



## **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.



## **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.



## **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.



## **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 16<sup>th</sup> 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.



## 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.



## 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.



## **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."





## **Brig. Gen. Alexander Leslie**

I am Brigadier General Alexander Leslie commanding the Second British Brigade that occupied Princeton much of the month of December 1776. From the time we went into winter quarters on December 14 until the battle of Trenton on December 26, I had a number of communications with Colonel Rall at Trenton in which I found him to be overly concerned about the American forces across the river from his post. After the battle of Trenton, and especially when Washington re-crossed the Delaware River again on December 29 and 30 to occupy Trenton, we became concerned that he might try to attack us at Princeton. Therefore, I ordered my officers who had engineering experience to determine the best locations for earthwork defenses to be erected and where our artillery pieces should be placed.

On December 30, I ordered men to construct fascine reinforced earthworks flanking the main Post Road as it entered the village of Princeton. The next morning, I ordered 100 men to begin construction of earthworks on the northwest end of town. I placed a strong guard of 100 men at the bridge over the Stoney Brook south of Princeton. My artillery was positioned at both ends of town and also to enfilade the road to Pennington in case any troops came from that direction. We felt that if Washington attacked, he would approach town from the south or west where the main roads were. The eastern side of town did not seem vulnerable.



## Col. Joseph Reed

I am Colonel Joseph Reed, Adjutant General of the Continental Army and, although more recently a resident of Pennsylvania, a native of Trenton. While General Washington's troops were completing their crossing to Trenton on December 30, I was sent with a patrol of six troopers of the Light Horse of Philadelphia towards Princeton to gather intelligence. I was unable to learn a great deal and was not successful in recruiting a local person to go into Princeton for information due to the terror the British had struck in the people. I decided to scout on the outskirts of town and perhaps get behind the town where there would be fewer guard posts.

While doing this, I came upon a farm where I observed a British soldier "passing from a barn to the dwelling-house without arms." I then saw several additional unarmed men. My patrol charged and surrounded the house, capturing twelve British soldiers, equipped as dragoons, and well-armed. We also captured a commissary officer with them. Instead of being on guard to defend that officer and themselves, they had been working on the much more pleasant business of attacking and conquering a parcel of mince pies.

We brought our prisoners to Trenton and learned that the enemy at Princeton was now about 7000 strong and that they intended to attack Trenton in a few days. Each prisoner was examined separately and each confirmed the situation. It appeared to me, and others, that our army was now in a trap and risked annihilation. The next day, a map of Princeton drawn by a patriot spy fell into the hands of Colonel Cadwalader and was shared with General Washington. It contained important information on the British defenses at Princeton that had recently been put in place by General Leslie.



## Gen Hugh Mercer

I am Brigadier General Hugh Mercer of Virginia. I was born in Scotland and took part in the rebellion in 1648 in which we were defeated and I had to leave the country and come to America. I am a doctor by trade and practiced medicine in Fredericksburg, Virginia before the war. I fought under Washington during the 1776 campaign and was especially responsible for the defense of New Jersey while leading a back-up force called the Flying-Camp. I am a close friend of General Washington.

After the combat ended for the day on January 2, General Washington called a council of war at the house of Alexander Douglass which he had designated as his headquarters. He laid out the situation for us and asked for our opinions on what we should do. It may well be that he knew just what he wanted to do next but he took in all opinions before announcing it so that we all felt we were part of the decision. We could not help but think that he only appeared to have put us in an inescapable trap.

The plan we adopted was to leave Trenton as secretly as possible overnight and march by a roundabout route towards Princeton where we could surprise the three regiments General Cornwallis had left there guarding the town and some supplies. From there we could go on and take New Brunswick which was very lightly defended and capture a number of supplies, including the British war chest, and then move on to Morristown in the Watchung Mountains. This would put us on the flank of any British movements in New Jersey and force them to pull back towards New York.



## **Lt Charles Willson Peale**

I am Lieutenant Charles Willson Peale of the Second Battalion of Philadelphia Associators. By training, I am an artist of some renown but am very motivated to lead my company of volunteers in the fight against the British. My company was at Crosswicks on January 1 and was ordered to march overnight to Trenton where we arrived the morning of January 2 and participated in the actions on that day, particularly towards the end of the day when the British forced us out of Trenton to our prepared positions on Mill Hill.

After the firing ceased, we were ordered to make our camp fires and get something to eat while we prepared to spend the night on Mill Hill and continue fighting in the morning. I "marched my company to the edge of the field, grounded our arms, made fires with the fence rails, and toiled over the fatigues of the day; and some, after eating, laid themselves down to sleep." My captain had injured his leg some days before and found he could no longer lead the company. He recommended that I be placed in command, and I was. My first orders to my men were to take some of the baggage from the wagons and send the rest away.

While most Continental regiments assigned quartermaster responsibilities as a collateral duty to a junior line officer, companies like mine were on their own and as the man in command, I had to deal with these issues. There was no real transportation command, so individual company commanders often had to make assignments and other decisions in response to orders from above. Sometime about midnight everyone received orders to send their supply wagons to Bordentown, but to do so very quietly, not an easy job given the wagon construction and moving and rubbing parts that created much noise. Things were made even more difficult by a change in the weather that turned extremely cold and froze the muddy roads to a very hard, slippery surface that jolted the wagons.



## **General Charles Cornwallis**

I am General Charles Cornwallis serving under General William Howe in North America. I commanded the British troops that pursued the rebel army across New Jersey before General Howe decided to establish winter quarters. At that point I was given permission to return to England on leave for the winter to visit my wife, whom I knew was ill. After the rebel victory at Trenton on December 26, my leave was cancelled and I was ordered to gather together at Princeton the elements of the British army in New Jersey cantonments, some 8 to 10,000 troops, and use it to destroy the rebel army that we knew was establishing itself at Trenton.

I arrived at Princeton late on January 1 and ordered my troops to be ready to march on Trenton in the morning. Marching so many men with artillery and baggage wagons was a complex enough operation without the weather changing and a short warming spell turning the dirt road into deep mud. Not only the mud delayed my march, but also enemy ambush sites at the creeks which crossed the road delayed me even further. At one such ambush, I was forced to halt and deploy my forces into line of battle to clear the rebels from their site and this delayed me for well over an hour. After this series of delaying actions, my vanguard arrived at Trenton not long before sunset and by the time my troops had cleared the retreating rebels from the town and made several efforts to cross a bridge over the Assunpink Creek to attack their fortified positions, it was dark and I decided to call off the attack until morning. I believed I had the rebels in a trap and would prevail. While several of my officers felt Washington might try to escape overnight, I made the decision to let him be.

Not long after, I heard reports that the rebels seemed to be breaking camp and moving troops, but I believed they were simply moving troops to reinforce troops guarding two fords up the Assunpink Creek and would try to outflank me in a surprise morning attack. I sent troops to fortify those fords and prevent this. I also expected that these troops could push across the fords in the morning and outflank the rebel forces.



## **Capt. Joseph Moulder**

I am Captain Joseph Moulder, commanding an artillery company of the Philadelphia Associators. Like my fellow artillery captain Jehu Eyre, I my profession is shipbuilder, but I am 62 years old while he is only 38. Like Eyre, I recruited men with shipbuilding skills for my company.

During the battle of Princeton, when General Mercer's men initially attacked the British on William Clarke's farm and Mercer was mortally wounded and his men retreated from the charge of British bayonets, my company was called up to help stem the tide of retreat by firing on the British, who also had artillery. My two cannon were placed in a position where they were able to keep the British from advancing and the troops of Colonel Cadwalader sent in as reinforcements also helped. However, even then the British were able to keep together, although outnumbered, and I did not know how long my artillery could help stem the tide.



**Lt. Col. Charles Mawhood (pronounced “maw ‘HOOD”)**

I am Lieutenant Colonel Charles Mawhood of His Majesty’s 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot. My brigade was ordered to remain in Princeton when General Cornwallis departed for his January 2 attack on Trenton. The evening of January 2, I received a message from Cornwallis by light dragoon messenger ordering me to bring two of my three regiments, some artillery, and some supply wagons to Trenton early on the morning of January 3 to aid in his renewed attack on Washington’s troops on Mill Hill. Not knowing the true situation overnight, I assembled my troops and set off for Trenton about dawn on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

I had proceeded on the Post Road south to the Stoney Brook where there was a grist mill and cluster of buildings at the bridge crossing. My leading unit, a detachment of light dragoons, ascended to the top of what was called Cochran’s Hill and one the dragoon officers looked back and noted a column of troops, of unknown army, about a mile distant and heading towards Princeton.

This presented me with the dilemma of what to do next – continue to Trenton as my orders stated, or find out more about that unidentified body of troops. I sent a dragoon officer towards them and he quickly discovered there were more of them than we initially thought and that they were definitely rebels. I reversed my column sending some to help defend Princeton while I took others and sought to cut off and engage column before it reached Princeton.

I quickly engaged some American troops sent to attack me and the battle of Princeton began in which I was greatly outnumbered and, while initially successful in making my enemy retreat, became nearly surrounded forcing me to abandon the field and save as many of my troops as I could.



## **Doctor Benjamin Rush**

I am Doctor Benjamin Rush from Philadelphia and accompanying the Pennsylvania troops. I am a member of the Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. When the Congress left Philadelphia on December 12, I did not go to Baltimore with them, but instead decided to join Washington's army as a doctor. Even though it was winter, I knew that Washington was in a position where he had to take on the British in combat and there would be wounded men.

I had been visiting with Washington shortly before the battle of Trenton when I observed him writing on small pieces of paper, "Victory or Death," his password for the Trenton campaign. I did not help with the battle of Trenton because I was with the troops who were not able to get across the Delaware. We did get across soon after and when Washington decided to collect all of his troops at Trenton on January 1, I became the messenger to Colonel Cadwalader at Crosswicks to bring his men to Trenton overnight.

During the late afternoon battle at the Assunpink Creek on January 2, I tended to wounded men, many of whom were wounded by artillery. The first wounded man I treated was a New England soldier who just two days before had extended his enlistment for six weeks and now "his right hand hung a little above his wrist by nothing but a piece of skin. It had been broken by a cannon ball." We moved him to a house we commandeered for an aid station, but he also had a thigh shattered from knee to hip and it was considered that he would probably not survive, so we worked first on other wounded men as they came in. Miraculously, he did survive and was taken to the Philadelphia hospital until his full recovery.





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