



Dedicated to promoting the sites and venues of the Ten Crucial Days

Robert Morris, delegate to the Continental Congress:

I am Robert Morris, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant and Pennsylvania delegate to the Continental Congress. When the Congress abandoned Philadelphia on December 12, relocating to Baltimore, due to fear of an imminent British attack on the city, I sent away my family and many of my papers and valuables, but remained in Philadelphia at Washington's request. I was to work on Congressional concerns until forced to leave by a British invasion. Congress was in dire straits due to a lack of money and we were unable to supply our army with sufficient food and clothing. Some delegates were wondering if Washington was a commander who could carry on the war to a successful conclusion. In spite of this, we had voted to give him extensive powers in this time of crisis. We knew that Washington's army would disband when its last enlistments expired on December 31, so we had authorized several months ago to recruit a new army to serve for a term of at least three years. However, getting me to enlist was a problem, due to Washington's lack of success on the battlefield and our inability to fulfill our part of the contract with enlistees. Some of my colleagues were in fear that the war was almost over and unless Washington could reverse the tide and drive the British out of New Jersey, which they essentially controlled, the people would abandon the war effort and return to British authority.



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Engineer - 1

While the Continental army did not have specific duty slots for engineers, many of us officers were called upon at various times to figure out solutions to problems that involved an understanding of mechanics, physics, etc. Crossing the Delaware presented such a set of problems. Everyone has heard about the Durham boats that Washington stated he favored for the crossing. However, these boats were designed to go up and down the river, not across it. They were designed to carry bulk cargoes – stone, coal, etc. They would be fine for transporting infantry across the river. However, we also needed to cross over our 18 artillery pieces, limbers, ammunition wagons, some supply wagons, horses, etc. The Durham boats were not suited for any of these. The flat-bottomed, barge-like ferry boats were the answer since they were designed to transport civilian passengers with wagons, coaches, horses, etc. as their everyday job. They did require special rigging and we needed to employ local people who knew how to operate these ferry boats. Washington had chosen this ferry for the crossing partly because he knew the ferry operators were loyal patriots, and several sons were members of local militia units.



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George Washington (Part 1 - Trenton)

I am George Washington, commander in chief of the Continental Army for the past six months. While getting my army organized as much as I can, I have been fighting a series of battles trying to prevent the British from taking control of New York City and vicinity to use it as a base of operations in America from which they could send troops north up the Hudson River to combine with troops heading south from Canada and split the North American colonies in half. I have been unsuccessful in battle throughout the fall and have recently been forced to essentially abandon New Jersey to the British. While many of my officers and men support me, I know there are those both in the army and outside who are coming to believe that I am not the man for the job.

I know that many people fear the war is virtually over and that to change that attitude I need to demonstrate to Americans, and especially my army and the Congress, that we can defeat British and Hessian soldiers in combat. Of immediate importance, I must relieve the pressure on the Patriots of New Jersey by driving the British from the State. General Howe has provided me with a situation I can take advantage of. His troops are spread across New Jersey in a series of winter cantonments. While his total troops outnumber mine significantly, my troops outnumber those in any one of the British cantonments, including the one at Trenton. Throughout mid-December I work on plans to take the cantonment at Trenton as a first step in attacking those cantonments.

I know I need to act soon because of the approaching end of my army's enlistments, but I also need to wait until I am joined by the forces I left near New York under General Charles Lee, any local militia units I can attract, and possibly some scant troops coming to me from Fort Ticonderoga. I finally have enough of these troops join me by December 21 and I can get them all organized to attack on December 26. I will outnumber my Hessian opponents by at least about two to one.

George Washington (Part 2 - Princeton)

When I sent General Mercer across the Clarke farm fields towards what we believed as a British morning patrol, I continued on with my main force towards the



back of Princeton. Hearing the battle behind me go on with more intensity than expected, I looked back and saw the potential defeat of Mercer's and Cadwalader's troops developing. I decided to enter the combat myself and ordered the Continental regiments of Colonel Hand and Colonel Hitchcock to advance behind me towards the melee. I led this charge on my horse, placing myself between the troops now firing on each other, much to the horror of my men, who expected me to be shot from my horse at any moment. Fortunately, I was not hit and as I got to the main fight encouraged my troops to follow me and defeat the British. They did so and the nearly surrounded British had to retreat from the field. While many of them escaped, we did capture a large number of them and then my whole army pursued those enemy heading for Princeton and soon after had succeeded in taking control of the town.

With the battle of Princeton now over, I had one a battle against the Hessians at Trenton on December 26, achieved my objective in combat on January 2, and had now defeated a British force on a traditional field of battle in grand style on January 3. From here, I decided not to go on to New Brunswick, but to head for my ultimate goal of Morristown where I could rest my men, raise my new army, and better control British movements in New Jersey. My goal of forcing the British out of most of New Jersey had been achieved and the momentum of the war reversed in our favor.



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Capt. Jehu Eyre - Artillery/Maintenance

I am Captain Jehu Eyre, commander of an artillery company of the Philadelphia Associators. Since Pennsylvania did not have a government mandated militia, mostly due to its Quaker principles, men formed voluntary Associations for local defense. I am a 38-year-old veteran of the French and Indian War, I am happy to have my command and have recruited, as volunteers, men for my company who have a lot in common with me. I am in the ship building business in Philadelphia and many of my artillerymen are skilled workmen in trades involved with ship building. Once Washington decided to cross the Delaware and attack Trenton, all the boats at the four locations where he planned to cross had to be made ready. On December 23, I detailed seven of my men to repair defective water craft located across the river from Trenton at Trenton Ferry. It was not uncommon for both militiamen and Continentals to use their civilian trade skills to benefit the army. The men I detailed for boat repair abandoned their artillery function for several days while they made the boats suitable for transporting part of the army over the river and then immediately returned to artillery duty when they tried to cross in those boats to participate in the battle.



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Henry Knox

I am 26-year-old Colonel Henry Knox, the commander of George Washington's artillery units. I do not have a military background, but instead was a bookseller in Boston before I abandoned my shop and joined the militia when fighting broke out in 1775. I was interested in the military and read many books from my shop, especially those dealing with artillery. Washington was convinced to make me his artillery commander. During the weeks of December, while Washington was developing his plans to attack Trenton, I was writing up a plan of organization and tactics for the Continental artillery. Washington and I talked frequently and I shared my ideas on how he could use artillery most effectively. Washington was concerned about the morale of our men and also that he had to have a decisive victory. I convinced him to take along more than the usual amount of artillery and distribute it throughout all the brigades. This would allow him to make a powerful showing to the Hessians while also inducing more confidence in his men by providing overwhelming firepower support. We planned to take 18 pieces of artillery, knowing that the Hessians had just six pieces.

Once we commenced to cross, the worsening weather conditions delayed things and especially the transporting of my artillery across the river. I had to reassure General Washington that the foul weather made my cannon even more important because artillery was considered the "foul weather weapon" in armies of our time. Even though it meant a greater delay, the cannon could not be even partially abandoned.



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Capt. John Mott

I am Captain John Mott, a captain in the First Hunterdon County, New Jersey militia regiment. My farm and gristmill is located outside of Trenton on one of the roads that we will use to advance on Trenton. Because I and my men know that area so well, we were called upon before the crossing to provide information on the route variations that could be used and any natural obstacles that would be encountered. After providing this information, about 25 of my militiamen were detailed to serve as guides, in pairs, to the various brigades that Washington had formed for the attack. We had alerted Washington to this difficult passage at Jacob's Creek, but we knew that this was still the best road for him to take.



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Lt. Elisha Bostwick

I am Lieutenant Elisha Bostwick of Colonel Charles Webb's 19th Continental Regiment (from Connecticut) of Colonel John Glover's Brigade in General Sullivan's Division. Our march from the ferry crossing through the storm was lighted by torches secured to the artillery carriages and they "sparkled & blazed in the storm all night."

When we got to the Jacob's Creek ravine the "horses were unharness'd [more likely he meant unhitched] & the artillery prepared." The road angled as it descended in order to reduce its steepness. Still, the cannon had to be slowly lowered down the ravine attached to long ropes that could be wrapped around trees as mooring posts and wheels locked in place by tree branches run between them to jam the wheel spokes and prevent wheel rotation and a runaway object.

At the creek, the ice cold water was fordable, but it was churned by the storm and the passage of the army. After crossing the creek, each cannon and wagon had to be hauled up the other side, taking up a lot of time and greatly contributing to fatigue of man and horse.

While General Washington was riding along the column, I saw the back feet of his horse slip from under him on the road ice and begin to fall. In a colorful demonstration of his superb horsemanship, the General seized the horse's mane and pulled its head up while shifting his own position to enable the horse to regain its balance and footing.



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Pvt. Conrad Beam

I am Private Conrad Beam of Colonel Nicholas Hausegger's German Battalion, containing four companies of Pennsylvania and four companies of Maryland men, of Brigadier General Roche de Fermoy's Brigade in General Greene's Division.

By the time we got to Birmingham we had marched "thru hail, rain & sleet, and our clothes were now frozen to our back." We had tried to keep muskets and powder dry with our blankets, but with little success. The General ordered us to keep by our officers and not stray or sit down and risk going to sleep, because we would freeze to death. At least one man I knew was saved by his sergeant who found him sleeping and woke him up.

The noise of our passing army aroused the family of farmer Benjamin Moore at Birmingham. Mr. Moore's son, Israel, served in Captain Mott's militia company, and he was the uncle of two other militiamen. Captain Mott was one of our guides who knew the roads and I guess it was he and his militiamen who told General Washington this was the best place to divide his army if he wanted to attack Trenton from two directions.

The Moore's brought out food and drink, which Washington accepted with thanks and consumed on horseback while gathering his senior officers for consultation. Our original time schedule was in tatters by this point, but General Washington ordered each officer to again set his watch by his and they fixed a new time for the simultaneous attack to begin.

Because our division's route to Trenton would be somewhat longer, we marched first and Sullivan's Division waited a short time before marching.



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Capt. William Washington

I am Captain William Washington of Colonel George Weedon's Third Virginia Regiment and a second cousin of General Washington's. I was put in command of 40 men from my regiment to proceed in advance of the main army to secure roads into and out of Trenton to prevent any word of our advance from reaching Trenton. We were to detain anyone out on the roads during the night. Lt. James Monroe of our regiment had volunteered to be my second in command for this duty.

Since the army was to split at Birmingham, we had gone in advance on the route to be taken by General Greene while another group of 40 men went in advance of General Sullivan's division. Those men were recruits for a New Jersey Continental regiment being formed.

While on our mission, we disturbed a civilian who came storming out of his house and berated us, thinking we were British. When he learned who we were and what we were doing, he informed us that he was a doctor and was planning to join a regiment of new Continental Army in that capacity. He volunteered to join us for the attack on Trenton, stating that he might be able to help some poor fellow in the morning. I agreed to let him accompany us.



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Maj. George Johnston

I am Major George Johnston of Colonel Charles Scott's 5th Virginia Regiment of General Mercer's Brigade in General Greene's Division.

About 800 yards from the Hessian guard house we formed three columns, with Mercer's brigade on the right, Stephen's brigade in the center, and Fermoy's brigade on the left. As the attack began about 8:00am, I saw and heard "our noble countryman, the General, at the head of the Virginia Brigades, exposed to the utmost danger, order us to follow him. We cheerfully did so in a long trot."

At the guard house, the shop of a cooper, I saw a Hessian officer come out to look around. When he saw us coming at him out of the storm he quickly got the 24 men under his command out of the shop and armed to defend themselves. It was very difficult to see in the storm and his determination to fight three brigades with his 24 men must have meant he could not see all of us. He acted as though we were the company of Captain Wallis of the 4th Virginia Regiment that had attacked the post the previous evening and was now returning.

We got off three ragged volleys of musket fire, with many misfires due to the damp powder. When the Hessian officer quickly realized we were a much larger force, he ordered his men to retreat in an orderly manner to delay our attack on the main Hessian force. His men were joined by a Hessian company quartered in a house on the road just outside the town but we continued to force them to retreat to town. Greatly outnumbered, they maintained their orderly retreat in a brave and professional manner.

As we advanced, our brigade peeled off to the right to attack the Hessian left flank from behind the houses on one of the two main roads of the town while Fermoy's Brigade peeled off to the left to secure the road to Princeton and Stirling's Brigade continued straight to the head of the town's main streets.



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Capt. Georg Pauli (Hessian)

I am Hessian artillery Captain George Pauli, attached as engineering officer to Colonel von Donop of the Hessian forces stationed south of Trenton around Bordentown. Shortly after three Hessian regiments were stationed at Trenton on December 14 for their winter quarters, I was ordered to go there and assist in planning out defenses to be constructed for the town. After looking over the town, I recommended that two redoubts be constructed at opposite ends of the town. Artillery could be placed in these redoubts and they would provide defensive positions for our Hessian infantry if the town were attacked.

However, Colonel Rall, in command at Trenton, never followed up to have those redoubts constructed. He believed they were not necessary because the American troops were so ineffective that any attack could be easily defeated – with only bayonets if necessary. To his credit, Colonel Rall did establish guard posts around Trenton and kept them manned at all times. It was one of these guard posts on the Pennington Road that was the first to suffer from the American attack on the morning of December 26.



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Col. Johann Gottlieb Rall

I am Hessian Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall in command of three regiments, one of grenadiers and two of fusiliers, supplemented by a company of Jaegers, three artillery companies, and about 20 light cavalry of the 16th Regiment of Light Dragoons of the British army. I was chosen to command the important post at Trenton for the winter due to the high quality professionalism of my forces, and myself, in the battles around New York in 1776, especially the taking of Fort Washington on November 16. I am a veteran, professional officer deserving of this position.

Once taking over command here, I quartered my troops throughout the town, mostly in private houses, many of which had been abandoned by their owners before our arrival. One problem I encountered was that I didn't speak English, only a Hessian dialect of German, and this made it difficult to communicate with American civilians to learn what they knew about my opponents. My men were also hated by the rebels who felt that my men, and their wives who accompanied them, abused them, even when they had papers that said they had sworn loyalty to the British King.

While I definitely believed that my opponent across the Delaware was inferior and incapable of making a major attack on me, I still felt that I needed additional troops and repeatedly asked my superiors for reinforcements that never came. I also did not get along with Colonel von Donop at the post just south of Trenton and we did not support each other effectively.



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Colonel Franziscus Scheffer

I am Lieutenant Colonel Franziscus Scheffer, commanding the Lossburg Fusilier Regiment of the Hessian forces. I did my best to assist Colonel Rall in preparing our cantonment at Trenton and preparing for its defense. I continually made him aware of the needs of our troops for proper clothing and other supplies that were often lacking. I tried to convince him that building the redoubts recommended by Captain Pauli should be done and even offered to have my men do it. We needed to keep the men busy for morale purposes so building the redoubts be a productive undertaking even if they were never needed.

During the two weeks before the Americans attacked us in force, they attacked in small groups almost every day to harass our outposts, foraging parties, messengers, etc. They wore us down and I felt we were still on campaign rather than in winter quarters. Our men could not recover from the 1776 campaign and some ways suffered even more because of the cold weather. Our sick list each day seemed to grow rather than shrink. I, myself, became quite ill, along with most of the other Hessian officers at Trenton.

When the word of the American attack on us the morning of December 26 reached me, I had to get out of the sick bed I had occupied for the past five days. Once the fighting became heavy in town, I saw that American riflemen "hid in the houses and fired continuously. It rained balls and grape shot, and sleet and hail beat steadily into our faces. Soon not another of our weapons could fire. The enemy closed in on our flanks and rear. Under these conditions it was impossible to maintain ranks and formations, and without an organized corps, it was impossible to use bayonets."

When Colonel Rall was seriously wounded, as the next senior officer I conferred with him and made an attempt to salvage the battle. This was not successful and we became virtually surrounded by a superior number of enemy troops, so I negotiated a surrender.





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Sergeant Joseph White

I am Sergeant Joseph White of Captain Thomas Forrest's 2nd Company, Pennsylvania State Artillery of Colonel Henry Knox's Regiment of Continental Artillery, attached to General Stirling's Brigade.

When we got to the head of King and Queen Streets we were one of the artillery companies that positioned our guns to fire directly down the streets while the Hessians were exiting the houses where they were billeted and forming in the street. On the third shot fired from our howitzer the axle-tree of its carriage broke and disabled it.

The Hessians were able to get two of their 6-pounder cannon in King Street to fire on us. Some of our Virginia troops led by Captain William Washington (a cousin of the General) and Lieutenant James Monroe headed down the street to attack the cannon. Colonel Knox rode up to us and calling us "my brave lads" ordered us to join them "sword in hand." I was one who joined and as we attacked, "I hallowed as loud as I could scream, to the men to run for their lives right up to the pieces. I was the first that reach them." The Hessian artillerymen had abandoned the cannon, "except one man tending vent - run you dog, cried I, holding my sword over his head, he looked up and saw it, then run. We put in a canister of shot, (they had put in the powder cartridge before they left it,) and fired. The battle ceased." Most the men of the gun crew were killed and so were the horses that had pulled the cannon.

Both Captain Washington and Lieutenant Monroe had received wounds. Captain Washington took bullet wounds in both hands and Lieutenant Monroe took a bullet "through his breast and shoulder." They were carried to a house and attended by Dr. John Riker, a man who had joined the army during our march to Trenton just a few hours earlier, thinking he might be able to help some poor fellow. Dr. Riker saved future president Monroe's life by stopping the bleeding from a bullet severed artery in his shoulder.





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Private Jacob Francis

I am Private Jacob Francis, a free black man in Colonel Paul Dudley Sargent's 16th Continental Regiment (from Massachusetts) in General Sullivan's Division. We marched into town on the River Road and advanced to the corner of King Street where we could see General Greene's troops engaged with the Hessians further up the street from us. After about half an hour at the foot of King Street, I saw some officers ride up to Colonel Sargent and talk with him. Then the Colonel marched us through town toward the Assunpink Creek, then across the bridge and along the creek. Once across the bridge, the artillery assigned to our brigade began firing across the Assunpink at the Hessian Knyphausen Regiment. The Hessians marched up the Assunpink looking for a ford they could escape across and ran into Colonel Glover's brigade which had crossed back toward town at a ford they could have used. One group attempted to ford the iccold water in the creek and some men found themselves up to their necks in the frigid water, negotiating a muddy bottom. At least one officer did get across, while several men drowned and others found it too deep and turned back.

While some of the Hessians were trying to swim across the mill pond, General Stirling's brigade came marching up and came within 40 steps where they formed into two columns with two cannon in front. The Hessian regiment was now surrounded by General Stephen's and General Fermoy's brigades on the north, Colonel Glover's brigade on the east, our brigade to the south, and General St. Clair's brigade guarding the bridge. General Mercer's and General Stirling's brigades held the rest of the town.

Our regiment was formed up in line across the creek from the Knyphausen men and I saw them ground their arms. After the surrender, some of our American soldiers ran among the prisoners "and after satisfying their curiosity a little, they began to converse familiarly in broken English and German."

