

An Historical Sketch

OF THE
64TH (SECOND STAFFORDSHIRE) REGIMENT
AND OF THE
CAMPAIGNS THROUGH WHICH THEY PASSED



BY MAJOR H. G. PURDON

Part III.

Orders, 22nd May. direct commanding officers to get the baggage on board the transports, as the troops were to embark on the 27th.

Orders, 24th, state:-"The Army is to be completed to two flints per man, the regiments to receive one flint per man, but two for the Grenadiers and Light Infantry." [The Americans had a great advantage in one respect. The black flints which they used for their firearms were very superior to those served out to the British. These black flints were "in the hammer of every gentleman's fowling piece" in England, yet European armies generally used poor quality flints lasting a tenth of the number of rounds black flint could sustain (60, according to some).] It appears that the antiquated wooden ramrods were still in use in the British Army, as a return was to be given in of the number of arms in the ranks with wooden ramrods, which were to be exchanged for others.

The last orders in the "Orderly Book" are dated 26th May. They direct "The Grenadiers and battalions of the Line in future to form in three ranks, with the files as formerly ordered at 18 inches interval."

The troops had for the most part been cooped upon board ship, as there was not sufficient accommodation for them on shore, and General Howe, anxious to get away from a dreary place and uncomfortable situation, without waiting for the reinforcements which were to arrive from home, set sail, in June 1776. with his Boston troops, for Staten Island, south of New York. It seems the intention was to capture the latter city, and hold the line of the Hudson River, which, if accomplished, would isolate the New England Colonies, and facilitate their reduction. The plan of campaign, though well conceived, was never carried out, as other schemes were allowed to interfere with it. General Howe and his troops arrived at Staten Island on the 3rd July, including over two thousand Highlanders, which he picked up at sea. Three thousand had been shipped from Glasgow, but a fourth part were captured by American privateers. The muster-rolls of the 64th Regiment were signed on the 15th July, 1776 at Staten Island. Eight companies were stationed at Amboy Ferry in the south of the island, one company at Richmond, and one simply shown as being at Staten Island; the two last named were the flank companies detached with the flank battalions. [It would be difficult to trace all the movements of the flank companies, as they were absorbed in the flank battalions, and to all intents and purposes formed part of separate corps for the time being.] In August six battalion companies were stationed at a farm belonging to Captain Billopps (who was a zealous Loyalist) opposite Amboy, and two companies at a house near Brigadier-General Agnew's headquarters; each company numbered 36 rank and file. On the 1st August Sir Henry Clinton, and Lord Cornwallis arrived with seven regiments from South Carolina, where an unsuccessful attack on Charleston had been made. Lord Howe, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, also arrived from England on the 12th August, with 1,000 Guardsmen, formed in two battalions, and 9,000 Hessians.

When all the troops had assembled on Staten island, they amounted to 30,000 men, and were then organised in brigades, and commanded as follows:

1st Brigade: 4th, 15th, 27th, and 45th Regiments; Major-General Pigot.

2nd Brigade: 5th, 28th, 35th, and 49th Regiments; Brigadier-General Agnew.

3rd Brigade: 10th, 37th, 38th, and 52nd Regiments; Major-General Jones.

4th Brigade: 17th, 40th, 46th, and 55th Regiments; Major-General Grant.

5th Brigade: 22nd, 43rd, 54th, and 63rd Regiments; Brigadier-General Smith.

6th Brigade: 23rd, 44th, 57th, and 64th Regiments; Major-General Robertson.

7th Brigade: 71st Regiment, New York companies, and some Hessian troops; Brigadier-General Erskine.

Light troops: four battalions Light Infantry; Brigadier-General Leslie.

Reserve: three battalions Grenadiers, the 33rd and 42nd Regiments; Lord Cornwallis and Brigadier-General Vaughan.

Guards: two battalions; Major-General Mathews.

Artillery & Engineers: Brigadier-General Cleveland.

Hessians: Lieut.-General de Hester and Count Von Donop.

The British marching regiments for the American service were to consist of twelve companies of 56 effective rank and file each, two companies of each battalion to remain in Great Britain and Ireland for recruiting. In January, 1777, the two 64th Depot Companies were stationed at Charles Fort, Trowbridge. Orders were previously issued from the War Office that anyone enlisting in the marching regiments should serve three years, or during the war, at the option of his Majesty.

Soon after the evacuation of Boston, Washington arrived in New York with part of his army, and made every effort to complete the defences necessary for the protection of the city. Redoubts and batteries were constructed, and the heights of Brooklyn on Long Island, which commanded New York, were protected on the land side by a line of entrenchments about a mile in length, which extended from the swamps of Wallabout Bay on the north to Gowanus Creek on the south. To hold all these works Washington had only 20,300 men fit for duty, not half of which were Continental troops (American Regulars), the rest being Militia; one-third of this force (7,000 men) was stationed in the lines at Brooklyn. After a delay of nearly seven weeks on Staten Island, General Howe on the 22nd August moved 15,000 men over to Long Island, where supplies were more abundant. The troops landed in Gravesend Bay, about eight miles south of Brooklyn, and Lord Cornwallis with the reserve, two battalions of Light Infantry, Von Donop's Hessian Chasseurs, and Grenadiers, pushed forward to the hamlet of Flatbush, which was situated at the foot of a long ridge. The remainder of the army encamped some three miles in rear, between the hamlets of Utrecht and Flatlands. The ridge already mentioned was thickly wooded, and ran in a north-easterly direction for seven or eight miles in front of the Brooklyn lines, from which it was distant about two miles at the nearest point. It was traversed by three roads; one which led from Flatbush divided near the ridge and crossed it at two passes. The other lay nearly four miles to the east of Flatbush, and led from the village of Jamaica to Bedford in rear of the ridge, which latter it crossed at a defile called "The Jamaica Pass." Another road leading from Gravesend and Utrecht to Gowanus Bay ran near the coast, skirting the western extremity of the ridge.

The Americans held the passes. but neglected to occupy the defile on their left, "The Jamaica Pass," the consequences of which were disastrous.

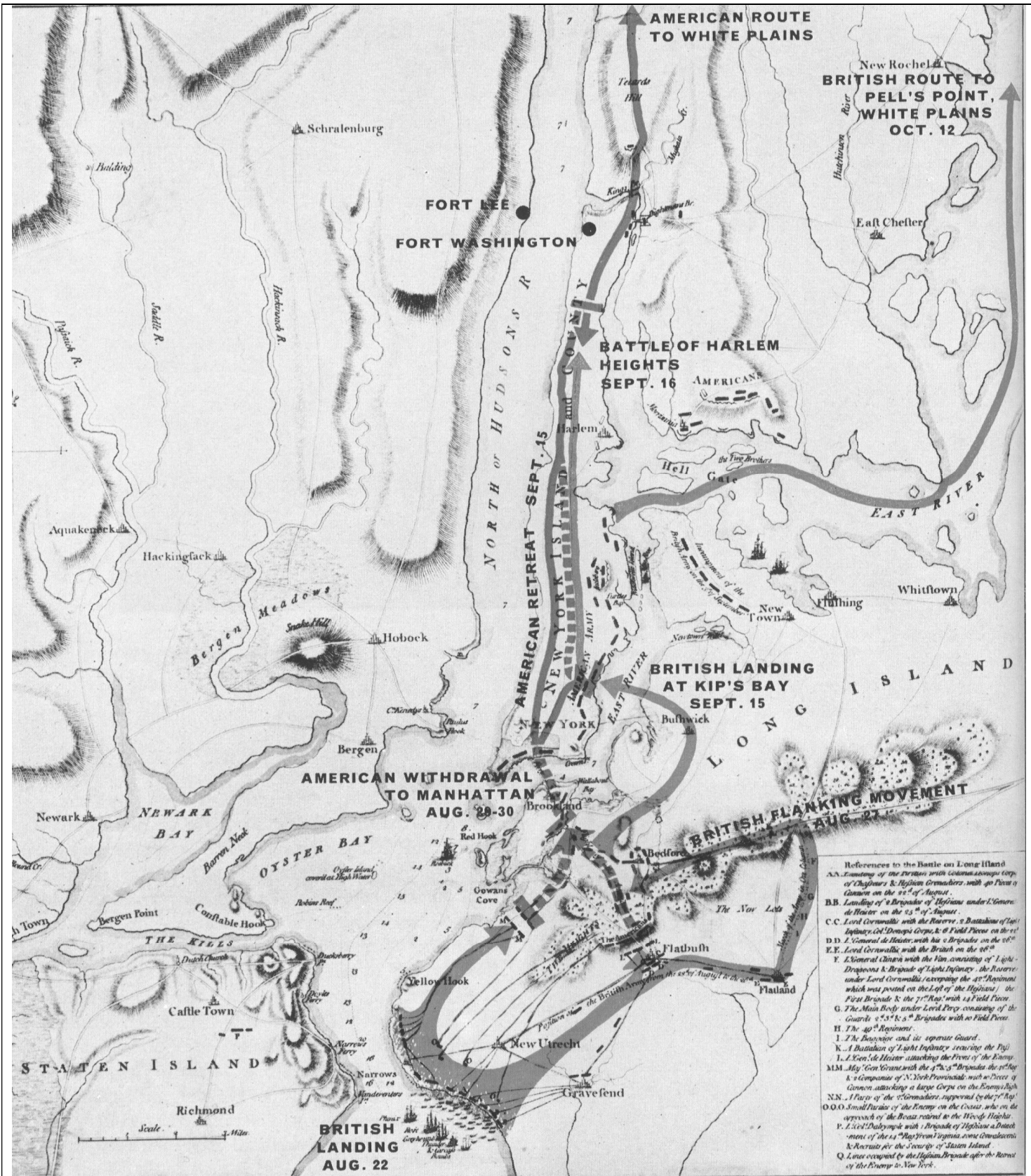
On the 26th, Lieut.-General de Hester, with two brigades of Hessians from Staten Island, relieved Lord Cornwallis at Flatbush, when the latter retired to Flatlands. In the meantime, Howe, having made dispositions for attacking the enemy, put his troops in motion the same evening. About nine o'clock Lieut.-General Clinton, with the Light Infantry Brigade and Light Dragoons, followed by Cornwallis, with the Grenadiers, 71st Regiment, first Brigade, and 14 guns, marched from Flatlands across country and arrived near the Jamaica Pass before daybreak on the 27th; the main body, consisting of the Guards, the second, third, and fifth Brigades, with 14 guns, under Earl Percy, marched soon after the vanguard. General Howe accompanied this column, which numbered about 10,000 men; it was destined to turn the enemy's left, and come in on the rear of their position, on the wooded ridge. Lieut.-General de Hester, with 6,000 Hessians, was directed to make a demonstration opposite the Flatbush defile, until such time as the turning movement was completed. Major-General Grant, with the fourth and sixth Brigades, the 42nd Regiment, two companies of the New York Provincials, and ten guns, numbering about 5,000 men, advanced by the coast road, with orders to distract the enemy's attention from the danger threatening their left. At midnight Grant attacked the enemy's pickets, with much clamour and firing, and at daybreak - about three o'clock - opened fire with his artillery, and then sent forward his skirmishers. On hearing the firing. Lord Stirling (one of the American Brigadiers) was hurried forward with five regiments to oppose Grant, and in the hills, near the present Greenwood Cemetery, the severest fighting during the day took place. The ammunition of the British at one time became exhausted, and they had to halt near the edge of the wood, but fortunately Admiral Howe landed some of his sailors with a supply of cartridges, which they carried up the hill to the troops engaged. General de Hester also opened fire soon after daybreak, and Major-General Putnam, who commanded in the line at Brooklyn, despatched Major-General Sullivan with a small reinforcement, which was quite inadequate, to check the vastly greater force of the Hessians advancing from Flatlands. Meanwhile, General Clinton, finding that the Jamaica Pass was unoccupied, took possession of it at daybreak, and having rested his men a little, pushed on and arrived at Bedford about 8:30 am. Here he had a skirmish with three American regiments, which retreated towards Brooklyn lines. The Grenadiers and 33rd Regiment followed until within musket range of the works, and were with difficulty restrained from attacking them. At Bedford,

Clinton turned to the left with the Dragoons and Light Infantry, and attacked General Sullivan in flank and rear, while the Hessians advanced against him in front. Sullivan ordered a retreat, and most of his troops escaped through the woods, but he himself, together with some hundreds of his men, were taken prisoners. About 11 o'clock, Stirling, hearing the firing on his left and rear, commenced to retire towards the bridge over Gowan's Creek, but it had been already burnt by some retreating party, and Cornwallis, who had passed in rear of Clinton, with the 2nd Grenadiers and 71st Highlanders, had taken post in a defile on the road leading to the bridge. Stirling, seeing that his retreat was cut off, ordered his men to escape across the swamp as best they could, while he engaged Cornwallis with five companies of the fine Maryland Regiment, which were dressed in scarlet and buff, and were well appointed. For half an hour they made a stout resistance, but Grant and de Hester coming up, the gallant corps, with the exception of nine men, were all slain or captured, and Lord Stirling gave up his sword to General de Hester. The Americans who had escaped from the field were all within the Brooklyn lines about two o'clock, where the remaining part of the Army on Long Island side had been stationed, and never brought into action.

Washington, who had arrived in the lines during the action, sent to New York for six regiments. and when these arrived he had 9,000 men available to resist any assault. The Americans had less than 5,000 men engaged. and of these 1,697 were taken prisoners, including 91 officers, and Washington believed that the killed and wounded amounted to about 1,000. The British lost five officers, three sergeants, and 53 men killed: 11 officers, 11 sergeants, three drummers and 231 men wounded. The Hessians had only 28 casualties. The 64th regiment lost no officers, and the casualties amongst rank and file are not shown separately. The flank companies must have been actively engaged, as the flank battalions were to the front in the turning movement. In the evening the British encamped in front of the American lines, and as Howe would not risk an assault, he commenced siege operations. Accordingly. on the night of the 28th, the first parallel was opened at a distance of 600 yards from the enemy's works. On account of a north-east wind the ships of war could not take the defences in reverse; and on the 29th, Washington, taking advantage of a dark rainy night. transported with much skill his whole force over the East River to New York. At daylight on the 30th, the British took possession of the lines, but were only in time to fire a few shots at the boats containing the rear guard. As soon as the Americans had left, General Howe distributed his forces along the East River, and made preparations for crossing over to the New York side. After a fortnight's delay, on the 15th September. under cover of a heavy fire of grape from the ships of war, 84 barges, under the orders of Clinton. Cornwallis, and Von Donop. started from Newtown inlet, laden with Light Infantry and Hessian Grenadiers. "The signal was given, and the flotilla spread itself into line, and swept forward to the hostile shore."

Washington had stationed his most reliable troops on Harlem Heights, where they were entrenched, also a considerable force at King's Bridge, 16 miles above New York, as he thought that Howe would probably attack from Westchester. At the same time he placed five brigades of Militia along the shores of the East River, in order to oppose any landing in that direction. About 11 o'clock the British landed in Kip's Bay, and the enemy - who had been driven from their entrenchments by grape-shot - together with two supporting brigades, retreated towards Harlem. The remaining three brigades, which were stationed south of Kip's Bay, and the troops in New York also retired and got safely away, although the island was not 3,000 yards wide, and they might have been intercepted without difficulty; their losses were small, consisting mostly of prisoners, which were taken by the Hessians. In the afternoon the British advanced, and at dark took up a position across New York Island from Bloomingdale, through McGowan's Pass, to Horn's Hook. Next day, September 16th, an action took place, which is known as the battle of Harlem Heights. The British troops engaged were the second and third battalions of Light Infantry, the 42nd Regiment, and some of Von Donop's Yagers; Brigadier-General Leslie (Lieut.-Colonel 64th Regiment) was in command. Not more than 1,800 men were engaged on each side, and the action ended without any decisive result. The British had 14 killed and 157 wounded, and the Americans 30 killed and 100 wounded. Earl Percy, with the third Division, which consisted of the Guards, the second and sixth Brigades - the 64th Regiment being in the latter - was encamped, it appears, to the right rear of the Army near the East River. General Howe fortified his position across the island, and for nearly four weeks remained inactive; however on the 12th October he made a move, for the purpose of passing round Washington's left flank. The Third Division, under Earl Percy, was left in charge of the fortified lines, opposite Harlem Heights, and the remainder of the Army was transported to New Rochelle, in Westchester, where they were encamped from the 18th to the 21st October. In order to counteract Howe's design, Washington marched his troops over King's Bridge to a position about eight miles north of New Rochelle, called White Plains, where he assembled 13,000 men, and threw up entrenchments. Howe advanced on the 25th towards White Plains, then halted, and after a delay of three days gave orders for battle.

On Washington's right front lay some high ground called Chatterton Hill, which commanded the plain in front of the American lines, and was separated from the main position by the river Bronx. Howe considered it unwise to



Contemporary Map of the Campaign and Battles in New York, 1776
(with modern notes and troop movements superimposed)

attack until he had gained possession of this hill; accordingly, on the 28th, Brigadier-General Leslie, with the second British Brigade, forded the Bronx river, and advanced against the Heights, while three Hessian battalions moved to the left, and turned the enemy's right flank. The hill was captured, the British losing 159 in killed and wounded, and the Hessians 77; the Americans estimated their own loss at 200. A position was thus secured from which the right of the enemy's lines could be threatened, but Howe hesitated, and waited for reinforcements, thereby losing an opportunity of defeating Washington which did not occur again.

The sixth Brigade had been moved from Harlem on the 22nd October, to hold the post of Mamaroneck, on the coast, some five miles south of White Plains, and about the same time the second Division of Hessians, 1,000 strong, under Lieut.-General Knyphausen, arrived from Europe. This Division, with the fourth Brigade, and two battalions of the sixth Brigade, also the 16th and 17th Light Dragoons, reinforced Howe, which brought his strength up to 20,000 men, and on the 31st he gave orders for the attack on the enemy's lines to be made on the 1st November. However, the battle never came off; a storm came on, and Washington, whose position had many defects, being neither strong by nature or art, withdrew under cover of the tempest on the night of the 31st, and took post on the heights of North Castle, a few miles in rear. On the 4th November, the sixth Brigade retired to Westchester, and were quartered near de Lancey's Mills. Howe did not follow Washington, but on the 5th moved to Dobb's Ferry, on the Hudson, where he had ordered some of the ships of war to meet him. A few days after he marched south, and having previously arranged a combined attack on Fort Washington, situated in the northern part of Manhattan, or New York Island, captured it on the 16th November, with 2,818 prisoners. The second Battalion of Grenadiers and the second Light Infantry formed part of one of the assailing columns.

Two days afterwards Cornwallis crossed the Hudson with twelve regiments and took possession of Fort Lee (opposite Fort Washington), which the Americans had just abandoned; he then followed them to Hackensac, where Washington had arrived from North Castle with a force much demoralised, and deserting in numbers. From Hackensac the Americans retreated to New Brunswick, on the Rariton River, where they were on the point of being overtaken by Cornwallis, when the latter received orders from General Howe to halt until he himself came up. When he joined Cornwallis, on the 1st December, he did not continue the pursuit for a week, and only arrived at Trenton, on the Delaware, on the 8th, a few hours after Washington, with the remains of his army, then reduced to about 3,000 men, had crossed over to the other side. Howe now put his troops into winter quarters, several brigades, with the Grenadiers and Light Infantry, being located in and about Princeton and New Brunswick; the muster rolls of the 64th flank companies were signed at the latter place in April, 1777. Six regiments of Hessians held the line of the Delaware, three of these being quartered in Trenton, under Colonel Rall. The sixth Brigade was stationed at Harlem, and General Clinton, with 6,000 men, was sent to Newport, in Rhode Island, from which place it was intended to invade New England in the spring. Sir Guy Carleton had started with an expedition from Canada early in October, in order to co-operate with General Howe, and he advanced as far as Crown Point, at the south end of Lake Champlain, but his progress was unduly delayed, and an attempt to reach Albany, on the Hudson, was prevented by the lateness of the season, so on the 3rd November he commenced his return march to Canada. After the capture of Forts Lee and Washington, the despondency of the Americans was such that Howe, with a comparatively small force, aided by the fleet, might have ascended the Hudson to Albany without meeting much opposition, while the main body of the Army pursued Washington. The New England Colonies would have been thus separated from the remainder, and if this course had been followed the war probably would have been ended in the following spring.

The British had hardly settled down in their winter quarters when Washington by a brilliant stroke changed the whole situation. On Christmas night he crossed the Delaware with 2,400 men, and surprised the Hessians in Trenton, killing and wounding about 100, and taking 900 prisoners; Colonel Rall, their commanding officer, died of his wounds the next day. When Cornwallis, who was

in New York, heard of this disaster, he hastened to Princeton, where 8,000 troops had already assembled. On the 2nd January, 1777, he started for Trenton before daylight, with about 6,000 men, including the Grenadiers, Light Infantry, Highlanders, and Germans. (The flank companies of the 64th must have been present with the flank battalions.) Cornwallis advanced in three columns along the main road through Maidenhead, the light Infantry and Hessian Chasseurs leading. The second Brigade, under Brigadier-General Leslie, remained at Maidenhead to secure the communications. Stiff opposition was met with, as Washington, who had taken up a strong position behind the Assapink Creek, just south of Trenton, had sent two brigades towards Maidenhead to delay the British, and it took the latter two hours to effect the passage of the Shabakunk Creek, where artillery had to be brought up to dislodge the enemy. Cornwallis arrived in Trenton during the afternoon, when some fighting took place, and he attempted the passage of the bridges over the Assapink Creek, but finding the American position too strong to attack in front with any chance of success, he decided to await the arrival of the second and fourth Brigades in the morning before taking further action. Washington, however, withdrew his troops during the night, and making a detour eastwards by the Quaker road, arrived near Princeton on the morning of 3rd January, where he met and defeated the fourth Brigade, which was marching towards Trenton. When Cornwallis found that Washington had left his position he made all haste to Princeton, but although the Light Infantry arrived at the southern end of the village while the enemy's rear guard was still in sight, the latter had got too good a start, and could not be overtaken. Washington made his way to Morristown, where he went into winter quarters, and remained until the end of May.