

## BATTLE OF GERMANTOWN HISTORY



Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Musgrave in 1786 by Lemuel Francis Abbott. In background are the camp and Chew House at German Town.

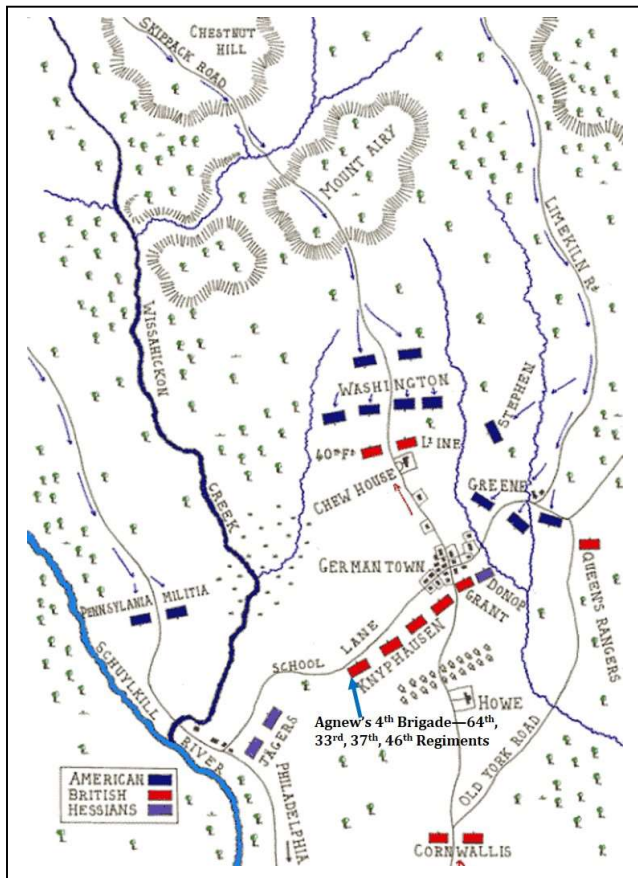
Usually I run a historical article to go with events we are doing, and I did not for Germantown. This was commented upon, so here is the makeup.

The Battle of Germantown was, of course, Washington's follow-up attack in response to the British occupation of Philadelphia following the Battle of Brandywine. The following is from Major H.G. Purdon's history of the 64th Regiment. Editor's notes are my own.

The day after the battle [of Brandywine], Washington retreated to Germantown, but re-crossing the Schuylkill at Sweed's Ford, he advanced along the old Lancaster road and met Howe on the 16th September near Westchester. The armies were about to engage when a violent storm came on, and wet the ammunition on both sides, so no battle took place. Washington then retired to Potsgrove, on the east side of the river, but left Wayne's Division, 1,500 strong, behind, for the purpose of attacking the rear of the British troops should they attempt to cross the Schuylkill.

On the 25th the [British] Army marched in two columns to Germantown, and next day Lord Cornwallis with 3,000 men took possession of Philadelphia. The village of Germantown then consisted of a straggling street running in a north-westerly

direction for nearly two miles, as far as Mount Airey, where the pickets of the second Light Infantry were posted. About half-way down the village on its eastern side, the 40th Regiment, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel T. Musgrave (late [the Major] of the 64th), was stationed in the grounds about Chief Justice Chew's house, which was a substantial building. (This distinguished officer entered the service in 1754; he joined the 64th Regiment as a Captain in 1759, and was promoted into the 40th Regiment as Lieut.-Colonel on the 21st August. 1776. He became Colonel of the 76th Regiment, Governor of Gravesend and Tilbury Fort, and died a General in 1812.) (Editor's note: he was also made a brevet-major in the 64th in July 1772.) General Howe encamped the main body of the army behind or south of School House Lane, which intersects the road leading through Germantown near the southern end of the village, at the market square. The left wing, commanded by Lieut.-General Knyphausen, was stationed behind the lane, between the Schuylkill River and the Germantown road. This wing was comprised of the third Brigade, under Major-General Grey, which was encamped on the right; the fourth Brigade, under Brigadier Agnew, was on their





*General George Washington conducting the American Attack on the Chew House at the Battle of Germantown on 4th October 1777 in the American Revolutionary War: picture by Alonzo Chapell*

left; three battalions of Hessians were stationed in the vicinity of the Germantown road, and the Hessian Chasseurs on the left near the Schuylkill. The fourth Brigade still consisted of the 33rd, 37th, 46th, and 64th Regiments; and the third Brigade, of the 15th, 17th, and 44th Regiments, being minus one battalion (42nd Regiment). On the right of the Germantown road Major-General Grant commanded, and here were encamped the Guards, the 4th, 5th, 27th, 28th, 49th, and 55th Regiments. The first Light Infantry furnished the advanced troops for this wing, and the Queen's Rangers protected the right flank; the whole line extended for a distance of about two and a half miles. According to the official return for October, the Army under Sir W. Howe numbered 16,000 men fit for duty, but only 9,000 were present at Germantown. There were 3,000 in Philadelphia,

and a strong detachment in the Jerseys; the 10th, 23rd, and 42nd Regiments were escorting provision columns at the time the battle took place. Washington having been reinforced by some 2,500 men, and hearing that a great part of Sir W. Howe's Army was detached, resolved to surprise the British at Germantown, his plan being somewhat similar to that which proved so successful at Trenton. He had now 8,000 Continental troops and 3,000 Militia at his disposal; accordingly, on the 3rd October he put his forces in motion, and set out for Germantown, some eighteen miles distant. A halt was made five miles east of Skippack Creek, and at seven o'clock in the evening the night march commenced. Sullivan, with his own and Wayne's Divisions marched on the main road, his objective being the British left, while Greene, with his own and Stephen's Divisions, was to make a detour and come in on their right by the Lime-kiln road. The Pennsylvania Militia were to demonstrate against the left rear, and the Maryland and Jersey Militia were to act in a similar manner on the other flank of the Royal Army. Sullivan arrived first on the ground, and Conway's Brigade, passing over Chestnut Hill through a thick mist about dawn, came on the pickets of the second Light Infantry. The latter fell back on the battalion, and the whole retired, contesting every inch of ground, to where the 40th Regiment was drawn up in the orchard of Chief Justice Chew's house. Here the fighting was obstinately maintained in the fog for some time; but the British were outnumbered and



*Major-General Charles Grey, 1st Earl Grey*

obliged to retire; before doing so however, Lieut.-Colonel Musgrave was able to garrison the house with six weak companies of the 40th Regiment, amounting to only 140 men. The building was now attacked on all sides, and soon 3,000 Americans were swarming round it in tumult and confusion. Three guns were brought to bear on the mansion, but no impression could be made on it, or on Musgrave's musketeers. Sullivan presently managed to push forward, with his own Division on the right of the road, and Wayne's on the left. Nash's Brigade was brought up to cover the right flank, while the reserve under Maxwell continued the attack on the house. The British were forced slowly back towards the Market Place, but Major-General Grey with the third Brigade, supported on the left by the fourth Brigade, presently came forward, and forming the three battalions of his own Brigade to the right took Sullivan in flank when engaged amidst the houses and enclosures, thus arresting his further progress. Meanwhile General Greene, who arrived late on the field, came from the

direction of the Lime-kiln road, and drove back the pickets and other troops which he encountered, but Stephen's Division, losing its way in the fog, got behind Wayne, and fired into his men, mistaking them for the enemy. This fortuitous occurrence caused confusion, and led to the retreat of both Divisions from the field, Sullivan's left was now uncovered, and Greene, who had advanced far into the British position, was isolated and unprotected on his right by Stephen's retirement. General Grant, who soon grasped the situation, reformed his troops, and prepared to act vigorously. He brought up the 49th Regiment, and four field guns on the left of the 4th Regiment, which had been sent to the right front to support the pickets, and these troops it seems attacked Greene on his outer flank. The 5th and 55th Regiments from the right centre fell on Sullivan's left flank in the village when he was engaged with Grey on the other side, and the remainder of the right wing formed up to oppose Greene. However at this juncture (about ten o'clock) a panic took place amongst the Americans, caused either by the firing in their rear at Chew's house, or by a rumour that they were being surrounded, and soon all the troops that had been engaged were retreating from the field. But one of Greene's regiments, the ninth Continentals, known as "the Tall Virginians", being unable to extricate themselves in time from an entangled position, were surrounded and taken after a desperate resistance. With the exception of a shots fired by the Pennsylvanians, near the Schuylkill River, the Militia took no part in the action, and Washington, after fruitless efforts to rally the troops, made dispositions to cover the retreat.

On hearing the sound of the firing at German-town, Cornwallis, who commanded in Philadelphia - which was over five miles distant from the scene of action - started at once with two battalions of British and one of Hessian Grenadiers. They ran a good part of the way, and arrived before the engagement was quite over. When the enemy retreated, Cornwallis followed them with the Dragoons and Grenadiers to Whitemarsh, where Washington skilfully posted his rear guard, and Wayne's guns came into action. Here Howe discontinued his languid pursuit early in the day, although the British were comparatively fresh: they had sustained small loss, and several of the regiments took little or no part in the battle. "The period which intervened between ten in the morning and dusk on the 4th of October, 1777, was for Sir William Howe a lost - and as fate willed it a last - opportunity." [Trevelyan] So the Americans, with empty cartridge boxes, and suffering from exhaustion, having marched nearly twenty miles before the action, got clear away with all their guns.

In an account of the action in "Gaine's Mercury" of November 10th, 1777 (a Loyalist journal), it states that a column of the enemy which had filed off towards our left - apparently Nash's Brigade - was driven off by the 33rd, 46th, and 64th Regiments; in fact the fourth Brigade. The commanders of these Brigades, Brigadiers Agnew and Nash, were both mortally wounded. It also states that "The Commander-in-Chief having perceived a large body that had rallied, forming itself on Chestnut Hill, apparently to retard the pursuit, his Excellency ordered Major-General Grey to advance upon it with the 17th, 33rd, 14th, 46th, and 64th Regiments, directing other corps to follow as fast as possible to sustain," but the Americans retreated on their approach.

The British casualties amounted to 70 killed and 425 wounded, the latter including 24 Hessians. The 64th had one rank and file killed and six wounded. What casualties the Light Company sustained are not shown separately; the second Light Infantry battalion, of which they formed part, lost 68 killed and wounded, besides five missing. Brigadier Agnew died a few days after the action from his wounds. Ensign Grant, of the 64th, died on the day of the battle, probably from wounds received at Brandywine. The Americans stated their loss at 152 killed and 521 wounded, besides 100 taken prisoners.