

ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF TRENTON



New Town PA, December 22, 1776- Things have been going against us since last August, when we were forced to give up Long Island, losing 3000 men...In October we were forced to evacuate New York and cross the Hudson into New Jersey. We reached Trenton Dec. 2...According to last accounts Gen. Howe and Gen. Cornwallis (both British) have gone to New York leaving... (only) a few hundred English troops at Princeton, Col. Rall

with 1500 Hessians at Trenton...

Washington's headquarters are here in...New Town...Gen. Greene and Gen. Sullivan, with their divisions, numbering 2500 men and sixteen cannon, are 10 miles up stream...Gen. Ewing, with 2000 men, is on this side of the river...below Trenton, and Gen. Cadwallader and Gen. Putnam are at Bristol...

I rode along the river yesterday morning and could see the Hessians in Trenton...Rall has his own regiment...A scout just in says that Gen. Howe has issued a proclamation, offering pardon to everybody in New Jersey who will lay down their arms and take the oath of allegiance...Cornwallis is going to England to tell the King that the rebellion is about over. Howe is going to have a good time in New York attending dinner parties. For what I see I am quite certain Washington intends to make some movement soon...

Dec. 23 – Orders have been issued...Washington has just given the counter sign, “Victory or Death.” ...He intends to cross the river, make a ten-mile march to Trenton, and attack Rall just before daybreak...

Dec. 25- Christmas morning. They make a great deal of Christmas in Germany, and no doubt the Hessians will drink a great deal of beer...They will be sleepy tomorrow morning. Washington will set the tune for them about daybreak...

Christmas, 6 p.m. – The regiments have had their evening parade...It is fearfully cold...and a snow-storm is (coming)...It will be a terrible night for the soldiers who have no shoes...but I have not heard a man complain. They are ready to suffer any hardship and die rather than give up their liberty...

Dec. 26, 3 a.m. – I am writing in the ferry house...We are three hours behind the set time...I never had seen Washington so determined as he is now. He stands on the bank of the river, wrapped in his cloak, superintending the landing of his troops. He is calm and collected, but very determined. The storm is changing to sleet, and cuts like a knife...

Primary Source
The Battle of Trenton

Dec. 26, Noon – It was nearly 4 o'clock, when we started... At Birmingham...a man came with a message from Gen. Sullivan that the storm was wetting the muskets and rendering them unfit for service...It was broad daylight when we came to a house where a man was chopping wood. He was very much surprised when he saw us. "Can you tell me where the Hessian picket is?" Washington asked. The man hesitated, but I said, "You need not be frightened, it is General Washington who asks the question." His face brightened and he pointed toward the house of Mr. Howell.

It was just 8 o'clock. Looking down the road I saw a Hessian running out from the house. He yelled in and swung his arms. 3 or 4 others came out with their guns. Two of them fired at us, but the bullets whistled over our heads...The other took to their heels, running toward (the) house, where the picket guard was stationed... They came running out of the house. The Captain flourished his sword and tried to form his men. Some of them fired at us, others ran toward the village. The next moment we heard drums beat and a bugle sound, and then from the west came the boom of a cannon. General Washington's face lighted up instantly, for he knew that it was one of Sullivan's guns.

We could see a great commotion down toward the meeting-house, men running here and there, officers swinging their swords, artillerymen harnessing their horses...Washington gave the order to advance, and rushed on the junction of King and Queen streets...The riflemen(s)...battalions went upon the run through the fields on the left just ready to open fire with two of their cannon when...(we) rushed forward and captured them. We saw Rall come riding up the street from his headquarters.. We could hear him shouting, "My brave soldiers, advance."

His men were frightened and confused...they were falling fast. Instead of advancing they ran...The officers tried to rally them, but our men kept advancing and picking off the officers. It was not long before Rall tumbled from his horse and his soldiers threw down their guns and gave themselves up as prisoners...

Dec. 26, 3 p.m. – ... We have taken nearly 1000 prisoners, six cannon, more than 1000 muskets, twelve drums, and four colors. About forty Hessians were killed or wounded. Our loss is only two killed and three wounded. . . I have just been with Gen. Washington and Greene to see Rall. He will not live through the night. He asked that his men might be kindly treated. Washington promised that he would see they were well cared for.

Dec. 27. 1776 — Here we are back in our camp with the prisoners and trophies. Washington is keeping his promise; the soldiers are in the New Town Meeting-house and other buildings. He has just given directions for tomorrow's dinner. All the captured Hessian officers are to dine with him. He bears the Hessians no malice... It is a glorious victory. It will rejoice the hearts of our friends everywhere and give new life to our...fortunes...