arno Press, Inc., 1968), 88.
[43] Major General William Heath was the commander of the troops at Peeks Kill, NY and he is who Washington tasked with defending the highlands and passes along the Hudson River into upstate New York. He was to ensure the British did not take control of the Hudson River and open their line of communication with their forces in Montreal, Canada.
[44] "To George Washington from Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., 30 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0173. *The Papers of George* Washington, 241–243.

British would attempt to push into New Jersey before entering winter quarters.[45] His letter of November 23 further stressed the need for an immediate response from New Jersey and stated that he had instructed his military secretary, Colonel Joseph Reed, to "wait on [Livingston]" which implied that Washington was offering direct assistance to Livingston as he attempted to mobilize the New Jersey militia.[46] On November 27, Livingston responded to Washington that he had ordered the militia of several counties to march and join Washington's command immediately.[47] Washington camped at Newark from November 23-28. During what must have been a long and stressful week for the commander-in-chief, Washington sent out signals of distress and urgency to his general officers, governors, and the Continental Congress. He was without doubt losing hope that the American army could survive such a desperate situation. To add to his stress, he became aware that one of his closest advisors and generals exchanged correspondence questioning his ability to be the commander-in-chief.

Following Washington's instructions to Lee on November 21, Colonel Reed wrote to Lee on the same day with deep concerns over Washington's leadership. The first letter which Reed wrote from the official position as Washington's military secretary updated Lee on the quickly changing situation and told Lee to move across the Hudson. In his personal letter, Reed urged Lee to rush to the support of the army in New Jersey and assured him that many officers and soldiers held his leadership, judgment, and experience in high esteem. Reed noted that the

[45] The units known as the "flying camp" were militia units that mobilized for a very short period in 1776 to assist the Continental Army. In this letter to Governor Livingston, Washington mentions that the enlistments of the flying camp are almost up but in a letter to General Heath on November 29, he specifically states that their enlistments expire "tomorrow." "From George Washington to William Livingston, 21 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0138. *The Papers of George Washington,* 195–196. "From George Washington to Major General William Heath, 29 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0164. *The Papers of George Washington*, 227–229.
[46] "From George Washington to William Livingston, 23 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0140. *The Papers of George Washington*, 198.
[47] "To George Washington from William Livingston, 27 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0161. *The Papers of George Washington*, 225–226.

enemy was concerned of Lee's presence and suggested that it was less confident when he was near. Reed attributed the defeat at Fort Washington to General Nathaniel Greene's indecisiveness following Washington's decision to place the garrison commander of the fort under Greene's charge. He then explicitly stated that Lee should go to Congress "as soon as the season will admit…and form the plan for the new army."[48] Lee did not acknowledge these letters as a positive order but understood the urgency and took the liberty to order General Heath to detach 2,000 troops to Lee's Corps. Heath had understood his orders from Washington to hold the highlands and the passes along the Hudson River and knew that if he gave up 2,000 troops, his ability to accomplish this mission would be severely degraded.[49] Lee saw the urgency to move to aid Washington and the people of New Jersey, yet lost sight of the strategic situation. Washington's army continued to hope for Lee's arrival, but it never came until they were already across the Delaware River.

While Washington's army encamped at Newark, they hoped for a situation to arise to disrupt the pursuing enemy. It did not come. Washington's letter to Lee on November 27 displayed his desire for Lee to have crossed the Hudson by then and be enroute to support him. He acknowledged Lee's request for clothing for his troops but, distraught by the circumstances, wrote "what can I do."[50] Washington also added in this letter that once Lee arrived, their

[48] Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds, *The Spirit of 'Seventy Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants*, Vol 1, (New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), 498.
[49] Pages 80-88 in Heath's *Memoirs* provides the correspondence and narrative of the conversation between Lee and Heath concerning how to support Washington in New Jersey and what mission was most important at the time—preventing the enemy from securing the line of communication between New York City and Canada or disrupting Howe's move into New Jersey. Between November 21-30, Heath and Lee debated the situation. Lee eventually conceded and on December 2, crossed the Hudson with the men and acknowledged that Heath was right. Heath, *Memoirs*, 80-88.
[50] "From George Washington to Major General Charles Lee, 27 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0160. *The Papers of George Washington*, 224–225.

combined forces would still be inadequate for fighting the enemy. He acknowledged that the enemy's slow pursuit of his army was not due to his tactics but rather to poor weather.[51]

Within a week following the fall of Fort Washington, the commander in chief transitioned from a strategy to contain the British east of the Hudson to one of retreat and despair. Washington's call for an immediate response was too late to stop the British from evicting the Americans from Newark and gaining a foothold in New Jersey. In a situation report to Hancock on November 23, Washington described the orders he gave to Lee to come to his support, to Heath to secure the passes along the Hudson north of New York City, and the request to Livingston to mobilize New Jersey militia.[52] Two days later, on November 25, a letter, which was printed in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* on November 27, stated the British intentions to occupy Philadelphia. This letter, as well as one dated November 23 and printed in the same journal, urged citizens to answer the call to defend their freedom. The writer of the letter dated November 23 asserted that "If she [America] does not exert herself now, she deserves not the independence she has declared."[53] The call to arms went out but a ready response was impossible to address Washington's current situation in Newark.

On the night of November 29, the British arrived on the far side of the Passaic River. At dawn the next morning, they marched through Newark, while some continued to Elizabethtown. When they arrived at the American camp in Newark, they saw that the Americans left many supplies, but there were no signs of any soldiers. Not only did Washington's army retreat from the pursuing British and Hessians but the townspeople also vacated the area out of fear of the

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[51] Ibid.
[52] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 23 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0139. *The Papers of George Washington*, 196–198.
[53] William S. Stryker, ed, *Documents Relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey*, Vol I, (Trenton, NJ: The John L. Murphy Publishing Company, 1901), 237.

Hessians whom the locals heard described as "inhumane monsters."[54] Washington entered Brunswick on November 29—a position south of the Raritan River but deeper into New Jersey. He continued to hope for the Jersey militia to mobilize and for Lee's Continental troops to come to his aid. The situation, however, was growing more dire by the day. The Continental Army forfeited supplies with each retreat in the essence of speed. Clothes, shoes, ammunition, and other essential items dwindled. The weather began to worsen. The manpower of the flying camp, which five months earlier appeared to be a valiant mobilization, would dissipate with the end of their enlistment contract.[55] Washington continued to wait for an opportunity to counterattack but all his efforts appeared increasingly futile.

Washington did not know all the intentions of the British but, by the end of November, he was certain that one of their aims was to occupy Philadelphia. In his November 30 letter to Hancock, he maintained that he was sending stores towards Philadelphia and that if all the members of the flying camp returned home, then the army "will be reduced to a mere handful."[56] On the same day, General Howe penned a letter to Lord Germain, which outlined his strategy for the war in North America with great confidence. His three-pronged strategy consisted of: 1) an offensive from Rhode Island to Boston, 2) the defense of New York and an offensive up the North River to Albany, and 3) a defensive army of 8,000 men to cover New Jersey and to keep the rebel army in check with the intention of an offensive against Philadelphia in the autumn of 1777. He also informed Germain that Cornwallis would occupy East Jersey to provide the army covering, foraging, and supplies of fresh provisions and that he believed Washington would

[54] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops in America under the command of General von Heister, 1776 to June 1777*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter AA, Fiche no 3, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 18.
[55] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 30 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0168. *The Papers of George Washington*, 232–234.
[56] Ibid.

retreat behind the Raritan River or continue across the Delaware River to cover Philadelphia.[57] At the time of this letter, Washington was already across the Raritan and sending supplies southwest towards Philadelphia. During the prior month, the Americans garrisoned at Fort Ticonderoga delayed the British advance from Canada into New York with irregular warfare tactics which caused the British commander in Canada, General John Burgoyne, to reconsolidate his forces for an offensive the following Spring.[58] Additionally, British forces on Long Island prepared for an offensive into Rhode Island and Connecticut at the same time.[59] Howe's strategy was working as planned while Washington could only hope to spare his army from annihilation.

Washington remained at Brunswick until December 1 when Cornwallis appeared on the north side of the Raritan River. Colonel Carl von Donop, the commander of the Hessian regiment which assumed Cornwallis' right column during their pursuit of the rebel army, recorded a few skirmishes his men had with rebel troops during their march from Newark to Brunswick on December 1. The Americans fled the Hessians, but Donop decided to wait for his whole force so that he could mass his combat power. When it arrived, so did Cornwallis, who ordered the halt further so that he could bring all the British forces in New Jersey to bear against Washington.[60] This decision may have been safe for Cornwallis' forces, but it allowed Washington time for further retreat. Captain Johann Ewald, a company commander in the Jäger Corps, expressed his frustration for this decision in his diary. He asserted that he "was assured that the campaign should have ended [at New Brunswick]."[61] Furthermore, he recorded several questions in his diary to his two sons that generally asked the question of why the British army

[57] Davies, *Documents*, 264-265.
[58] Robert L. Tonsetic, *Special Operations During the American Revolution,* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2013), 105-106.
[59] Forrest Morgan, ed, *Connecticut as a Colony and as a State*, Vol 2, (Hartford, CT: The Publishing Society of Connecticut, 1904), 96-101. Frederick MacKenzie, *The Diary of Frederick MacKenzie*, vol 1, (Cambridge, MA: Havard University Press, 1930), 117-123.
[60] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops*, MHT, 20.
[61] Ewald, *Diary*, 24.

"march[ed] so slowly" or "tarr[ied] so many days" when he believed that they were in a position to end the war. He further concluded that Howe wished to see the war end without the unnecessary shedding of blood.[62] This, of course, was a fateful decision of non-aggression on Howe's part which Washington took the opportunity to exploit in his Christmas Campaign.

Once Cornwallis made his push towards New Brunswick, cannon fire erupted. The engagement was the American attempt to destroy a bridge across the Raritan while also considering a defensive stand there. The previous day enlistments of the men of the flying camp expired and Washington could not convince the New Jersey men to stay and defend their own soil. Washington knew that a stand against the British at New Brunswick would be costly, and that the army was in no composition to bear that burden. He ordered his commander of artillery, Captain Alexander Hamilton, to delay the British advance in order to allow the army to retreat towards Princeton.[63] By this time, Washington committed to establishing a defense on the west side of the Delaware River. Meanwhile, Howe determined that a rapid pursuit of the Americans through New Jersey would disintegrate Washington's army.[64] After departing New Brunswick, Washington spent one day in Princeton before finishing his retreat across New Jersey and arrived in Trenton on December 2. His last task was to cross the Delaware River and establish a strong defensive position against the British.

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[62] Ibid, 25.

[63] In this letter to Hancock, Washington wrote, "It being impossible to oppose them with our present force with the least prospect of success, we shall retreat to the West side of Delaware & have advanced about Eight miles, where it is hoped we shall meet a reinforcement sufficient to check their Progress." "From George Washington to John Hancock, 1 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0176. *The Papers of George Washington*, 245–247. Carl Leopold Baurmeister, *Revolution in America: Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces,* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 73. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 129-131.

[64] Ewald, *Diary*, 25. Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 87.

Washington's only cause for a halt at Trenton was to coordinate his army's river crossing and disrupt any possible attempt by the British to cross. He was quickly consolidating his supplies and acquiring boats for a systematic crossing of the Delaware River.[65] In two short days, his entire army of demoralized, fatigued, and ill-equipped soldiers retreated twenty-six miles from New Brunswick to Trenton, and hustled to mount an urgent river crossing as winter set in. His beleaguered force, once numbering more than 8,000 before Fort Washington fell, was now a meager 2,500 men attempting to cross the Delaware River and spare their own annihilation.[66]

At the time of Washington's crossing from Trenton into Pennsylvania, he had received no assistance from the New Jersey militia. Approximately three weeks before, when he started his retreat through New Jersey, he hoped for and expected the coordinated resistance efforts of the states' militia. Now, when planning his first crossing of the Delaware River, Washington's hope in the militia had evaporated. However, as an "opportunist," Washington refocused his expectation of assistance to the Pennsylvania militia.[67] As Washington finished his trek across New Jersey, his force was dispirited and exhausted. However, contrary to Howe's expectation, they had not completely disintegrated. Charles Willson Peale, one of Washington's portrait artists, journaled that it was a 'hellish' scene. When his brother approached him, Peale did not

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[65] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 3 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0187. *The Papers of George Washington*, 255–256.
[66] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 131. In Washington's letter to Hancock on December 8, Washington reports that he believes his strength is between 3,000-3,500 soldiers. "From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0213. *The Papers of George Washington*, 273–275. To understand the full gravity of Washington's situation, Rose maintains that his force was 20,000 in August 1776 and diminished to only 3,000 in early December following his retreat through New Jersey. Alexander Rose, *Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2006), 41.
[67] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 3 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0187. *The Papers of George Washington*, 255–256. Mark Kwasny labels Washington as an "opportunist." A thorough review of Washington's letters and actions, which this Thesis does, defends Kwasny's label. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War*, 99.

recognize his brother's disfigured state of being.[68] Not only was Washington's army less than a third of what it was a month prior, the soldiers that remained were incapable of any confrontation with the superior numbers of the British and Hessian forces.

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Howe and Washington understood each other's strategies well. However, where Washington was persistent to keeping the American cause alive, Howe was passive in extinguishing it. Howe appeared to be a sound military leader who understood the British political climate. He knew that to finish the war on British terms, British blood must be spilled, yet he wished to prevent further death if possible.[69] If he was going to commit forces, he wanted to be sure of the outcome. Howe assumed that he had time to enter winter quarters and wait for the moment of his choosing to cross the Delaware and occupy Philadelphia. He expressed no urgency to finish the destruction of the Continental Army with a swift, immediate action to cross the Delaware and attack Washington's army or Philadelphia.

Washington was not the only one fearing that the cause of the American rebels to institute freedom and liberty and experiment with self-governance was all but dead. In a letter from Ebenezer Huntington, a captain in the Continental Army, to his grandfather, Jabez Huntington, on November 25, 1776, he asserted that "Our people, instead of behaving like brave men, behave like rascals, and to add to that, it seems that the British troops had gone into the Jersies, only to receive the submission of the whole country."[70] To add to the lack of support from the New Jersey inhabitants, Howe and his brother, Admiral Richard Howe, commander of all the Royal Navy forces in North America, together issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of

[68] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 133.
[69] Ewald, *Diary*, 24-25 and 30.
[70] Steele and Morris, *The Spirit of 'Seventy Six*, 497.

all of the British "provinces" on November 30 to preserve stability and gather the support of the locals to the British suppression of the rebels.[71] The British, along with their Hessian mercenaries, occupied Long Island and New York City and now were marching through New Jersey towards a fleeing, dilapidated, and numerically inferior enemy force. A promise of protection in exchange for an oath of allegiance certainly appealed to inhabitants who were naturally more focused on protecting their property and families than the heroic patriot cause that seemed, at the moment, only something for posterity to enjoy. For those who decided to pledge allegiance to the British Crown, why continue fighting for a fading cause in hopes that the next generation would enjoy the benefits when the fight itself could destroy any chance that there would be a next generation for their own family? The Howe brothers issued the proclamation two days after Governor Livingston's call for the militia was published in newspapers. The next day, Cornwallis evicted Washington from New Brunswick. From there, Washington focused his efforts on securing a defensive position on the west side of the Delaware River. Rather than seeking the quick subjugation of Washington and his army on the east side of the Delaware, Howe decided to conserve his combat power for an offensive against Philadelphia once the Delaware River froze.[72] This was a decision that proved costly for Britain but, for America, ushered in the first experiment in self-government in the modern era.

[71] Peter Force, ed, *American Archives*, Ser 5, Vol 3, (Washington, D.C., 1837–53), 927-928.
[72] Ewald, *Diary*, 27.

Chapter 2

We May Yet Make a Stand

Donop's Hessians, with Ewald leading the advance guard, saw the last soldiers in Washington's rear-guard embarking on boats on the east bank of the Delaware River while Ewald was still about 300 paces away.[73] Ewald was disappointed with the British pursuit. He believed that Cornwallis' force could have marched faster and caught much of Washington's force before they crossed the Delaware.[74] Howe's strategy was to seize Philadelphia because he assumed Washington's army was all but disintegrated after their march through New Jersey. He underestimated the resolve of the American rebels. Cornwallis began his priorities of work to establish a defensive line on the east bank of the Delaware River while Washington established a defense on the west. Washington ordered any boats along the river to be secured or destroyed to prevent them from falling into British control.[75] He also put out additional requests to mobilize militia and to Congress to authorize the mobilization of a professional army with long enlistments. The security of Philadelphia was Washington's top priority in early December. Fortunately for the patriot cause, Washington was a strategist while also a maneuverist.[76] Though his desperation was real, Washington displayed a keen focus to planning, waiting, and manipulating the situation for an opportunity to act.

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[73] Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 27. See Appendix B for definition of "advance guard" and "rear guard."

[74] In his diary to his sons, Ewald claims that their two-day march from New Brunswick to Trenton should have been completed in twelve hours since the army had few artillery pieces. He maintains that the march was slow "for no other reason than to permit Washington to cross the Delaware safely and peacefully." Ewald, *Diary*, 27-30.

[75] "From George Washington to Brigadier General William Maxwell, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0218. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, 278–279.]

[76] The term "maneuverist" is used here to describe Washington as a military leader who planned and executed strategies and tactics in war according to the maneuver warfare philosophy. "Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope." Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1: *Warfighting*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), 4-4.

Greene's situation report to Washington on December 7 detailed the enemy's current actions and gave Washington sound planning advice. At the time of Greene's letter, Lee had positioned his corps to apply pressure against the enemy's rear formations. Greene advised Washington that Lee should "keep upon the flanks" of the enemy.[77] He also thought that Lee should fall under Washington's plan and not act on his own accord. Lee was an aggressive general and respected for his successes among his subordinates and peers. However, at the moment, Greene and Washington both agreed that, given the situation in reduced manpower and stores, it was paramount for the Americans to mass their combat power if they were going to have any chance at a decisive victory against the British before the British offensive towards Philadelphia. Washington's urgency to raise forces and harass the British along the east bank of the Delaware River displayed his offensive mindset and understanding that the American situation would not improve while he remained docile on the defense.

Washington ordered the immediate defense of Philadelphia. He reported to Hancock that his rear guard crossed the Delaware on December 8 as the enemy entered Trenton.[78] The Americans covered the last men to cross with a heavy bombardment of artillery fire to suppress any chance of the Hessian advance guard disrupting their crossing.[79] Once across and having developed a defensive position, Washington identified the defense of Philadelphia as his top priority. However, if the British were able to penetrate defenses around Philadelphia, they would be able to strike directly at the heart of the American political power and confiscate a large

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[77] "To George Washington from Major General Nathanael Greene, 7 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0206. *The Papers of George Washington*, 269–270.
[78] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0213. *The Papers of George Washington*, 273–275.
[79] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops in America under the command of General von Heister, 1776 to June 1777*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter AA, Fiche no 3, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 24. David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 135.

portion of military stores. Washington ordered Major General Israel Putnam to command the city's defense and General Thomas Mifflin to secure the military stores contained within the city.[80] Washington established a linear defense along the Delaware between Philadelphia and Tinicum.[81]

On the east side of the Delaware, as the Jäger advanced guard reached Trenton to witness the last soldiers of the rebel army depart the east bank, Cornwallis arrived with his rear guard at Maidenhead between Trenton and Princeton. Here, he made the immediate decision to move thirteen miles up the Delaware to Corriel's Ferry with the intent to find boats to cross the river.[82] However, Washington's anticipation of this move and action to secure or destroy any boats so they did not fall into British control prevented Cornwallis from flanking the left of Washington's army and severing his hopeful link with Lee's corps approaching from northern New Jersey.

Howe began to set up a defense and prepare for an offensive against Philadelphia. Concurrently, he began organizing his defense-in-depth around towns that could provide his troops proper winter quarters.[83] He established garrisons in Trenton, Maidenhead, and Princeton along his route of advance. He also had Cornwallis establish his headquarters in Pennington, a town eight miles north of Trenton but offset from the river by about seven miles.[84] He wished to extend his left flank south where he could reconnoiter crossings in the vicinity of Philadelphia. He sent Donop with a large contingent of troops to the town of Burlington to confirm or deny the

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[80] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 9 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0222. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, 283–285.]

[81] Tinicum was a small town about thirty-three miles north of Trenton along the west side of the Delaware. "From George Washington to Brigadier General William Maxwell, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0218. *The Papers of George Washington*, 278–279. See Appendix B for definition of "linear defense."

[82] K. G. Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783*, Vol XII, (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1976), 267.

[83] See Appendix B for the definition of "defense-in-depth."

[84] Ibid, 266-267. See Map C on page 43.

feasibility of quartering troops there and to collect information of intelligence value to use in planning the offensive against Philadelphia. This reconnaissance failed. The advance guard, with Ewald leading the patrol, had a chance contact with about thirty rebels who fired a few shots and withdrew into the town where they consolidated with another fifty men. As the Hessians entered the town, the rebels delayed Donop's troops further and withdrew towards the Delaware. When they fled, they signaled to galleys in the Delaware which delivered a heavy barrage of cannon fire against Captain Ewald and Donop's Jäger troops. Donop was not prepared for a decisive engagement and so he withdrew back to the town of Bordentown where he established the British left flank.[85] The rear troops, which consisted of a reserve for the forces along the Delaware and served as a communications link with the British garrison and supply depots around Long Island and New York City, were quartered in Brunswick, Elizabethtown, Newark, and Amboy.[86]

After Lee crossed to the west side of the Hudson River, he sent Washington a letter to encourage and give hope that their forces could confront the enemy with 5,000 men. Lee was determined to acquire clothing for his troops from Tories as they moved south through New Jersey which he asserted would also produce psychological effects upon "the foes of Liberty."[87] Lee's corps was Washington's first hope to strengthen his army. They were mobilized, in the field, and under one commander. Any mobilization of the militia would take more time and was less reliable to building a formidable army against the British. Nonetheless, Washington's call for militia was unrelenting.

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[85] Captain Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter C, Fiche no 27, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 1. Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops,* MHT, 29-32. Ewald, *Diary*, 30-31.
[86] Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop,* MHT, 5.
[87] "To George Washington from Major General Charles Lee, 4 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0194. *The Papers of George Washington*, 259–260.

Washington needed a rapid response from militia as well as a plan for building an army when the enlistments of over half of the men under his command expired on December 31. Contractual limitations, desertion, surrender, and the fatigue and physical exertion from a retreat in late fall with little food and supplies created a weakened, degraded force. On December 5, Washington presented his case to Hancock for how a professional army could be more cost effective and combat effective than relying on militia or an army built from short enlistments like the current one. Washington was bitter by the failure of the New Jersey militia to respond to his call for rapid mobilization. He appealed to the manpower situation since hostilities began in April 1775 and alluded to the notion that a consistently paid army of 40,000 soldiers "would have saved money."[88] He believed that his defeats were directly the result of poor soldiering and that a standing, professional army must be raised to prevent the same situation in the future. However, this would take time, which was something that Washington did not have. He needed an opportunity.

Despite his advice to Congress to raise a professional army, Washington knew the near target for mobilizing a force to counter the British incursion into New Jersey was the militia. On the same day that he pleaded his request to Hancock for a professional army and complained about the unreliability of the militia, he ordered Colonel Richard Humpton to inquire into Lee's whereabouts and to investigate the strength of the militia with General Matthias Williamson in New Jersey.[89] Washington also wrote to Williamson directly on December 5 and 7.[90] He knew he was about to cross to the west side of the Delaware River with the remaining troops under his

[88] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 5 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0198. *The Papers of George Washington*, 262–264.
[89] "Memorandum for Colonel Richard Humpton, 5 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0200. *The Papers of George Washington*, 265.
[90] Neither one of these letters from Washington to Williamson was found but Williamson's response on December 8 mentions receipt of the letters and his reply provided Washington the information into which he ordered Humpton to investigate.

command and he knew that action would buy him some time to mobilize. How much time, he did not know. What he did know was that he needed men.

Williamson replied to Washington on December 8. He confirmed that after receiving Livingston's orders to mobilize the militia, he sent out his own orders to call the militia battalions of New Jersey and form them for immediate duty under Washington's command. The battalion commanders reported for duty, but Williamson attested that most of the rank and file did not respond. In his letter, Williamson listed colonels from Essex, Morris, Burgen, and Sussex counties who reported with an "inconsiderable" strength of force. He identified Colonel Jacob Ford, Jr. as the most influential and patriotic leader in the brigade and recommended him to command it upon Williamson's resignation.[91] Now Colonel Ford's brigade, numbering approximately 1,000 militiamen, joined Lee at Morristown. Lee reported to Washington on December 8 that his force, with the New Jersey militiamen attached, numbered approximately 4,000. He assumed that Washington's army was significantly reinforced and so he thought that his best position was to attack the enemy's rear.[92] Sometime during the day on December 8, he received the truth of Washington's beleaguered force. After traveling from Morristown to Chatham to be in a better position to harass the enemy's rear, Lee responded to Washington's desperate situation and disagreed with him that Philadelphia was Howe's next objective. Lee advised Washington that he thought Rhode Island and the other northeastern states were in a much more precarious position and so he sent a colonel and French advisor to give direction to the militia in Rhode Island. He also maintained that it would be difficult for him to join

[91] "To George Washington from General Matthias Williamson, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0220. *The Papers of George Washington*, 280–282.
[92] "To George Washington from Major General Charles Lee, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0215. *The Papers of George Washington*, 276.

Washington on the west side of the Delaware, and again insisted on focusing his efforts on the enemy's rear forces.[93]

Lee did not have Washington's perspective of the precarious situation. He assumed the British invasion of Rhode Island to be a priority over the occupation of Philadelphia. To his credit, the British sailed for Newport, Rhode Island on December 4 and were seeking an excursion towards Boston in the spring 1777.[94] However, he clearly did not have the same information as Washington. Howe expressed his calculated decision to focus the British combat power against Philadelphia as their primary target and to delay action against Boston when he wrote to Lord Germain on December 20.[95] Washington assessed Philadelphia as the British primary target while he was encamped in Brunswick. His response to Lee was clear. He corrected Lee's assumption regarding the state of Washington's army, he explained the actions of the enemy taking up posts along the east side of the Delaware River with the timely intelligence given by a prisoner caught the night before, and he maintained his position that it would be agreeable for Lee to join his army on the west side which his war council of general officers all voted for as the best course of action.[96] Since Washington began his retreat following the fall of Fort Lee, Lee had questioned Washington's ability to be the commander-in-chief. After Washington ordered Lee to cross to the west side of the North River, Lee bickered with Heath that he needed to take 2,000 of Heath's troops to accomplish his task of joining Washington's army. Between preparing his corps for movement from New York into New Jersey and trying to pressure Heath to detach a large portion of his force, Lee did not cross to the

[93] Ibid.
[94] Frederick MacKenzie, *The Diary of Frederick MacKenzie*, vol 1, (Cambridge, MA: Havard University Press, 1930), 117-123.
[95] K. G. Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783*, Vol XII, (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1976), 268-269.
[96] "From George Washington to Major General Charles Lee, 10 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0227. *The Papers of George Washington*, 288–289.

west side of the Hudson until about ten days after receiving Washington's initial orders to do so. A leadership crisis between the two came to an end with Lee's capture on the morning of December 13.[97]

Before crossing the Delaware, Washington sent orders to General Heath and Colonel John Cadwalader—one of the wealthiest merchants in Philadelphia and so the brigade commander of the Philadelphia Associators (militia).[98] To Heath, he ordered him to retire from his position guarding the passes along the North (Hudson) River and cross to the west side and march towards Morristown. Washington believed this maneuver would give additional protection to the countryside in New Jersey while also reigniting the patriot cause. He hoped it would attract attention from the enemy and force them to spread their defenses and so adjust their concentration of combat power along the Delaware.[99] Washington's letter to Cadwalader alerted him to prepare his men to march on a moment's notice. He also ordered Cadwalader to bring the Marines and Sailors in Philadelphia under his command and inquired whether the Marines and Sailors were willing to serve on land or adamantly reserve themselves for service on the water only.[100]

Following Washington's November 6 request to the Massachusetts Council for reinforcements of militia, the assembly reported to Washington on December 8 that it would

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[97] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian*, MHT, 26. "From George Washington to the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 15 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0276. *The Papers of George Washington*, 347–348. "To George Washington from Major General John Sullivan, 13 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0261. *The Papers of George Washington*, 328.

[98] *Founders Online* provides footnotes to this letter that describes Colonel John Cadwalader. "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 7 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0205. *The Papers of George Washington*, 268–269.

[99] "From George Washington to Major General William Heath, 7 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0207. *The Papers of George Washington*, 270–271. William Heath, *Memoirs of Major General William Heath*, (New York, NY: Arno Press, Inc., 1968), 90.

[100] "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 7 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0205. *The Papers of George Washington*, 268–269.

increase the number of men he requested from 4,000 to 6,000 given the dire change in the situation since early November.[101] These reinforcements would have tripled Washington's army. However, it was impossible for Washington to receive these reinforcements before the Battle of Trenton. The Massachusetts Council responded to the American victories at Trenton and Princeton in their letter to Washington on January 17, 1777, to congratulate him as they continued to mobilize their forces.[102]

In one of his first letters after establishing his headquarters on the west side of the Delaware, Washington ordered Brigadier General William Maxwell to secure boats to be used to facilitate Lee's corps in crossing the river. He entrusted Maxwell with mobilizing the militia of Pennsylvania, and those he could gather from New Jersey, to defend the ferries on Washington's left flank (north of his headquarters) and "having all the Boats, as high up as there can be the least Danger of their being procured by, or for the Use of the Enemy secured or destroyed…"[103] Washington stressed the urgency in securing boats as he believed that the British would search for boats and crossing points. This immediate action prevented Cornwallis from crossing at Corriel's Ferry the next day.

When attempting to mobilize the militia of Pennsylvania, Washington commended the response of the Philadelphia Associators but expressed frustration towards the men of Bucks County and surrounding areas. In a letter to Colonel Arthur Erwin of the Bucks County militia, he corrected the misconception that his army was strong and capable of defending Pennsylvania

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[101] "To George Washington from the Massachusetts Council, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0217. *The Papers of George Washington*, 277–278.
[102] "To George Washington from the Massachusetts Council, 17 January 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0096. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 8, 6 January 1777–27 March 1777*, ed. Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, 94.]
[103] "From George Washington to Brigadier General William Maxwell, 8 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0218. *The Papers of George Washington*, 278–279.

without reinforcements. Washington earnestly requested Erwin to march his regiment to his encampment for immediate service.[104] Meanwhile, to the south, the Pennsylvania Council clearly understood the threat to Philadelphia but not the urgency of Washington to mobilize troops for service specifically with his army. Washington's plan encompassed the whole defense of Pennsylvania and the reconstitution of his army. The Pennsylvania Council seemed solely focused on defending Philadelphia. Washington wrote to it on December 9 urging it to adjust its orders to the militia colonels to join him rather than send all the available militia to support the defense of Philadelphia.[105] The Council's response on the same day presented Washington the intelligence of Donop's brigade as far south as Bordentown with other reports of reconnaissance patrols in Burlington.[106] In several letters dated December 12, 13, and 14, the Pennsylvania Council informed Washington of its persistent effort to call the militia to arms.[107]

On December 9, Washington updated Congress on the situation. He asserted that he was unsure of the British immediate intentions but was certain that Philadelphia was their objective. He anticipated that the British would bring boats with them and believed that they would attempt a feint at one place along the river to support a crossing at another. Washington concluded by claiming that, "if we can keep the Enemy from entering Philadelphia and keep the Communication by Water open, for Supplies, we may yet make a Stand, if the Country will

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[104] "From George Washington to Colonel Arthur Erwin, 9 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0221. *The Papers of George Washington*, 282–283.
[105] "From George Washington to the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 9 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0223. *The Papers of George Washington*, 285.
[106] "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 9 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0224. *The Papers of George Washington*, 285–286.
[107] "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0249. *The Papers of George Washington*, 315. "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 13 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0260. *The Papers of George Washington*, 326–327. "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 14 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0269. *The Papers of George Washington*, 337–338.

come to our Assistance, till our new Levies can be collected."[108] Washington was building his force with all available and willing participants. His letters between December 5 and 9 displayed his resolve to rapidly mobilize forces in defense of Philadelphia while seeking an opportunity to mount an offensive. The militia heard the call, but it was over a week before it could project combat power across the river. During the ten days between December 8 and 18, Washington's hope in the militia and in continuing the cause of liberty ebbed.

By mid-December, the militia started to show themselves. Slowly, militia units began to mobilize throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In New Jersey, some of the resistance was rogue, local actors seeking to kill the enemy occupying their countryside, while others answered the call from Washington and Livingston to join with Washington's army.[109] In Pennsylvania, the Council sent Mifflin on a tour throughout the counties that were closest to Philadelphia to mobilize the militia through an incessant warning of the military situation along their eastern border. Owen Biddle, the Council Chairman, wrote to Washington on December 13 detailing their plan to raise the necessary forces. Biddle reported that the support from frontier counties was unpredictable because they had little information concerning their mobilization efforts.[110] Fortunately, only a day passed before the Council provided Washington with positive news of the militia mobilizing. On December 14, David Rittenhouse, the Council's Vice President, forwarded Washington a letter from William Attlee, Esquire of Lancaster, with the assurance that several battalions from Lancaster County would begin their march to join Washington and

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[108] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 9 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0222. *The Papers of George Washington*, 283–285.
[109] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 179.
[110] Owen Biddle's letter to Washington states that Mifflin will tour the counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, Berks, Lancaster, and Northampton. One should assume that the "frontier counties" which Biddle mentions are those to the west and north of Lancaster. "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 13 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0260. *The Papers of George Washington*, 326–327.

Attlee expected that several more battalions from Cumberland and Northampton Counties would do the same soon.[111]

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Washington's force, beyond the soldiers with which he retreated through New Jersey, was beginning to reconstitute. The greatest effects delivered against the enemy from American rebels outside Washington's Continental regulars were from the Philadelphia defenses who engaged Donop's reconnaissance patrol in Burlington on December 10.[112] Other irregular warfare actions harassed the British but were insignificant for shaping the operational environment in Washington's favor. Those actions would come. For the time, however, the effort lacked coordination and strength.

During the first two weeks of December, Washington's lines of effort were to mobilize the militia forces, gather information regarding the enemy's disposition, composition, and strength, and the defense of Philadelphia and the west bank of the Delaware River.[113] At the time Washington issued his General Orders of December 12, he had mobilized 1,500 Philadelphia Associators, 4,000 in Lee's corps in the vicinity of Morristown and Chatham, New Jersey, 1,300 under Heath's command marching from New York into New Jersey as Washington ordered him to do through a letter dated December 7, and hundreds more of Pennsylvania and

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[111] "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 14 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0269. *The Papers of George Washington*, 337–338.

[112] *Founders Online* cites Thomas Seymour as the commodore of all naval assets of the state of Pennsylvania as appointed by the Pennsylvania Council on September 26, 1776. In this letter, Washington instructs Seymour to be prepared to disrupt the enemy's reconnaissance along the river. This letter was written the same day that one of Seymour's galleys fired cannons against Donop's reconnaissance patrol in Burlington. "From George Washington to Thomas Wharton, Jr., 10 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0229. *The Papers of George Washington*, 293–294. Ewald's *Diary* and Donop's journal offer detailed accounts of their patrol. Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 1. Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian*, MHT, 29-32. Ewald, *Diary*, 30-31.

[113] See Appendix B for the definition of a "line of effort" with regards to military plans.

New Jersey militia who began to respond to Washington's urgent call to arms over the previous two weeks. Additionally, General Philip Schuyler, commander of the Northern Army responsible with securing the northern approaches from Canada, commanded Major General Horatio Gates to depart Albany and march to Washington's aid with four regiments. Washington's general orders formally established assignments for the subordinate general officers under his local command for the coordinated effort to defend the Delaware River and prevent any enemy party from attempting to cross.[114] After he issued these general orders, he then issued specific orders to Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson of the New Jersey militia, Brigadier General James Ewing of the Pennsylvania militia, and Colonel John Cadwalader of the Philadelphia Associators. In each of these orders, given on the same day as the general orders, Washington stressed the need for the utmost vigilance in their defensive positions and for them to "Spare no pains or Expense to Obtain intelligence."[115] In specific orders to Brigadier Generals William Alexander (a.k.a. "Lord Stirling"), Hugh Mercer, Adam Stephen, and La Rochefermoy, Washington expressed the same urgency to defend their sectors along the Delaware and gave specific instructions for controlling passage and maintaining their communications security. To these four generals, he did not order them to obtain intelligence as he did with Dickinson, Ewing, and Cadwalader but he did order them to seek additional recruits as a collateral duty to guarding the river.[116]

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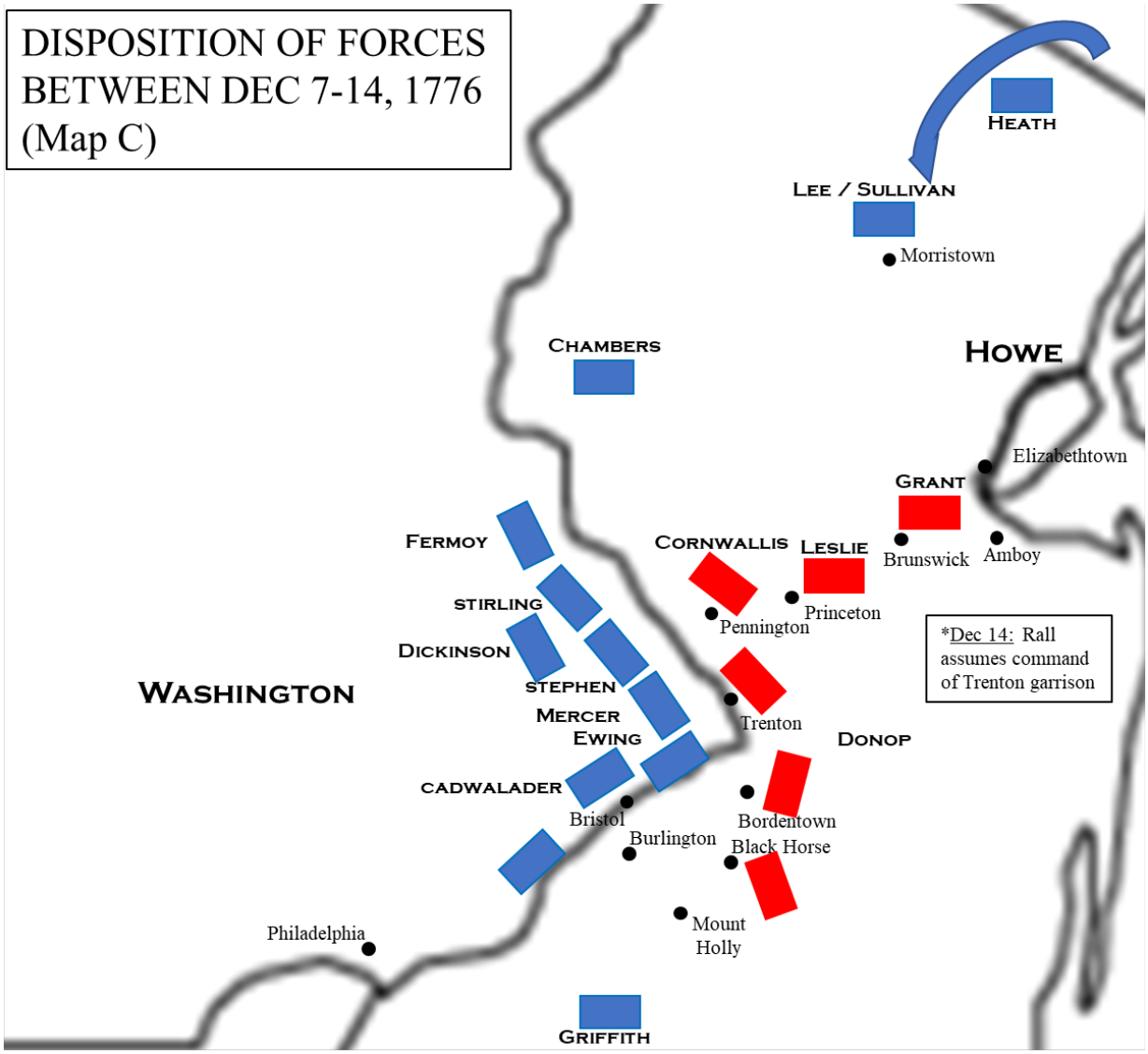
[114] "General Orders, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0239. *The Papers of George Washington*, 303–304.
[115] "Orders to Colonel John Cadwalader, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0240. *The Papers of George Washington*, 304–305. "Orders to Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0241. *The Papers of George Washington*, 305.]. "Orders to Brigadier General James Ewing, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0242. *The Papers of George Washington*, 306–307.
[116] "Orders to Brigadier Generals Lord Stirling, Hugh Mercer, Adam Stephen, and La Rochefermoy, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0243. *The Papers of George Washington*, 307–308.

Washington had enough intelligence to determine that the British front along the Delaware was as north as Pennington and as south as Bordentown. He assessed the British to be much larger in troop strength and stores than his own force. His desire was to compose enough strength between his army on the east of the Delaware and Lee's in New Jersey to mount an offensive action.[117] Before such an action could take place, he needed much more information about the enemy. His intent was to gather the necessary intelligence to formulate his offensive plan through the persistent efforts of men of Cadwalader, Ewing, and Dickinson, who were conducting irregular warfare actions and activities behind enemy lines. These special operations shaped the environment for Washington's aggressive decision to cross the Delaware on Christmas night 1776 and conduct an attack against the Hessian garrison at Trenton with near absolute surprise.

[117] See Map C on page 43.


DISPOSITION OF FORCES BETWEEN DEC 7-14, 1776 (Map C)
HEATH
LEE / SULLIVAN
Morristown
CHAMBERS
HOWE
Elizabethtown
GRANT
FERMOY
CORNWALLIS
LESLIE
Brunswick
Amboy
STIRLING
Princeton
Pennington
DICKINSON
*Dec 14: Rall assumes command of Trenton garrison
WASHINGTON
STEPHEN
Trenton
MERCER
EWING
DONOP
CADWALADER
Bristol
Bordentown
Burlington
Black Horse
Mount Holly
Philadelphia
GRIFFITH

Chapter 3

Give the Enemy All the Opposition

Washington's general orders to his army and special orders to his subordinate commanders on December 12 initiated the coordinated irregular warfare actions and activities for the militia under his command. The pressure against the Hessian patrols among the towns and rural areas along the east shore of the Delaware River increased. While the British leadership patiently waited for the Delaware River to freeze over, they underestimated the resolve and capability of the Americans. Though Washington was in no position in mid-December to mount an offensive campaign, he still possessed an offensive mindset while in the defense. Until he received an urgent request from Reed on December 22 to make an attack on the east bank of the Delaware, preferably against Trenton, Washington's primary objective was the defense of Philadelphia.[118] In all his urgency to mobilize the Pennsylvania militia, Washington recommended to the Pennsylvania Council that it retain the militia gathering from other counties for the defense of Philadelphia under the command of General Putnam.[119] Though he understood his forces to be much less than the enemy's, his focus was to fortify the city of Philadelphia rather than build up his own camp. Like any prudent general, Washington did not want to sit in the defense and wait for the British to attack. He was looking for an opportunity to strike at the enemy's weakness, which existed from their attitude of overconfidence in the military situation.

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[118] "To George Washington from Colonel Joseph Reed, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0324. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, 414–417.]

[119] "From George Washington to the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0323. *The Papers of George Washington*, 413–414.

Under the guise of entering Trenton in response to the Howe Brother's Proclamation of November 30, rebel spies operated within the populace. In his journal, Major Carl Leopold Baurmeister, a Hessian Adjutant General throughout the war, attributed an ambush by fire incident against the garrison at Trenton on December 12, to information collected from the spies.[120] In military doctrine, ambush by fire tactics seek to cause death and destruction through a heavy bombardment of ordnance without the follow-on requirement to physically sweep the kill zone.[121] The Americans sought to demonstrate their firepower, distribute harassing effects on the enemy, and maintain control of the river. Additionally, the sea power the rebel sailors provided demonstrated the resolve of Americans to come to their compatriots' aid following the Continental Army's devastating retreat across New Jersey.

On December 14, Colonel Johann Rall, a notably strong commander in the offense yet weak in the defense, assumed command of the Hessian garrison at Trenton from Donop.[122] Rall was placed under the orders of Donop and Donop maintained the command of the Hessian brigade along the Delaware River as the British most forward units.[123] Within Rall's first week of command, his posts and patrols experienced chance engagements with the rebel security patrols. Major General James Grant, the British general headquartered in Brunswick who took over command of the British forces in New Jersey when Cornwallis was sent back home,

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[120] Carl Leopold Baurmeister, *Revolution in America: Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 75.
[121] See Appendix B for the definition of "ambush (or attack) by fire."
[122] Following Rall's death and defeat on December 26, 1776, in the Battle of Trenton, many of his superiors questioned his actions, investigated the cause of defeat, and ruled that the blame was to be placed on Colonel Rall. Several British officials noted Rall's reputation as an excellent commander in the attack but weak in the defense. Despite Rall's superiors dismissing his support and reinforcement requests, they also dismissed any fault of their own for the defeat at Trenton and instead laid it all on the dead Colonel Rall. Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds, *The Spirit of 'Seventy Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants*, Vol 1, (New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), 516. Motz, F. H., *The Account of the North American War*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter AA (Part 2), Fiche no 9, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 16. Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops in America under the command of General von Heister, 1776 to June 1777*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter AA, Fiche no 3, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 40.
[123] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops*, MHT, 28.

dismissed Rall's concern stating that crossing the Delaware was not feasible in December.[124] Grant also claimed that bands of twenty to thirty rebels attempting to harass the garrisons was of no significant concern to alter his defenses.[125] Following Washington's orders of December 12, Americans began to apply significant pressure to the British defenses while Grant continued to underestimate his enemy.

Cadwalader, who commanded the brigade of the Philadelphia Associators and whose sector of Washington's defense stretched between Bristol and Dunkes Ferry, sent men to New Jersey to gather information on the enemy's composition, disposition, and strength.[126] He reported to Washington in a letter on December 15 that his patrols witnessed approximately 600 enemy soldiers moving in the vicinity of Mansfield and Black Horse (present-day Columbus, New Jersey). Through corroboration with Ewing, whose defense responsibility intersected Cadwalader's to the north along the river, their intelligence collection efforts identified 2,000 Hessians in the towns south of Trenton—these troops, were under Donop's command.[127] Washington reported these findings to Hancock on the same day he received them from Cadwalader and ensured Hancock that he was uncertain of the enemy's intention but that he had parties out to watch their movements and to provide him "an accurate opinion of their plans."[128]

Donop intended to place his troops in winter quarters in the town of Burlington. The town allowed them to establish a foothold in the vicinity of a crossing site and pose a more direct threat to Philadelphia and to the American sea power patrolling the Delaware River. The reason

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[124] Captain Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter C, Fiche no 27, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 7.
[125] Ibid, 26.
[126] "Orders to Colonel John Cadwalader, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0240. *The Papers of George Washington*, 304–305.
[127] "To George Washington from Colonel John Cadwalader, 15 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0273. *The Papers of George Washington*, 341–344.
[128] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 15 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0274. *The Papers of George Washington*, 344–345.

Donop was not able to occupy the town during his reconnaissance on December 10 was because he lacked the heavy artillery necessary to suppress the American galleys in the river and Cadwalader's troops encamped on the other side. In his report to the Hessian commander, General Leopold Philip von Heister, on December 13, Donop maintained that he was unable to occupy Burlington for winter quarters, as Howe desired, without the heavy artillery from the Kohla Grenadier Battalion.[129] The inability of the British to provide the necessary armament to Donop and his failure to occupy the town allowed the Americans' greater freedom of movement in the country south and east of Burlington. In his diary, Ewald recounted that, on December 13, his patrol intercepted a foraging party of Americans. He attacked the patrol and captured several rebels. Upon interrogation of his prisoners, he learned that Mifflin had crossed the Delaware with 1,000 men and was prepared to attack the left flank of the British army if Washington were to cross the Delaware north of Trenton. Ewald's account then skips forward to December 19 when Donop ordered him to inspect the left flank at Black Horse.[130] What occurred between December 13 and 19 south of Bordentown was unrecorded save for Cadwalader's report to Washington on December 15. It is quite possible that Ewald's prisoners gave him false information or that Ewald misunderstood Colonel Samuel Griffin for Mifflin. Griffin was an officer from Virginia who was wounded during the retreat from New York. Griffin found himself in southern New Jersey along with a small force of artillery and infantry. He mobilized the militia from the surrounding counties and commanded a force nearing 1,000 men by mid-December. Upon reconstituting a force, he fell under the command of General Putnam in

[129] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops*, MHT, 31-32.
[130] Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 31-34.

Philadelphia. [131] Washington placed Mifflin in charge of the military stores in and around Philadelphia and Putnam in command of the defense of the city. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Council sent Mifflin out to mobilize the militia in the counties between Philadelphia and the west bank of the Susquehanna River.[132] It is more likely that Putnam ordered Griffin to reconnoiter the country south of Bordentown and to harass the British left flank while preparing to mount a coordinated attack in the event Washington crossed the Delaware.[133] Griffin's base of operations was at Moorestown.[134]

As American forces began to shape the operational environment south of Bordentown, small bands of rebels incessantly harassed Rall as he settled into his new assignment. On December 14, Washington issued very direct and spirited orders to Stirling, Mercer, Stephen, and Ewing. Washington ordered his commanders to send spies across the river into Trenton and the surrounding countryside. Concurrently, Washington wished that his commanders would "give the enemy all the opposition they possibly can" if attacked at any point along the Delaware.[135] Upon receiving the instructions, his commanders took the initiative to create a position of advantage for the American forces. They projected their combat power across the river and did not wait in their defensive position for the enemy to attack. They employed spies, conducted raids and ambushes, and set fire to enemy posts. Within twenty-four hours of assuming his defensive command, Rall sent out a security patrol of six light horse dragoons to provide early warning for any American movements to the north between Pennington and the

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[131] David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 198. Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1996), 98.
[132] "To George Washington from the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 13 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0260. *The Papers of George Washington*, 326–327.
[133] Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War*, 98-99.
[134] Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 9.
[135] "From George Washington to Brigadier Generals James Ewing, Hugh Mercer, Adam Stephen, and Lord Stirling, 14 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0264. *The Papers of George Washington,* 331–333.

Delaware River. The following day, on December 16, Rall reported to Donop that one of the dragoons lied mortally wounded in a house. Rall believed the engagement to be evidence that some of Washington's troops crossed the river to join with Lee's corps—at this time, commanded by Sullivan.[136] This, however, was not the case. Washington wished Lee to join him. Moreover, Rall soon realized that these bands of men were intentionally probing his defenses.

The Americans whom Rall's patrols encountered north of Trenton were from General Dickinson's command. His efforts quickly mobilized the militia of Hunterdon County, New Jersey who had grown weary of the British and Hessian atrocities to women and children.[137] One of his subordinate commanders, Colonel David Chambers, led the bands of Hunterdon militia harassing Rall's patrols in the vicinity of Pennington, Maidenhead, and Trenton.[138] On December 17, the Hunterdon men attacked a patrol of dragoons between McConkey's Ferry and Pennington, killing one. The following day, the Americans ambushed a British patrol on the road to Maidenhead killing another dragoon and the day after that, the Hunterdon men captured three Hessians who were out foraging between Trenton and Maidenhead.[139] These irregular

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[136] Report from Colonel Carl von Donop to General von Heister, *Journal of the Hessian Troops*, MHT, 32-33.
[137] Fischer writes of how many people in New Jersey were becoming angry with how the British and Hessian invaders were giving no distinction between civilian and military and were raiding and plundering homes and property. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 191-192. Stryker includes several newspaper inserts citing the devastation which the British brought from letters written in December 1776. In a report published on December 7, 1776, in *The Pennsylvania Evening Post*, the writer states that General Howe "was obliged to allow" the English soldiers to plunder as the Hessians were doing because the English soldiers became jealous, and Howe thought he would have a mutiny on his hands if he did not allow it. The writer further states that the soldiers made "no distinction, Whig or Tory is all one to them." In the same newspaper published on December 28, "an officer of distinction in the American army" lamented over the "horrid depredations" and tells of how soldiers "ravished" women throughout the countryside, specifically a mother and her ten-year-old daughter as the father watched in horror. William S. Stryker, ed, *Documents Relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey*, Vol I, (Trenton, NJ: The John L. Murphy Publishing Company, 1901), 242, 245-247.
[138] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 191-193. In letter to Washington on December 16, Colonel Chambers reported to Washington that the British appeared to be vacating Pennington which allowed Chambers and his Hunterdon men greater freedom of movement north of Trenton and between Trenton and Princeton. "To George Washington from Colonel David Chambers, 16 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0279. *The Papers of George Washington,* 350–351.
[139] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 193. Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 10.

warfare actions in rapid succession and without regard to the strength of the British and Hessian forces in the area caused grave concern for Rall. He had no control of ground outside the perimeter of his garrison. The rebels' persistent did not allow Rall's patrols to any respite. Donop's journal entry for December 21 stated that, in response to the Americans ambushing his patrols between Trenton and Princeton, Rall sent a captain with 100 men and a cannon to urge Brigadier General Alexander Leslie, the British commander at Princeton, to send a detachment of at least "200 men to occupy Maidenhead in order to keep the communication open with Trenton."[140] Rall claimed that the number of rebels causing the disturbance around Maidenhead was said to be forty or as many as 150 men.[141] The truth was he did not know, and that uncertainty only raised his concern further.

Though he was unsure of the size of the rebel unit probing his defenses every day, Rall began to build an intelligence picture of the Americans' disposition. He concluded that a large rebel force operated out of Pennington and that Lord Stirling's brigade defended the west bank of the Delaware across from him and stretched his line to the north up to Howel's Ferry nineteen miles north of Trenton.[142] The pressure which the Hunterdon militia applied to Rall's right flank and to the line of communication with Leslie at Princeton kept Rall from ascertaining a clearer intelligence picture of the enemy to his north. However, his understanding was much better than that of his superiors who had no direct information collection assets of their own. Rall's efforts were their assets, and they discarded his requests as unnecessary.

[140] Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 12.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid, 10.

While the Hunterdon militia ambushed the patrols on Rall's right flank and to his rear, Ewing's troops raided Rall's front along the Delaware.[143] Raids and ambushes often involve a heavy volume of firepower but not all the engagements Rall's men had with the Americans in mid-December did. In most cases, the volume of fire was heavy in a relative sense because it inhibited Rall's men from responding with any effective firepower of their own. Ewing's raids displayed this concept even more distinctive than the ambushes of the Hunterdon men.

Washington ordered Ewing to defend the sector of the Delaware directly across from Trenton between the post opposite from Bordentown to the south and Yardley's Mill to the north where he connected with Dickinson's sector.[144] On December 17, thirty of Ewing's men executed a raid when they crossed the river and attacked a Jäger post positioned in a house along the river that held one non-commissioned officer and six men. Ewing's canons along the west bank of the river provided suppression while the attackers crossed in boats to attack the post and then withdrew before any reinforcement could assist the Jägers. Rall then reinforced the post with six more Jägers and a reserve of one officer and twenty men to support the post if needed. Nonetheless, these reinforcements did not deter Ewing from launching another raid the following morning with a stronger force. In the same way, fifty of Ewing's men crossed the river on the

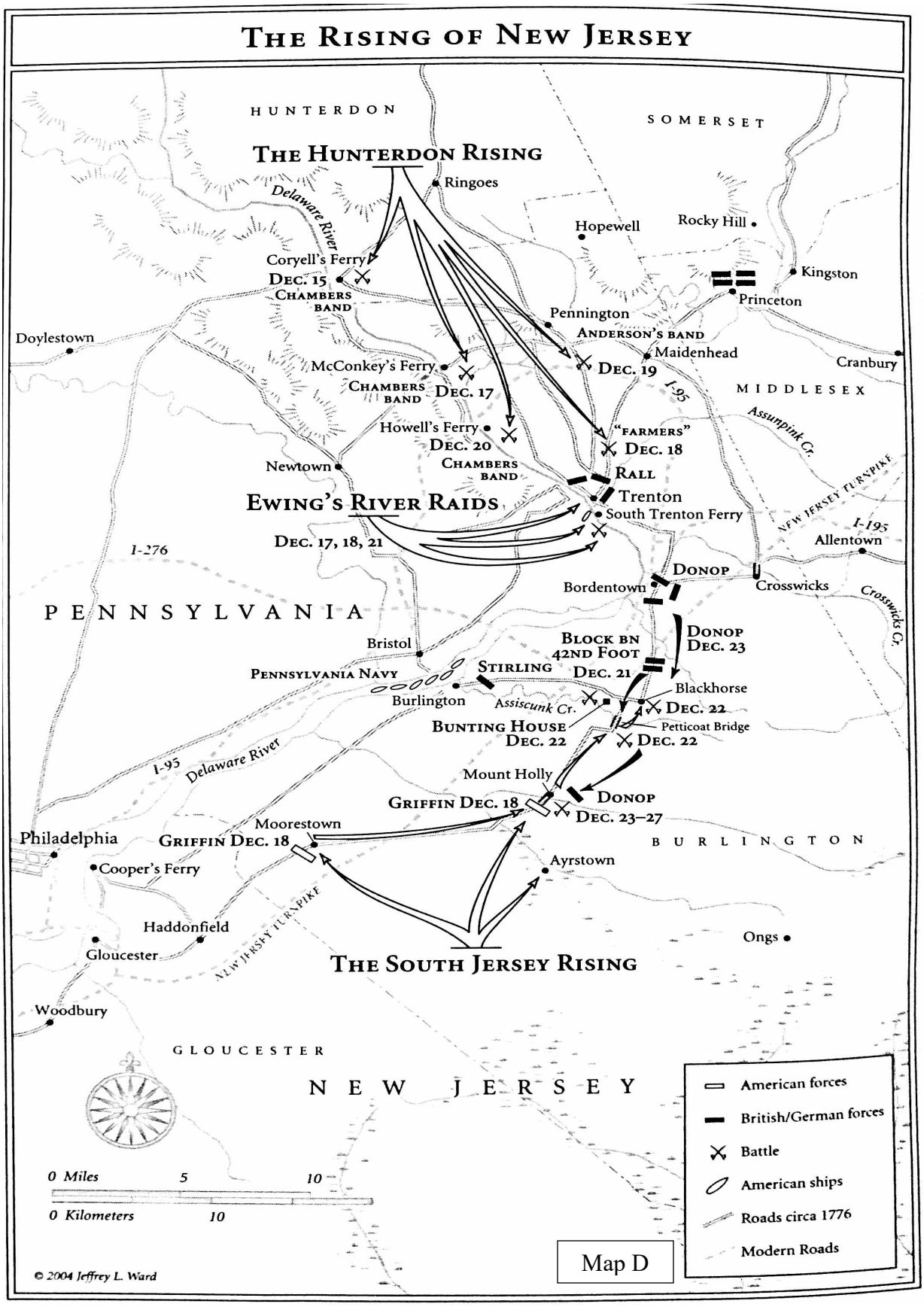
[143] These operations were intentional and representative of present-day special operations. Joint Publication 3-05: *Special Operations*, that American special operations forces (SOF) conduct direct action missions and in doing so, "SOF may employ raids, ambushes, or other direct assault tactics (including close quarters combat); emplace mines and other munitions; conduct standoff attacks by fire from air, ground, or maritime platforms; provide terminal guidance for precision-guided munitions; conduct independent sabotage; conduct anti-ship operations, as well as ship boarding and seizure (e.g., maritime interception operations)." Joint Staff, Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05: *Special Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2011), II-5. Raids and ambushes are traditional irregular warfare actions which have existed as long as war has. The tactics of raids and ambushes offered the attacker an opportunity to quickly deliver devastating and deadly effects against their enemy. The attackers move swiftly and silently to their intended position to kill the enemy and exercise speed, surprise, and an incredible violence of action to overwhelm the enemy. Raids and ambushes not only have the tactical effect of a decisive military victory but also induce a distinct psychological effect upon the one receiving the defeat. When raids and ambushes are well executed, the enemy does not see or hear the attacker until the attacker unleashes a destructive volume of firepower against the enemy.

[144] "Orders to Brigadier General James Ewing, 12 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0242. *The Papers of George Washington*, 306–307.

morning of December18 and drove the Jägers' post back again.[145] Four days into Rall's new assignment and he had no security beyond his garrison. This situation would concern any commander in the defense and cause them to request support. Rall did, but his requests were denied. He had to figure out another method to secure his post. In response to Ewing's unpredictable raids, Rall ordered his distressed men to haul a cannon down to the Jager post before dawn each morning and return it after sunrise. He also ordered the troops to not gather in large groups within range of the American artillery because each time they did, the Americans dispersed them with a bombardment.[146]

Under the cover of darkness on December 21, Ewing's men launched another psychologically devastating raid against Rall's river defenses. This time, rather than overtly rowing across the river under the suppression of artillery fire, the Americans darkened their faces, silently rowed across, and achieved complete surprise when setting fire to several houses at the ferry landing. One Hessian recorded in his journal that they had to watch out because they never knew when or how the next attack would come. Ewing's raids did not cause many casualties, but they had a significant psychological effect which impacted Rall's decision making and caused physical stress and fatigue among Trenton's defenders.[147]

[145] Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 7-8. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 195.
[146] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 195.
[147] Ibid, 195-196. See also Map D on page 53 from Fischer, 196.


THE RISING OF NEW JERSEY
HUNTERDON
SOMERSET
THE HUNTERDON RISING
Ringoes
Delaware River
Coryell's Ferry
DEC. 15
CHAMBERS BAND
Hopewell
Rocky Hill
Kingston
Princeton
Pennington
ANDERSON'S BAND
Doylestown
McConkey's Ferry
CHAMBERS BAND
DEC. 17
Maidenhead
DEC. 19
Cranbury
I-95
MIDDLESEX
Howell's Ferry
DEC. 20
CHAMBERS BAND
"FARMERS"
DEC. 18
Assunpink Cr.
Newtown
RALL
Trenton
EWING'S RIVER RAIDS
South Trenton Ferry
NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE
I-195
Allentown
DEC. 17, 18, 21
I-276
DONOP
Bordentown
Crosswicks
Crosswicks Cr.
PENNSYLVANIA
Bristol
BLOCK BN 42ND FOOT
DONOP DEC. 23
PENNSYLVANIA NAVY
STIRLING
DEC. 21
Blackhorse
Burlington
Assiscunk Cr.
DEC. 22
BUNTING HOUSE DEC. 22
Petticoat Bridge
DEC. 22
I-95
Delaware River
Mount Holly
GRIFFIN DEC. 18
DONOP
DEC. 23–27
Moorestown
Philadelphia
GRIFFIN DEC. 18
BURLINGTON
Cooper's Ferry
Ayrstown
Haddonfield
NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE
Ongs
Gloucester
THE SOUTH JERSEY RISING
Woodbury
GLOUCESTER
NEW JERSEY
0 Miles 5 10
0 Kilometers 10
American forces
British/German forces
Battle
American ships
Roads circa 1776
Modern Roads
Map D
© 2004 Jeffrey L. Ward

As Washington's army was shaping the tactical situation in front of them on the east bank of the Delaware, Washington also looked to Heath and McDougall in Morristown, New Jersey to harass the rear of the British army in New Jersey and gather information concerning the enemy's movements. He dispatched Stirling on December 14 to go to Lee's camp (although Lee was captured the day before, but Washington did not receive the word of it until the next day) and learn of the enemy's composition, disposition, and strength.[148] Washington had asked Lee to join his army on November 21.[149] By mid-December, before learning of Lee's capture, he was still insistent for Lee to join him on the west side of the river. Regardless of whether Lee was captured, his corps was still in the vicinity of Morristown and Chatham, New Jersey, and Washington needed specific information about the enemy in the area. The information he ordered Stirling to collect was critical to Washington's decision making when planning the time, space, and logistics of an operation.

By December 16, Washington learned that the British were moving back towards Brunswick to enter winter quarters. With the British withdrawing from their threatening positions, Washington ordered Heath to return to his post at Peeks Kill, New York to secure the highlands and passes along the Hudson River. However, Heath was not to return without attempting to harass and surprise the enemy if the opportunity arose during his movement back to New York.[150] Other than regular reconnaissance patrols, Heath's significant engagement while returning to Peeks Kill occurred on December 20 in Tampan, New Jersey. He surprised an enemy position at 1:00 am killing several and capturing twenty-two prisoners. He withdrew his

[148] "From George Washington to Lord Stirling, 14 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0271. *The Papers of George Washington*, 339–340.
[149] "From George Washington to Major General Charles Lee, 21 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0137. *The Papers of George Washington*, 193–195.
[150] "From George Washington to Major General William Heath, 16 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0281. *The Papers of George Washington*, 353–355.

force before the enemy could reconsolidate for a counterattack. On December 23, Heath arrived back to Peeks Kill.[151]

Unfortunately, to make matters more difficult for Washington, three days after he ordered Heath back to Peeks Kill, McDougal and Ford pleaded for Heath's return and stated clear uneasiness about the situation facing them. The information they had in Morristown gave them a strong indication that the enemy was going to attack and that they would be severely outnumbered.[152] At this time, McDougall was bed ridden from an illness and so, on December 21, Washington sent Maxwell to take over McDougall's command.[153] The militia in this part of New Jersey had still not turned out as expected and McDougall's latest estimate of the enemy that was preparing to attack outnumbered the Americans four to one.[154] Washington sent orders to Heath to join him but Heath was already at Peeks Kill when he received the message. He wished to send the ill McDougall to replace Heath in the command at Peeks Kill and for Heath to join his army. Though the militia did not turn out in the strength he first expected, Washington thought that the appearance of a stronger continental force would motivate more militia to mobilize.[155]

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[151] William Heath, *Memoirs of Major General William Heath*, (New York, NY: Arno Press, Inc., 1968), 94-95.
[152] "To George Washington from Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, 19 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0302. *The Papers of George Washington*, 376–380.
[153] "Orders to Brigadier General William Maxwell, 21 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0315. *The Papers of George Washington*, 402–403.
[154] "To George Washington from Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0321. *The Papers of George Washington*, 410–411.
[155] "From George Washington to Major General William Heath, 21 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0312. *The Papers of George Washington*, 396–397.

By December 20, Washington was still in a state of grave uncertainty and apprehension with the situation. He argued in a letter to Hancock, that "the Enemy are daily gathering strength from the disaffected; This strength, like a Snowball by rolling, will increase, unless some means can be devised to check effectually, the progress of the Enemy's Arms."[156] His concern over Philadelphia grew. By his accounts, the militia in Pennsylvania or New Jersey had not answered the call to his expectations. He lamented to Hancock that the "Militia may possibly do it for a little while; but in a little while also, the Militia of those States which have been frequently called upon, will not turn out at all, or if they do, it will be with so much reluctance and sloth as to amount to the same thing—Instance New Jersey! Witness Pennsylvania!"[157] Washington's most important issue, however, was the prospect of losing half his force ten days later when enlistments expired on December 31. Writing to Hancock, his grief was at its apex. He claimed that nothing could prevent the British from sacking Philadelphia in the winter because his army would be non-existent in ten days. He expressed his disgust of the militia and the inability to use them in any sort of coordinated operational plans. He complained of their poor turn out to repel the British occupiers and only gave credit to the physical obstacle, "the River Delaware," for opposing a British attack on Philadelphia.[158] Washington reported to Hancock that he sent Maxwell to replace McDougall and that Sullivan and Gates had just arrived in his camp. He asserted that few of his men stayed beyond their initial enlistment and closed his letter with the solemn statement that, "If Militia then do not come in, the consequences are but too evident."[159] Despite his disgust with the militia and his strong desire to have a large and a professional, standing army in the field, he knew that, at this moment in their fight for independence, the

[156] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 20 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0305. *The Papers of George Washington*, 381–389.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

militia was his main effort. What Washington was not aware of at the time of this letter was the growing beleaguered state of Rall's garrison at Trenton.

The Hessian units along the Delaware grew increasingly concerned with the presence of American forces and with the frequency of patrols and attacks on the east side of the river. In his comfortable position in Brunswick, Grant dismissed Rall's requests for support. Donop, who grew more worried about Griffin's men to his south and who was clearly unaware of Rall's impending situation, ordered Rall to send a battalion to Bordentown to reinforce his own defenses. Rall responded that he could not send any men to Donop because it was too risky. He thought an American attack would come on his right flank or his rear at any moment and so, must keep his own combat power ready for such an attack.[160] The Americans applied pressure to three sides of the British front and harassed their rear. The Hessians had no heavy artillery to support them along the river and so the Americans maintained complete control of the Delaware at all crossing points. Washington had lulled the British into a false sense of security.[161] Though the British were stronger in numbers and supplies, the Americans were shaping the operating environment in their favor.

[160] Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 13.
[161] Commager and Morris, *The Spirit of 'Seventy Six*,' 499.

Chapter 4

Christmas Night is the Time Fixed Upon[162]

One week before Washington's victory at Trenton, he confided to his brother, Samuel, his distressful situation. Washington lamented that he saw nothing to oppose Howe before the end of the year when over half of his army's enlistments expired. He mentioned that he had word that there were more militia who would be arriving but appeared to believe it would not be enough to replace the many soldiers he would lose fourteen days later, on the first of the year. He wrote to Samuel, "between you and me I think our Affairs are in a very bad way."[163] When Washington penned this letter to his brother, Dickinson, Ewing, and Cadwalader were executing his commander's intent from his order of December 12 with favorable effects.[164] Rall was becoming uneasy about the pressure from Dickinson's and Ewing's raids and ambushes, Donop thought he needed reinforcements for a pending large attack from Griffin's men to the south, and Grant, the British commander of it all, saw no real threat and continued to enjoy his comforts in winter quarters twenty-six miles to the rear. Though the military situation did not favor an American offensive yet, the opportunity was fast developing. As Howe and Grant casually waited for the Delaware River to freeze and for Washington's army to be cut by half when the

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[162] In Washington's letter to Reed on December 23, he asks if Reed's proposed action of December 22 was tried and states that he and his war council decided that "Christmas-day, at night one hour before day" was when he would attack Trenton. This letter sounds like Washington intends to attack an hour before dawn on Christmas day. Of course, the actual attack happened the day after Christmas. Either Washington's word choices were clear that he meant the morning after Christmas or, when he wrote this letter on December 23, the plan was to attack Christmas morning. In either case, at the writing of this letter, the assumption is that this planned attack on Trenton was to support Griffin's attack to the south. What Washington would soon learn is that Griffin was already in decisive contact with Donop and on December 23, Donop drove Griffin away from Mount Holly. Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds, *The Spirit of 'Seventy Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants*, Vol 1, (New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), 511. "From George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed, 23 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0329. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, 423–424.]

[163] "From George Washington to Samuel Washington, 18 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0299. *The Papers of George Washington*, 369–372.

[164] See Appendix B for the definition of "commander's intent."

enlistments ended on December 31, Washington and his commanders continued to apply pressure. That pressure moved Rall and Donop to be defensively focused and in a reactionary mode. They were not in a posture to strike but rather anxiously waited for a larger attack to come. The tense situation gave Washington his opportunity following the Battle of Mount Holly when Donop subsequently decided to remain there rather than return to Bordentown where he could mutually support Rall.

On December 22, his opportunity began to materialize. Washington's trusted military secretary, Colonel Joseph Reed, wrote to him from Cadwalader's camp in Bristol urging offensive action. He relayed the report from Griffin who was now at Mount Holly, seven miles from the enemy at Black Horse, and requested two pieces of artillery and two to three hundred men to join him from Cadwalader's camp. Griffin was in a position to mount an offensive so Reed pleaded with Washington to plan a larger attack so that Griffin's action would not be in vain. Reed asserted that the spirits of the militia were high, and that Washington should not miss this opportunity. Reed speculated that an offensive action might reignite the cause before enlistments ended and could spur more militia to action. He believed that to do nothing at such a time so critical as this would be as devastating as an actual defeat. "Delay," he wrote, "…is now equal to a total Defeat."[165] Reed asserted to Washington that if they could occupy, even a small part of New Jersey, then the effects of that victory "would be greater than if they had never left."[166] In this letter on December 22, he thought that if Washington could make some sort of diversion around Trenton—a feint—then Griffin, with the requested reinforcements from Cadwalader, could secure a victory against Donop's troops on the British left wing. Such an action may have assisted Griffin, but there was no time for it.

[165] "To George Washington from Colonel Joseph Reed, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0324. *The Papers of George Washington*, 414–417.
[166] Ibid.

On December 19, Ewald, Donop, and Colonel Thomas Sterling (also, Lord Sterling), commander of the Forty-Second Highlanders, inspected the left wing at Black Horse and then moved to Mount Holly to reconnoiter the area. Ewald claimed that he "obtained information" that Griffin had 2,000 men with him.[167] However, according to Reed's letter to Washington on December 22 and the Tory spy, Bazilla Haines, who lodged in Griffin's camp the night of December 21-22, there were only 600-800 men.[168] Furthermore, Donop recorded in his journal information he received on December 21 and 22 regarding the strength of Griffin's force. On December 21, he noted receiving reports of 1,000 rebels coming to Mount Holly with another 2,000 enroute, and on December 22, he documented that Griffin had 800 now at Mount Holly.[169]

Between December 19 and 21, Donop ordered Ewald to reconnoiter Burlington to determine if the galleys still controlled the river and to investigate the areas north of Mount Holly and between Burlington and Black Horse. By the afternoon of December 22, Ewald was reinforced with an officer and fifty grenadiers and posted at the Bunting House on high ground where the roads from Mount Holly and Burlington intersected. Shortly after taking his position, Ewald interdicted an American patrol who then fled toward Burlington. As soon as he finished his pursuit of these forces, he heard heavy small arms fire coming from Black Horse and deduced that the Americans must have attacked Donop's troops there. Donop's troops repelled the attack and the Americans suffered heavy losses. As Ewald arrived at the fighting, Donop ordered him to rest his troops and prepare for an attack to finish the job of evicting the rebels

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[167] Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 34.
[168] "To George Washington from Colonel Joseph Reed, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0324. *The Papers of George Washington*, 414–417. Commager and Morris, *The Spirit of 'Seventy Six*,' 509.
[169] Captain Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, Marbury Hessian Transcripts, Lidgerwood Collection, Letter C, Fiche no 27, (Morristown National Historic Park Library, NJ), 11-13.

from the area on the next day.[170] Donop immediately advised Rall of the ensuing battle so that he would be on his guard—either to reinforce Donop or to be prepared for an attack from the north.[171]

As Griffin occupied Mount Holly with less than 1,000 troops, he was certainly not prepared to enter a decisive engagement but more likely attempting to distance Donop's troops from Rall's—either to prevent Rall from reinforcing Donop or prevent Donop from reinforcing Rall when Washington attacked Trenton. The action was premature but achieved its desired affects through mere coincidence or divine intervention. Griffin sent an advance guard north of Mount Holly to lure Donop's advancing columns into the town. The town's dwellings would allow Griffin's much inferior force to deliver effective fire on the approaching enemy columns before withdrawing into the woods to the south. On the morning of December 23, Donop and Sterling set off with over 2,000 men from Black Horse and moved south towards Mount Holly. As Donop order Sterling and Ewald to the right to cut off Griffin from Mount Holly, he attacked the center and left with his columns. Griffin's advance guard quickly withdrew back to the town and consolidated with the main body. Fighting ensued in the town and the Hessians quickly evicted Griffin's men from Mount Holly and pursued them into the woods. The Battle of Mount Holly was a tactical and swift victory for the British - over 200 men were captured, two cannon seized, and over 100 men were killed on both sides.[172]

As was custom for the Hessians and British throughout New Jersey over the preceding month, following their decisive victory, the soldiers commenced to plunder the town, specifically

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[170] Ewald, *Diary*, 34-38.
[171] Wagner, *Journal of Colonel von Donop, 1776*, MHT, 13.
[172] Adam E. Zielinski, "The Engagement at Woodlane: Precursor to the Battle of Iron Works Hill, A Key to the American Victory at Trenton," *Journal of the American Revolution*, December 5, 2016, accessed April 13, 2022, https://allthingsliberty.com/2019/12/the-engagement-at-woodlane-precursor-to-the-battle-of-iron-works-hill-a-key-to-the-american-victory-at-trenton/. Ewald, *Diary,* 38-39.

the wine and liquor stores. The drinking and celebration began following the battle and lasted through Christmas. Ewald tried to keep his Jägers sober for the continued patrolling which Donop ordered him to do along the rebel's route of withdraw and to reconnoiter Burlington again on Christmas Eve.[173] The Hessian Jägers were a light-infantry unit, used as advance guards in front of the larger, conventional body of troops.[174] They were also the force of choice for reconnaissance missions. Ewald did not stay in Mount Holly long after the fighting before he pursued the fleeing rebels and patrolled the area towards Burlington. However, the conventional soldiers were likely drunk in Mount Holly and unprepared for any follow-on operation.

While Donop's soldiers enjoyed their victory by emptying the local wine stores, he celebrated his with a local widow he had met. Ewald recorded that Donop set up his rest quarters in the home of a beautiful young widow.[175] Ewald claimed that Donop was "led by the nose to Mount Holly by Colonel Griffin and detained there by love."[176] As was his intention, Griffin drew Donop into the streets of Mount Holly to break up his formations before withdrawing his own much inferior force into the woods to his rear. However, Donop remained focused only on his tactical situation, which he had in hand. He did not consider the operational implications of staying in Mount Holly. In Bordentown, Donop was close enough to Rall for the two to mutually support each other in the event one was attacked. Mount Holly doubled the distance between the two colonels and prevented any chance of mutual support.

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[173] Ewald, *Diary*, 39.
[174] Baurmeister provided a detailed description of the Jäger units in his account of the war. "They were light troops, both foot and horse, and carried rifles…[They were] experienced [and] all well-trained marksmen…The jägers usually operated as detachments rather than a corps. These detachments were employed to great advantage in reconnoitering and patrol duties and in guarding foraging parties and headquarters. During several campaigns, jäger detachments served as adjuncts to infantry regiments…Because of their accurate fire and their valor, they were greatly feared by the Americans." Carl Leopold Baurmeister, *Revolution in America: Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 16.
[175] Ewald, *Diary*, 42.
[176] Ibid, 44.

The operational situation, which was shaping to favor the Americans, was not part of their plan. Griffin did not seek to draw Donop into Mount Holly because he understood Washington was going to cross the Delaware River and attack Trenton. He certainly knew that Donop and Rall would not be able to support each other if Donop was in Mount Holly rather than Bordentown. However, if this attack was coordinated with Washington's, then Washington's time of attack should have been the early morning hours of December 24 rather than forty-hours later. Donop had ample time to return to Bordentown and reconsolidate his force to support Rall when Washington attacked on the morning of December 26. Instead, to no determinable action on the part of the Americans, Donop remained in Mount Holly by a sheer stroke of luck—or as Ewald attests, love.

When Reed wrote to Washington on December 22, urging Washington to conduct an offensive action, Griffin was already in contact with Donop's forces.[177] Griffin may have been aware that Reed and Cadwalader pleaded to Washington to use an opportunity Griffin might provide him but at the time, there was no planned coordinated attack. When Washington replied to Reed setting the time for his attack on Trenton as Christmas night, Griffin was already battling Donop in the streets of Mount Holly.[178] The following day, Washington wrote to Cadwalader to coordinate an attack with him and Griffin. Cadwalader's letter in response to Washington the same day was not found. When Washington attempted to coordinate an attack with Cadwalader and Griffin, he was unaware of Griffin's defeat at Mount Holly and that Griffin had become ill.[179]

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[177] "To George Washington from Colonel Joseph Reed, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0324. *The Papers of George Washington*, 414–417.
[178] "From George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed, 23 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0329. *The Papers of George Washington*, 423–424.
[179] "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 24 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0332. *The Papers of George Washington*, 425–426.

On the evening of December 22, following Reed's call to action, Washington convened his war council to discuss the situation and deliberate their options. The following day, he issued orders for an attack on Christmas night.[180] On Christmas Eve, Dickinson sent spies across the river to gather information regarding Rall's position in and around Trenton and informed Washington that the spy would return Christmas morning and report his findings directly to Washington's headquarters.[181] Concurrently, Reed (or possibly some other spokesman for Washington) traveled to Mount Holly to request a meeting with Donop so that the two could discuss prisoner exchange. Ewald believed that this was a reconnaissance to investigate whether Donop was still in Mount Holly or if he had returned to Bordentown.[182] Donop's location was critical information to plan an offensive.[183] If Donop had returned to Bordentown, Washington's planned attack against Trenton may have needed to wait until Griffin or Cadwalader could attempt to divert Donop again. Washington did not have much time. If he was going to mount an offensive operation, he needed to do so before the year was out. In a letter to Hancock on Christmas Eve, Washington made no mention of his intended war plans yet continued to stress Howe's desire to occupy Philadelphia once the Delaware River froze over and once half of

[180] "From George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed, 23 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0329. *The Papers of George Washington*, 423–424. David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 203.
[181] "To George Washington from Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson, 24 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0336. *The Papers of George Washington*, 427–428.
[182] Ewald, *Diary,* 39. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 203.
[183] Donop's location was a commander's critical information requirement (CCIR) for Washington. Commander's Critical Information Requirement (CCIR): "CCIRs are elements of friendly and enemy information the commander identifies as critical to timely decision making. They focus [information management] (IM) and help the [joint force commander (JFC—in this case, George Washington)] and staff assess the [operating environment] (OE)." Joint Staff, Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0: *Joint Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2017), II-7.

Washington's army disbanded when their enlistments expired on December 31.[184] Washington's war council reconvened on Christmas Eve night to work out the plans in detail.[185]

On Christmas morning 1776, the officers and men of the American army awoke to the general orders from Washington which placed them on course to participate in one of the most revered military actions in American history.[186] These orders were likely issued following the return of one of Dickinson's men who was sent to spy in and around Trenton on a final reconnaissance mission before the attack, and the report that Donop remained in Mount Holly.[187] Though Griffin's action in Mount Holly was two days old, Washington still urged Cadwalader to attempt an attack against Donop, or at the very least, a diversion.[188] Regardless of what combat power Cadwalader could apply against Donop, Washington's decision to cross the Delaware River on Christmas night and attack Trenton an hour before daybreak was final.[189] He now had his opportunity, but the British were not entirely unprepared.

Of all people, Grant had an embedded spy in Washington's headquarters and became concerned when the spy reported that Washington was planning an offensive operation. Grant was anxious but still underestimated the Americans' capabilities. He advised Rall to be on his guard against an unsuspected attack but also maintained that he did not believe that Washington would try such an operation. Rall received several other warnings from deserters from the American camp that Washington was planning to cross the river. Rall's men had been worn out

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[184] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 24 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0338. *The Papers of George Washington*, 429–432.
[185] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 203.
[186] "General Orders, 25 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0341. *The Papers of George Washington*, pp. 434–438.
[187] "To George Washington from Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson, 24 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0336. *The Papers of George Washington*, 427–428.
[188] "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 25 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0342. *The Papers of George Washington*, 438–439.
[189] Ibid. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 209.

by the raids and ambushes against their patrols and outposts; however, Rall believed that a beleaguered, undisciplined American army was no match for his well-trained Hessians in an open battle. For eight days, Rall's men consistently patrolled the area. They were ambushed, harassed, and suffered fatigue from little sleep. They did not know when each attack would come. Despite previous histories claiming that the Hessians at Trenton were drunk from Christmas celebrations, the Hessians' Christmas was actually one of sober, disciplined soldiers taking actions to defend their garrison against the looming threat of the American attack. After night fell on Christmas evening, forty to fifty Americans attacked one of Rall's outposts, resulting in six wounded Hessians before the Americans disappeared into the woods. The Americans kept the pressure on Rall's men up until hours before the army crossed the Delaware River. On Christmas night, a heavy nor'easter rolled through the area. Assuming the Americans would not cross the Delaware and attack under such weather conditions, Rall saw an opportunity to rest his men so that they would be more prepared for the ensuing battle that seemed imminent in the coming days. He assessed that the weather was unfavorable for a river crossing followed by a coordinated attack against his fortified garrison.[190]

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Since the fall of Fort Washington over a month earlier, Washington had lost significant manpower and military stores and provisions as his enemy rapidly evicted his army from one place after another. He attempted to bring Lee's Corps to join him when he was at Hackensack, New Jersey but the British pursued Washington much too fast for Lee's slow response. Reed and Lee questioned Washington's actions and decision making and wondered if he could carry

[190] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 203-205, 232.

on the duties of the commander-in-chief or if they should go to Congress and petition it for a change in leadership.

Washington was optimistic that the New Jersey militia would immediately respond to the urgency of the situation and come to his aid when he was at Newark for a week. The militia did not respond with any adequate force. The British then pushed the Americans to New Brunswick where the Americans attempted to delay the British advance for a day but after a week and a half of retreating and losing considerable amounts of their supplies, they were no match for the superior strength of the British army.

As Washington retreated across New Jersey to the Delaware River, he received intelligence that Howe wished to occupy Philadelphia. He sounded the alarm and called for a rapid mobilization of the Pennsylvania militia and gave orders to Putnam and Mifflin for the city's defense. He continued to urge the New Jersey militia to answer his spirited call to arms and oppose the British and Hessian occupiers. From November 21, when he first ordered Lee to join him, to December 15 when he received word of Lee's capture, Washington pressed Lee to mass his corps together with Washington's army.

As some militia began to mobilize in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, it was not to the strength which Washington had hoped. As late as December 18, in a letter to his brother, he gravely surmised that the struggle for liberty was all but over. Even on December 20, he maintained, in a letter to Hancock, that he did not see anything that could stop Howe from attacking Philadelphia when the Delaware River froze over and, after the new year, when the strength of his force would be nearly cut in half.

Four days after crossing the Delaware River from Trenton to Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Washington issued specific orders for the defense of Pennsylvania. These orders

were offensively focused and provided much flexibility to how his commanders could execute them. The comfortable situation in which the Hessian garrisons along the river thought they had was soon disrupted by small bands of American soldiers to the Hessians' front, right flank, left flank, and even at times, in their rear. The Hessians became weary of the attacks. Rall's requests were unheard by Grant, his unengaged and unaware commander. Donop believed the greatest threat was from Griffin's force to his south and seemed ill-advised of the situation surrounding Rall's garrison. Following Donop's victory at Mount Holly, he merely returned to his comforts and celebrated Christmas with drinks and love. Meanwhile, Rall remained alert. He knew his men were fatigued from a week of constant patrolling, enemy attacks, and long hours on guard. The nor'easter that arrived Christmas night was a relief. Rall assessed that it was unlikely that Washington could cross the Delaware River with enough men to attack and do so with any sort of a coordinated effort in such a heavy storm of snow and hail.

Washington had his opportunity. There was now five days before he would lose much of his army to the expiration of their enlistments. An action needed to happen. Washington was a maneuverist and he knew that sitting in his defensive position and waiting for the British to attack Philadelphia was only going to delay the Americans' demise. The Americans needed a victory. They needed to strike and reoccupy parts of New Jersey which they had lost a month earlier. Washington believed, as did Reed, that such a victory would reinvigorate the cause and draw the manpower and logistics support his army desperately needed.[191]

Shaping operations were successful. Between the bold initiative of Washington's subordinate leaders and the persistent irregular warfare actions of their soldiers, the operational environment had changed towards favoring an American attack. Not all the Americans' actions

[191] "To George Washington from Colonel Joseph Reed, 22 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0324. *The Papers of George Washington*, 414–417.

were intentional to shape the operating environment for Washington to attack Trenton and certainly not all the actions were within his control. Griffin lured Donop away from Trenton, but the timing of that action did not favor an attack on Trenton until Washington confirmed that Donop decided to remain at Mount Holly. Washington still prepared to have Cadwalader divert Donop from interfering in his attack against Trenton.[192] Furthermore, the unpredictable heavy snow and hailstorm that rolled into the area would have deterred the most disciplined, well-trained army from commencing an attack under such conditions. Rall assumed that the ragged American rebels, whose spirits were weakened following the retreat through New Jersey and whose shoe and clothing supply was inadequate for a winter campaign would not attempt such a military action. Despite its weakened state, Washington's army applied the necessary pressure to shape the operating environment for an attack against Trenton and carried it out amid a nor'easter storm.

[192] "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 25 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0342. *The Papers of George Washington*, 438–439. "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 25 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0343. *The Papers of George Washington*, 439. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 209.

Chapter 5

The Utter Loss of the Thirteen Splendid Provinces

Washington's decision to cross the Delaware River and attack Trenton on Christmas night 1776 is regarded as not only a pivotal moment in American history but also in the history of the entire Western World.[193] Washington's crossing the Delaware River to attack Trenton was a turning point in the war during its early years. Though the British eventually sacked Philadelphia, Washington's victory in the Christmas Campaign bought him and Congress time to raise a professional army with longer enlistments. Without his bold action to cross the Delaware River and mount an offensive against the British, the American cause would have likely collapsed when over half of Washington's force planned to leave the army on January 1, 1777, and Howe planned to occupy Philadelphia. Understanding the American victory in the three battles of the Christmas Campaign within the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war allow historians to grasp the military significance of the victory for the Americans at that point in the war.[194] Additionally, such an understanding allows historians to comprehend the military necessity of the irregular warfare actions and activities which shaped the operational environment for Washington's attack.

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[193] In his Editor's Note to Fischer's *Washington's Crossing*, James McPherson claimed that "of all the pivotal events in American history, none was more important than what happened on those nine days from December 25, 1776, to January 3, 1777." McPherson adds that Fischer set Washington's crossing in the "social and political context of a major transformation in the history of the Western World." Washington's crossing of the Delaware River on Christmas night to attack Trenton was arguably the boldest and most courageous decision he made in those nine days. In his introduction, Fischer argued that Washington's crossing and the events that followed had an impact "not only in America but in Britain and Germany and throughout the world." David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), ix.

[194] War planners and strategists conceive war as an extension of politics across three levels: tactical, operational, and strategic. The tactical level is the means of securing battlefield victories while the strategic level meets national political objectives. The operational level connects the tactical to the strategic through the art of war campaigning where military leaders maneuver forces and provide logistics support for a theater of operations. Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1: *Warfighting*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), 2-7—2-10.

The victory in the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776, was an immediate blow to the British. It was a decisive tactical victory for the Americans and boosted their spirits, but it was, in no way, an operational victory. Though the number of captured Hessians increases slightly in the following days' reports, Washington's initial report to Congress of the victory lists twenty-three officers and 886 men, while Colonel Rall was mortally wounded and another twenty to thirty killed. The Americans suffered only two officers and two privates wounded, and two privates killed. Washington wrote this letter to Hancock on December 27 from his secured defensive position on the west bank of the Delaware. Following the victory, Washington made the decision to return across the river rather than pursue his enemy.[195]

His decision was a calculated one; he understood that the American position on the east shore of the river was precarious. Despite a well-coordinated attack, Ewing and Cadwalader were unable to cross the river due to the density of the ice floats.[196] This left Washington's army in Trenton squeezed between the British garrison in Princeton and Donop's forces in Mount Holly. At the time of the attack, Washington was unaware of how many of Donop's troops were still in Bordenton and how many were with him in Mount Holly. There were also considerable stores of liquor in Trenton, and so Washington was concerned that his troops' discipline would suffer if left to their own vices to enjoy the fruits of victory. He wanted to secure the army's tactical gains and seek the counsel of his subordinate commanders for *how* and *if* to conduct follow-on operations.[197]

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[195] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 27 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0355. *The Papers of George Washington*, 454–461.
[196] "To George Washington from Colonel John Cadwalader, 26 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0347. *The Papers of George Washington*, 442–444.
[197] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 27 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0355. *The Papers of George Washington*, 454–461. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 263-266. William S. Stryker, ed, *Documents Relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey*, Vol I, (Trenton, NJ: The John L. Murphy Publishing Company, 1901), 248-249.

From his headquarters in Pennsylvania, Washington began to reconsolidate and plan to further their offensive against the British. He would need men who were no longer fighting out of duty to their contracts but out of existential necessity for their country, their countrymen, and their own families. Washington continued his inspirational call to duty in his general orders of December 27.[198] His intent was clear. The army was going to cross the Delaware and continue to attack a disorganized enemy. He had a position of advantage, not geographically speaking, but he had control of the next military action for the time being. If he was to refrain from action, his army would find itself back on the defensive, with enlistments expiring, and a British force no longer underestimating their enemy but prepared for a renewed offensive with an increase of combat power. Washington needed to act and there was not time for prolonged celebrations.

The war council met on the evening of December 27 and conceived the plan to cross the Delaware and consolidate their forces in Trenton. The following morning, Washington issued the orders.[199] Washington intended to drive the British out of New Jersey. He wrote to Maxwell in Morristown to coordinate efforts. He hoped Maxwell could influence the militia and Continentals with him to join the offensive with a renewed spirit.[200] Maxwell was in a position in Morristown to divert the enemy's combat power away from Washington's main attack and prevent the British from harnessing all their strength in a counteroffensive against Washington. Washington's tactical victory at Trenton on December 26 provided him an opportunity to gain an operational victory in the Northern Theater of the war. Meanwhile, as plans were crafted and armies repositioned, irregular warfare activities persisted.

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[198] "General Orders, 27 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0351. *The Papers of George Washington*, 448–449.
[199] "General Orders, 28 December 1776 [letter not found]," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0360. *The Papers of George Washington*, 464. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 265-266.
[200] "From George Washington to Brigadier General William Maxwell, 28 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0367. *The Papers of George Washington*, 472–473.

Between December 29 and 30, Washington's army crossed the river back to Trenton. Washington, himself, crossed on the morning of December 30. On January 1, he reported to Hancock an estimate of his army's strength. He could not give an accurate number because many had fallen ill but his estimate was that about 2,200 crossed the Delaware with him but only 1,500 were now fit for duty. Additionally, both Mifflin and Cadwalader had 1800, respectively. Washington's force amounted to a little more than 5,000 soldiers.[201] His calls for the militia to mobilize still reverberated throughout New Jersey and many answered the call.[202]

Trenton was an unfavorable plot of land to defend. Therefore, Washington set up his defensive positions on the south side of Assunpink Creek.[203] Rather than attempt to defend the town, as Rall did, and be vulnerable to attack on all sides, Washington placed his forces where the British columns would be channelized in their attack, allowing the Americans to bear a heavy volume of firepower upon them. Washington regained his foothold on the east short of the river and prepared his plans for a renewed offensive.

Reed, who was instrumental in delivering intelligence to the commander-in-chief, knew the area around Trenton and Princeton very well and was educated at Princeton College before the war. On December 30, Washington ordered Reed to take a patrol to Princeton and conduct reconnaissance and surveillance on the enemy's positions. The patrol approached the town from the south and, as they neared it, encountered a foraging patrol of twelve British dragoons. They conducted a hasty raid on the house in which the dragoons were plundering and captured all but one. They returned with their prisoners to Trenton, and, on the evening of December 30, the

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[201] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 1 January 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0398. *The Papers of George Washington*, 503–505.
[202] One British traveler named Nicholas Cresswell, attributed the victories at Trenton and Princeton to the vast number of new recruits "from every county on the continent" coming to join the army and he further claims that "the rascals will be stronger than ever." Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds, *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants*, Vol 1, (New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), 519.
[203] See Map E on page 76. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 294.

prisoners offered valuable knowledge concerning the British strength and intentions in Princeton. The prisoners indicated that the British were mustering 8,000 troops in Princeton and preparing to attack Trenton.[204]

In addition to reconnaissance patrols, espionage efforts from both armies were ongoing. In a letter to Washington on December 31, Cadwalader reported findings from a local spy who was not employed by the Americans but who both sides exploited for information. The spy had spent the previous night with British officers, who Cadwalader labeled "Americans"—likely Tories commissioned in the British Army— and had offered them misleading information. The spy relayed to Cadwalader that the British officers believed the American army to be weak in numbers and dispirited causing many to continue to desert daily. He was also able to provide sound intelligence of the disposition of the British garrison at Princeton and that it expected an American attack at any moment.[205] Despite the anxiety of the British rank and file in anticipation of an attack, the British were consolidating forces and supplies at Princeton and Howe even decided to pull Cornwallis away from boarding a ship back to Britain to attend to his ailing wife and ordered him to lead the offensive operation to dispose of the rebel army.[206]

Cadwalader also employed his own spies. In the same letter to Washington, he mentioned "our spy" was in the vicinity of the eleven British dragoons whom Reed's patrol captured on December 30. Cadwalader further reported that a patrol of light horse brought in about thirty cattle that were left by the fleeing Hessians.[207] Since Washington issued his general orders on December 12, his army had conducted irregular warfare actions and other clandestine

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[204] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 279-280.
[205] "To George Washington from Colonel John Cadwalader, 31 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0386. *The Papers of George Washington*, 491–495. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 280-281.
[206] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 290-291. Commager and Morris, *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six,'* 518.
[207] "To George Washington from Colonel John Cadwalader, 31 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0386. *The Papers of George Washington*, 491–495.

activities on a consistent basis. Following victory in the Battle of Trenton, the Americans continued their persistent shaping actions for follow-on operations. This first significant tactical victory since the British landed on Long Island would quickly lead to two more, delivering to Congress and the American people an operational environment from which to harass the British in New Jersey, prosecute a forage war, and encourage new recruits so that Washington could grow a professional army and not be hindered by short enlistments.[208]

The last action before the Second Battle of Trenton on January 2, 1777, occurred on the morning of January 1. After receiving the intelligence from the young man who had spent a night with British officers who disclosed the British intentions to him, Washington sent a covering force of about 1,000 men and an artillery battery with orders to delay any British force marching from Princeton to Trenton.[209] This mission was another one offensively-focused and would enable the Americans to maintain the advantage and wear down their enemy before the impending larger battle at Trenton on the following day. The patrol established a hasty defensive position about six miles south of Princeton along the road to Trenton. They were soon discovered but not easily removed. The Americans put up a stiff resistance and only lost four killed while killing and wounding over 100 of the enemy. They executed delaying tactics very well and did not leave the pass "until the grenadiers were brought up against [them]."[210]

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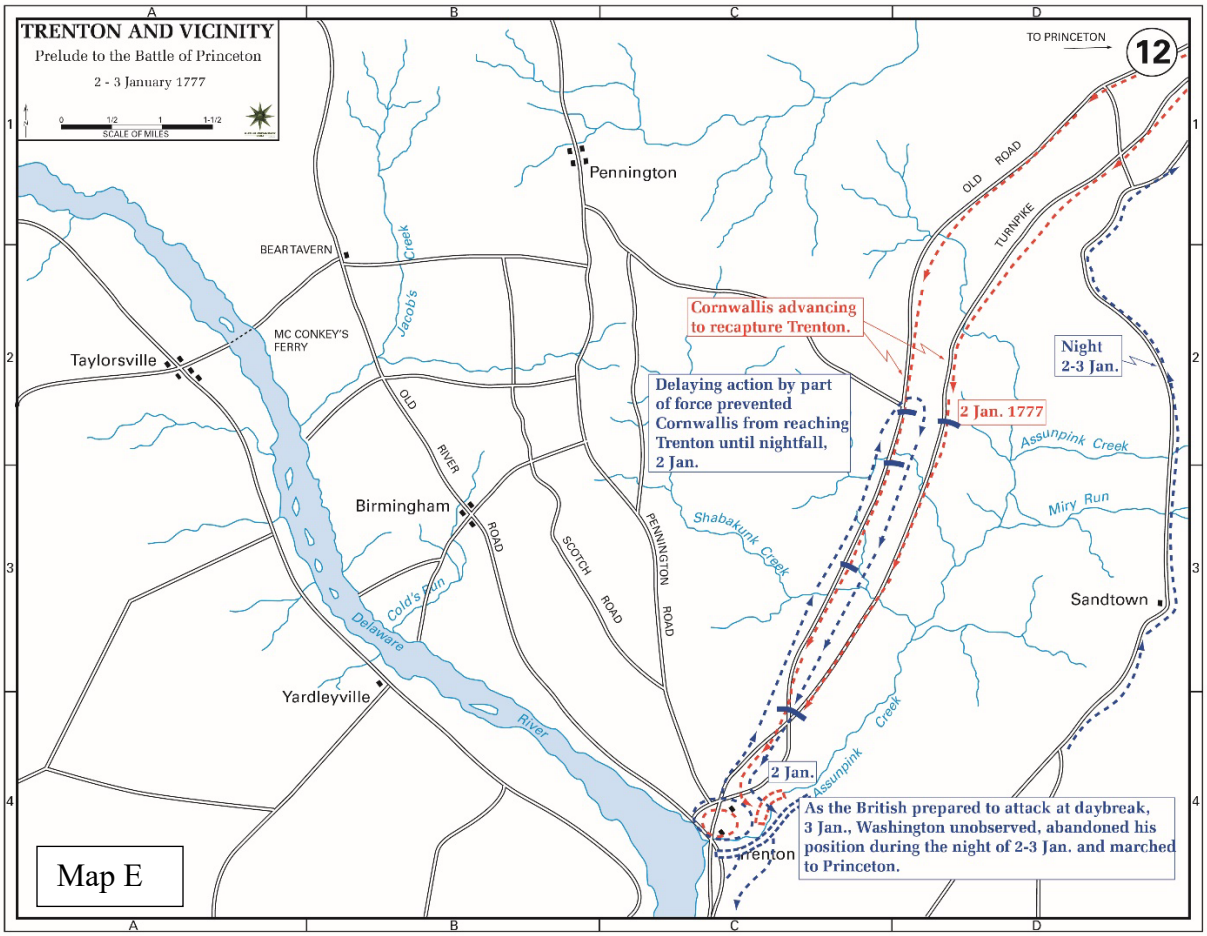
[208] The "Forage War" in New Jersey was only possible because of the operational and strategic successes following the Christmas Campaign. Tonsetic mentions the forage war in New Jersey in January to the spring 1777. Robert L. Tonsetic, *Special Operations During the American Revolution*, (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2013), 141. Kwasny also discusses the militia's actions during the 1777 forage war in New Jersey. Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 113-117.

[209] An artillery battery is six canons. A "covering force" is defined as "1. A force operating apart from the main force for the purpose of intercepting, engaging, delaying, disorganizing, and deceiving the enemy before the enemy can attack the force covered. 2. Any body or detachment of troops which provides security for a larger force by observation, reconnaissance, attack, or defense, or by any combination of these methods." Joint Staff, Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02: *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), 61. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 281-283.

[210] Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 48. "A delay involves a force under pressure trading space for time by slowing down the enemy's momentum. Its goal is to inflict maximum damage on the enemy without becoming decisively engaged." Headquarters, United



While the American covering force delayed the enemy throughout the day and into the next, Washington met with his war council and devised a plan to conduct an enveloping movement against Cornwallis while Cornwallis assumed he would simply "bag the fox" the next morning.[211] In a letter from McDougall in Morristown on December 29, before he relinquished command of the Continentals and militia at that place to Maxwell, he reported the British strength in eastern New Jersey between Elizabethtown, New-Bridge, Newark, Waldeckers,

States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-0: *Marine Corps Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2011), 8-9. See Map E on page 76. United States Military Academy at West Point, "Prelude to the Battle of Princeton, 2-3 January 1777," *The American Revolution War*, accessed May 02, 2022, https://www.westpoint.edu/academics/academic-departments/history/american-revolution.

[211] Commager and Morris, *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*,' 518.

Bonum Town, Brunswick, and Pluckhimin to be over 2,000 possible reinforcements.[212] Washington needed to act fast if he was to remain on the offense. In several letters to McDougall, Maxwell, and Heath, he had already urged them to harass the enemy in their quarter or to create whatever diversion they could in support of his maneuvers.[213] Following the war council's deliberations on New Year's night, he decided to bring Cadwalader's brigade, which was encamped seven miles away, to join the army in Trenton. Benjamin Rush agreed to deliver the message. He arrived at 1:00 am on January 2, with the orders from Washington for Cadwalader and Mifflin to join him by 6:00 pm at the latest.[214] No further information was necessary to express the reason for the immediate movement.

During the late morning hours of January 2, the Americans were alerted to war drums signaling that the enemy was advancing. Though some desired rest after their long march through the night, all prepared for battle. At this point, their spirits were high and their confidence in their commander-in-chief was firm. As the British advanced towards Trenton, the American covering force continued to delay and harass their advance. By nightfall, Cornwallis's force occupied the town, and the Americans held a position of advantage on the south side of Assunpink Creek.[215]

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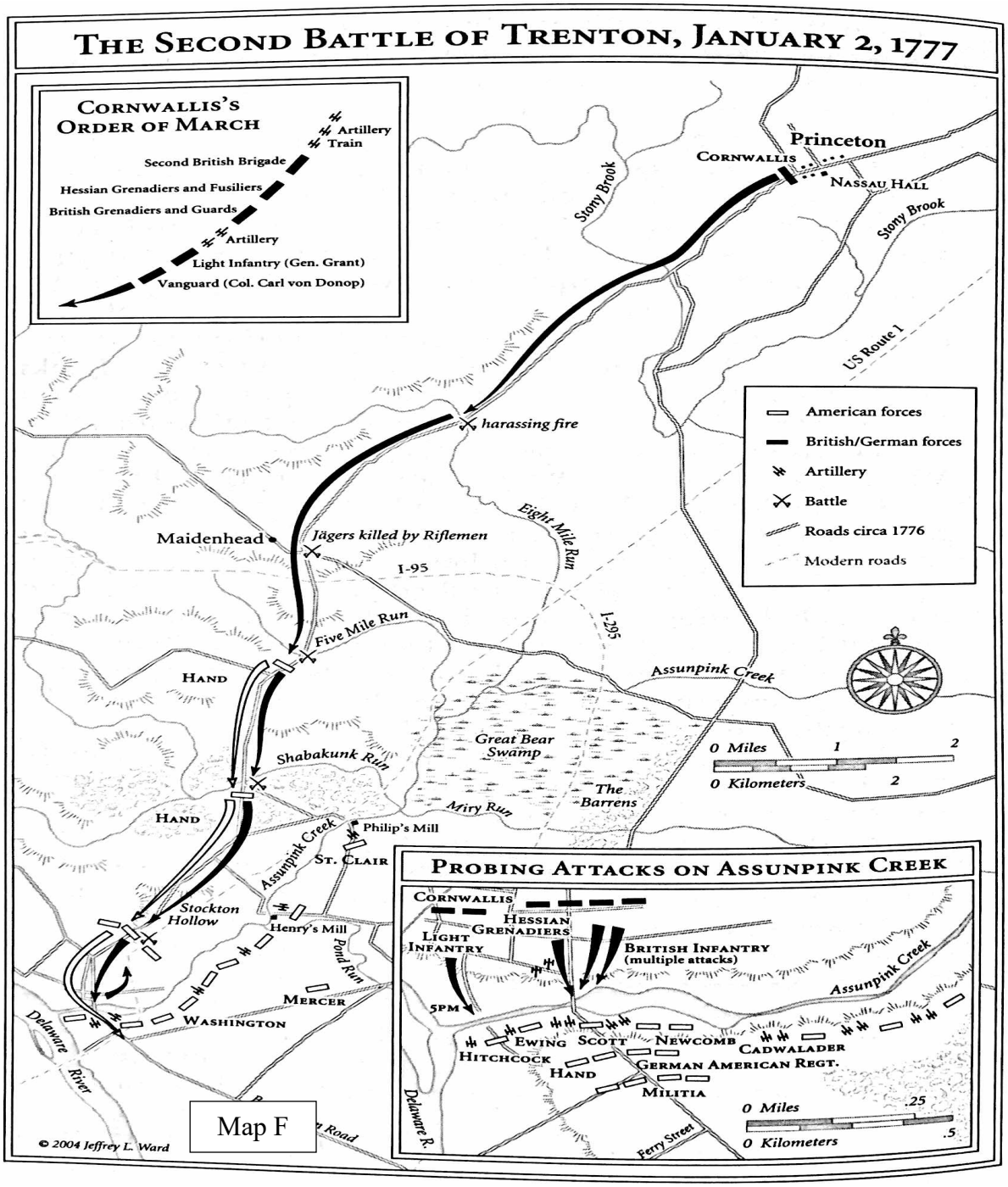
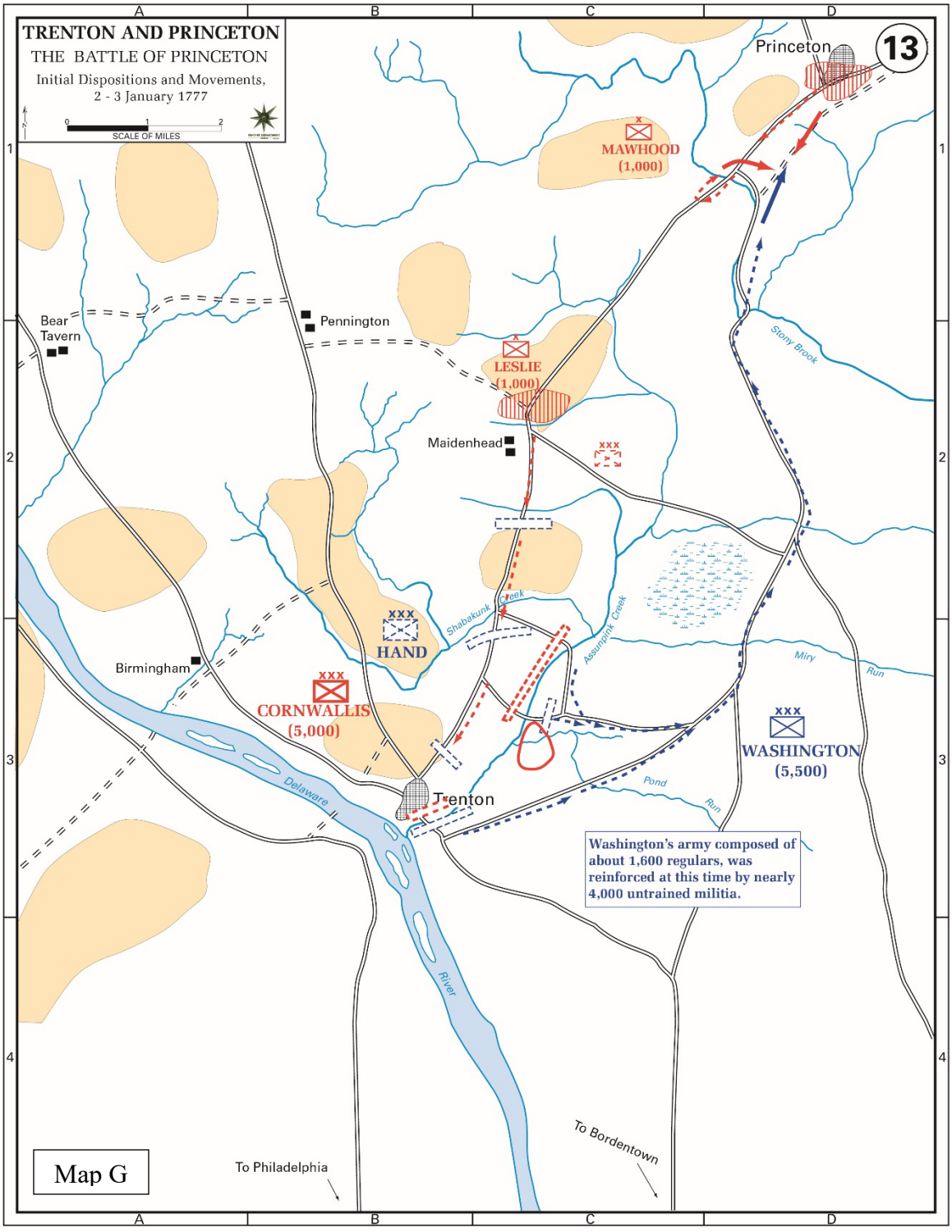
[212] "To George Washington from Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, 30 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0381. *The Papers of George Washington*, 485–488.
[213] "From George Washington to Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, 28 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0366. *The Papers of George Washington*, 471–472. "From George Washington to Brigadier General William Maxwell, 28 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0367. *The Papers of George Washington*, 472–473. "From George Washington to Major General William Heath, 28 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0364. *The Papers of George Washington*, 468–469. "From George Washington to the Commanding Officer at Morristown, 30 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0385. *The Papers of George Washington*, 490–491.
[214] "From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader or Brigadier General Thomas Mifflin, 1 January 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0404. *The Papers of George Washington*, 510–511. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 283-285.
[215] Ewald, *Diary*, 48-49. Fischer, 290-307. See Map F on page 78. Copied from Fischer, 294.



While Cornwallis expected a pitched battle in Trenton, Washington was considering his next offensive maneuver. As the American artillery bombarded the buildings in which the advancing British occupied on the north side of Assunpink Creek, he sent Mercer to lead a nighttime march to envelope Cornwallis with an attack on his rear guard in Princeton. To cover

their intended action and deceive Cornwallis, the Americans left their campfires burning giving the appearance that they remained in camp to continue their defense into the following day. In the early morning hours of January 3, Cornwallis was alerted to the sound of the American artillery initiating their surprise attack against his garrison at Princeton. Understanding that his attack against Washington in Trenton would no longer accomplish his purpose of subduing the American army, he turned his attention to his rear. Mercer, as the advanced guard, engaged the Seventeenth and Fifty-fifth Regiments about a mile south of the town. The British routed Mercer's troops and killed him in the fighting. As Mercer's men retreated, Cadwalader and the rest of the formation, which marched through the night, arrived to beat back Princeton's defenses, and threaten the British stores there. Washington accomplished his mission and though his army was in great spirits, they were physically fatigue, lacking sufficient footwear and clothes for the elements, and many had not slept in two nights. Though he could march to Brunswick and seize the British military chest with £70,000 in it, and possibly end the war, he did not have the fresh troops to do so, and Cornwallis was rapidly approaching Princeton. Washington secured his military gains and moved his army north to reconsolidate and concentrate his forces at Morristown.[216]

[216] "From George Washington to John Hancock, 5 January 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0411. *The Papers of George Washington*, 519–530. Ewald, *Diary*, 49-50. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 308-345. See also Map G on page 80. United States Military Academy at West Point, "The Battle of Princeton, 2-3 January 1777," *The American Revolution War*, accessed May 02, 2022, https://www.westpoint.edu/academics/academic-departments/history/american-revolution.


TRENTON AND PRINCETON
THE BATTLE OF PRINCETON
Initial Dispositions and Movements,
2 - 3 January 1777
SCALE OF MILES
13
Princeton
MAWHOOD
(1,000)
Bear
Tavern
Pennington
LESLIE
(1,000)
Stony Brook
Maidenhead
HAND
Shabakunk Creek
Assunpink Creek
Miry Run
Birmingham
CORNWALLIS
(5,000)
WASHINGTON
(5,500)
Delaware River
Trenton
Pond Run
Washington's army composed of about 1,600 regulars, was reinforced at this time by nearly 4,000 untrained militia.
To Philadelphia
To Bordentown
Map G

* * * *

Following his victory at Princeton, Washington marched his army and its prisoners to Morristown where they would enter winter quarters. The British were handily defeated tactically and operationally in the New Jersey theater. Their operational plans completely changed from the offense to the defense. In a period of nine days, the British transitioned from intentions to sack Philadelphia to defending its small foothold in eastern New Jersey. Strategically, the tide of war had turned. No longer was the British facing a part-time, rag tag army of partially committed rebels but from January 1777 on, they would be fighting a spirited, professional army committed to securing American independence.

Washington's several tactical victories led to the change in the operational environment in the northern theater of the war. As devastating as the tactical and operational defeats were for the British, the strategic effects were much greater. Ewald boldly claimed that Washington's decision to cross the Delaware on Christmas night 1776, and attack Trenton "caused the utter loss of the thirteen splendid provinces of the Crown of England."[217] Without that aggressive maneuver, Washington was bound to lose his army, Philadelphia, and likely the war in a fortnight's time. However, his successful campaign reignited the poor spirits of the army and encourage new recruits and large numbers of militia to respond to the defense of their homeland.

British and Hessian soldiers were allowed near unregulated plundering of civilian property. Unfortunately, this was not enough. The occupiers also raped women and children as young as ten years old. The time had come for the Americans to seek vengeance, but Washington forbade it. In his general orders on January 1, he stated that "it is expected that humanity and tenderness to women and children will distinguish brave Americans, contending

[217] Ewald, *Diary*, 44.

for liberty, from infamous mercenary ravagers, whether British or Hessians."[218] He understood the need for a strictly disciplined force and he would not allow the same atrocities to continue under his command.

The atrocities which occurred throughout New Jersey between late November and December 1776, did not cause Americans to revenge in kind but rather drove a greater passion to defeat the British in battle and secure their independence. A man considered to be "an officer of distinction" in the American army wrote a letter which was published in *The Pennsylvania Evening Post* on December 28, in which he claimed that the brutal behaviors of the British and Hessian soldiers "has so exasperated the people of the country, that they are flying to arms, and forming themselves into parties to waylay [the British] and cut them off…"[219] The fervor for justice was ripe but the focus to attain it was through military means leading to political success.

Beyond the psychological effects to aid the tide of the war in January 1777, a potential alliance with France continued to develop. The American spirit was at a wartime high while the British belief that they were a far superior army in military generalship and discipline was quickly eroding. Washington received information from McDougall on December 29, which attested that a French declaration of war with England was imminent.[220] Though France's formal entrance into the war did not occur for another year, the continued anticipation of it and unofficial logistical support from the French encouraged and enabled the American leadership to continue to prosecute its rebellion against a global superpower. Washington's victories in the Christmas Campaign changed the course of American history, and an America, arguably

[218] "General Orders, 1 January 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0393. *The Papers of George Washington*, 499.
[219] Stryker, *Documents*, 246.
[220] "To George Washington from Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, 30 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0381. *The Papers of George Washington*, 485–488.

changed the course of Western Civilization. However, Washington would have never had his opportunity to cross the Delaware River on Christmas night 1776 and attack Trenton had small bands of courageous Americans not shaped the operating environment between December 12-25 through incessant irregular warfare tactics.

Conclusion

Though irregular actions were not the only variable which helped shape the operating environment to favor an attack on Trenton on December 26, 1776, it was clear that irregular warfare was the most prominent method to create an opportunity for such an aggressive offensive operation. Whether conducting raids, ambushes, ambushes by fire, or information collection through many different methods, the irregular actions and activities of American rebel forces in December 1776 created the opportunity for victories at Trenton and Princeton. Their actions provided early warning of British and Hessian movements and intentions. They kept pressure on the enemy garrisons along the east bank of the Delaware River. They influenced several passive decisions of the Hessian commanders. Washington was an opportunist and they gave him an opportunity.[221] Some historians have claimed that Washington was not fond of the militia because they were unreliable to follow orders and timelines or because he preferred the traditional, 'honorable' tactics of conventional eighteenth century warfare.[222] Many of Washington's letters during his withdrawal from New York and across New Jersey in November and early December 1776 gave evidence to that claim.[223] However, a true understanding of the

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[221] Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1996), 99.

[222] Kwasny developed his research from the premise that historians have misunderstood Washington's generalship regarding his thoughts on irregular warfare and use of the militia. Similar to this paper, Kwasny's work seeks to expose Washington's use of the militia throughout the northern theater of the war. Kwasny cited several works in his endnote that express the traditional view of Washington's contempt for militia. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War*, xiv. Also, see footnote "1" of the Historiography section of this paper regarding historian Randy Flood's comments in 2017 that Washington was not interested in irregular warfare tactics.

[223] In a letter to Governor Livingston of New Jersey on November 23, Washington is desperate for militia from the state to answer his call to arms. "From George Washington to William Livingston, 23 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0140. *The Papers of George Washington*, 198. Washington writes to Hancock that he "[has not] much reason to expect" the militia to come to the army's aid. "From George Washington to John Hancock, 30 November 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0168. *The Papers of George Washington*, 232–234. On December 3, Washington still has no assistance from the militia as he is planning to cross the Delaware River to retreat out of New Jersey and he does not believe he will receive any. "From George Washington to John Hancock, 3 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0187. *The Papers of George Washington*, 255–256. Washington expresses great distaste for the militia in this December 5 letter to Hancock. "From George Washington

military situation, rather than drawing a simple conclusion from Washington's letters written in clear frustration, showed that Washington defended against the militia's weaknesses of being unreliable in a conventional battle and exploited their strengths in irregular actions to shape the operating environment for a necessary victory for the Americans.

Today, though light-infantry, conventional units also conduct irregular warfare, the United States uses its robust Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to conduct irregular warfare actions across the globe in order to shape the operating environment to create favorable options to US policy makers and military leaders. The irregular actions and activities in war were no less significant during eighteenth century warfare where ranks of soldiers marching shoulder-to-shoulder came within about fifty yards of the opposing army before firing their first volley than they are in twenty-first century warfare replete with unmanned aerial vehicles, tanks, and submarines. Where human behavior is constant and can be anticipated in war, there will always be a need for the guerrilla—the one who can think irregularly and maneuver in the physical, cognitive, information, and narrative spaces to defeat the enemy. Though the weapons and equipment; communications methods; insertion, extraction, and mobility methods; and other tactics, techniques, and procedures have evolved, the principles of special operations which McRaven described are timeless and unchangeable. For the militia units operating in New Jersey and along the Delaware River to meet Washington's intent during the two weeks before the Battle of Trenton, they needed to practice "security" and "simplicity," and achieve "speed" and "surprise." Their "purpose" was clear: defend their own land. Their land was either already occupied by the British or in jeopardy of British occupation. Though the principle of "repetition" is not as prevalent in the sources, the need for it for their missions to be successful

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to John Hancock, 5 December 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0198. *The Papers of George Washington*, 262–264.

was as important then as it is today. All six of McRaven's principles applied to the irregular actions and activities which shaped the operating environment for an attack on the Hessian garrison at Trenton.

The history of United States special operations did not begin in WWII with the renown Marine Raiders of the Pacific campaign. Rather, it began with the bold and daring irregular actions of the Continental Army and the militia of the infant states throughout the American Revolutionary War. Since then, one could argue, American military units conducted one form or another of irregular warfare. The term "special operations" may not have been coined until World War II, but the tactics and principles of special operations missions have existed since there has been war. In *Special Operations During the American Revolution*, Robert Tonsetic began the scholarship to present the irregular warfare actions during the American Revolution as "special operations." As America's special operations forces have been at the forefront of its National Security Strategy *during the first two decades of the 21st century*, there needs to be more scholarship exposing the untold stories of the special operations which led to key victories during the American Revolution and shaped the environment for American independence.

Appendix A: Principles of Special Operations[224]

Purpose. "Purpose is understanding and then executing the prime objective of the mission regardless of emerging obstacles or opportunities" McRaven defines purpose with two aspects: 1) "clearly defined by the mission statement" and 2) "personal commitment" (21-22). Due to the inherent nature of a special operation being against a relatively stronger foe, clandestine, and one of the more dangerous military operations with regards to risk to mission and risk to force, purpose is essential for the successful application of the above principles and overall mission success.

Repetition. Repetition is the "routine" of training. It is the constant training of standard operating procedures which special operations forces do every day. Additionally, it is imperative for special operators to conduct full dress rehearsals of their impending mission. McRaven writes, "Repetition hones individual and unit skills, while full-dress rehearsals unmask weaknesses in the plan" (15-16).

Security. Security in a special operation relates to "operations security" defined in Appendix B. It is the security "to prevent the enemy from gaining an advantage through foreknowledge of the impending attack" (14). Special operations are typically a lighter, smaller force against a fortified, well-defended enemy position. Security in containing the information surrounding the time of attack and infiltration will allow the special operator to achieve surprise and move quickly to defeat the enemy.

Simplicity. McRaven states that the principle of simplicity is "the most critical." He defines it by splitting it into three elements: "limiting the number of objectives, good intelligence, and innovation" (11). A plan that all involved can understand, execute in the darkest night and under austere conditions, and carried out in a decentralized manner with little additional guidance or direction from the commander is a simple plan.

Speed. McRaven simplifies the concept of speed by stating that it means to "Get to your objective as fast as possible" (19). This is simple to understand but can be difficult in execution. A simple plan will allow for a quick execution. Speed is relative and moving quicker than the enemy can react will allow the special operator to achieve relative superiority over his/her foe.

Surprise. McRaven refines JP 3-05's definition of surprise and argues that "In a special operation, surprise is gained through deception, timing, and taking advantage of the enemy's vulnerabilities" (17). Surprise allows special operators to achieve what McRaven calls a "relative superiority" over an otherwise stronger enemy (4-8).

[224] These principles are William McRaven's theory and are not considered United States military special operations doctrine. McRaven derives some definitions from doctrine but refines them for application specifically to a special operation. McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 4-23.

Appendix B: Current and Commonly Used Doctrinal Military Terms and Phrases[225]

Advance Guard. Detachment sent ahead of the main force to ensure its uninterrupted advance; to protect the main body against surprise; to facilitate the advance by removing obstacles and repairing roads and bridges; and to cover the deployment of the main body if it is committed to action (JP 1-02, 3).

Ambush. A surprise attack by fire from concealed positions on a moving or temporarily halted enemy (MCDP 1-0, C-1)

Attack (ambush) by fire. Fires (direct and indirect) destroy the enemy from a distance, normally used when the mission does not require or support occupation of the objective (MCDP 1-0, C-1).

Area of Operations. An operational area defined by a commander for land and maritime forces that should be large enough to accomplish their missions and protect their forces (JP 3-0, GL-5).

Assault Position. A covered and concealed position short of the objective from which final preparations are made to assault the objective (FM 1-02.1, 1-7).

Assembly Area. 1. An area in which a command is assembled preparatory to further action. 2. In a supply installation, the gross area used for collecting and combining components into complete units, kits, or assemblies (JP 1-02, 20).

Attack. An attack is an offensive operation of coordinated movement and maneuver supported by fire to defeat, destroy, or capture the enemy or seize/secure key terrain (MCDP 1-0, 9-5).

Chance contact. When referring to contact with an enemy force, chance contact is where neither force intended to engage the other, but one rather stumbled upon the other's position and so an engagement ensued.

Combat Power. The total means of destructive and/or disruptive force which a military unit/formation can apply against the opponent at a given time, (JP 1-02, 43).

Commander's Intent. A clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned (JP 1-02, 46).

Defense-in-depth. The siting of mutually supporting defense positions designed to absorb and progressively weaken attack, prevent initial observations of the whole position by the enemy, and to allow the commander to maneuver the reserve (MCDP 1-0, Glossary-12).

Denied area. An area under enemy or unfriendly control in which friendly forces cannot expect to operate successfully within existing operational constraints and force capabilities (JP 3-05, GL-7).

Disrupt. A tactical mission task in which a commander integrates direct and indirect fires, terrain, and obstacles to upset an enemy's formation or tempo, interrupt the enemy's timetable, or cause enemy forces to commit prematurely or attack in piecemeal fashion (FM 1-02.1, 1-34).

[225] All definitions are derived from the corresponding United States Department of Defense (DoD) Publications. See Bibliography for full citation of each publication.

Feint. In military deception, an offensive action involving contact with the adversary conducted for the purpose of deceiving the adversary as to the location and/or time of the actual main offensive action (JP 1-02, 95).

Information Requirements (IRs). In intelligence usage, those items of information regarding the adversary and other relevant aspects of the operational environment that need to be collected and processed in order to meet the intelligence requirements of a commander (JP 1-02, 128).

Key Terrain. Any locality, or area, the seizure or retention of which affords a marked advantage to either combatant (JP 1-01, 153).

Leader's Reconnaissance. When possible, the [detachment] leader reconnoiters the defensive position [of the enemy] and the route(s) to it (FM 7-8, 2-66).

Line of Communications. A route, either land, water, and/or air, that connects an operating military force with a base of operations, and along which supplies and military forces move (JP 1-02, 160).

Linear Defense. A linear defense orients in a single direction to take advantage of a linear terrain feature, such as a river line or ridge, or when a wide area must be defended (MCDP 1-0, 8-12).

Line of Effort. In the context of joint operation planning, using the purpose (cause and effect) to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions by linking multiple tasks and missions (JP 1-02, 160).

Main Body. The main force of a military unit composed of the necessary combat power for impending decisive contact with an enemy force (Author's own definition).

Main Effort. The designated subordinate unit whose mission at a given point in time is most critical to overall mission success. It is usually weighted with the preponderance of combat power and is directed against a center of gravity through a critical vulnerability (MCDP 1-0, Glossary-20).

Maneuver. A movement to place ships, aircraft, or land forces in a position of advantage over the enemy (JP 3-0, GL-12).

Neutralize. 1. As pertains to military operations, to render ineffective or unusable. 2. To render enemy personnel or materiel incapable of interfering with a particular operation (JP 1-02, 187).

Operating Environment. A composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander (JP 3-0, GL-13).

Raid. An operation to temporarily seize an area to secure information, confuse an enemy, capture personnel or equipment, or to destroy a capability culminating with a planned withdrawal (JP 3-0, GL-14).

Rear Guard. Detachment behind the main force to ensure it is protected from an attack on its rear or rear positions; to protect the main body against surprise; to facilitate the maneuver of the main force and to cover the deployment of the main body if it is committed to action (Author's

definition derived from the definition of advance guard and his own experience and understanding of the rear guard).

Reconnaissance by fire. A method of reconnaissance in which fire is placed on a suspected enemy position in order to cause the enemy to disclose his presence by moving or returning fire.[226]

Shaping Actions. The commander employs shaping actions to set the conditions for achieving a decision. Shaping actions are lethal and nonlethal activities conducted throughout the battlespace to attack an enemy capability or force or to influence the enemy commander's decision making. Shaping actions can also protect friendly critical vulnerabilities or enhance friendly capabilities (MCDP 1-0, 3-17).

Special Operations. Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk (JP 3-05, GL-12).

Suppressive Fire. Suppressive fire is that volume and accuracy of firepower which achieves the doctrinal definition of suppression. "Suppression" is the "temporary or transient degradation by an opposing force of the performance of a weapons system [or maneuver element] below the level needed to fulfill its mission objectives" (JP 1-02, 254).

Task-organize. The mobilization of a force, whether large or small, which is scalable and flexible in its design to address a specific mission or problem set (Author's definition derived from MCDP 1-0).

Withdrawal operation. A planned retrograde operation in which a force in contact disengages from an enemy force and moves in a direction away from the enemy (JP 1-02, 288).

[226] "Reconnaissance by fire," *Vocabulary.com*, accessed May 02, 2022, https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/reconnaissance%20by%20fire.

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