# WASHINGTON IRVING'S WASHINGTON OF TON

A CLASSIC HISTORY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION THIS EDITION EDITED WITH NEW MATERIAL FROM MIKE CHURCH "First in war, first in peace, first in the eyes of his countrymen, he was second to none, in the humble and endearing scenes of private life."

> For my children. May they witness another Cincinnatus, walking among them.



## LIFE OF WASHINGTON Students Edition (abridged)

By Washington Irving

This Edition Edited, with Introduction essay; retouched illustrations; additional illustrations and text; updated footnotes and commentary by MIKE CHURCH



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*ILLUS. 1 Washington taken from life painting by Robert Edge Pine c. 1786. Engraved by G.R. Hall* 



*ILLUS. II J.W. Paradise (engraving) from a picture by J.G. Chapman after Charles Wilson Peale's painting* 

History of the American Revolution

THE STUDENT'S

## LIFE OF WASHINGTON;

CONDENSED FROM THE LARGER WORK OF

## WASHINGTON IRVING.

#### FOR YOUNG PERSONS AND FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS.

#### WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

## NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, 182 FIFTH AVENUE. 1870.

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### PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

In condensing into one compact volume Mr. Irving's elaborate Life of Washington, care has been taken to retain, not only all the important facts connected with Washington's career, but also those circumstances and incidents which may be supposed to contribute to a full estimate of his character in all its aspects. Nor have any portion of the great events connected with the era in which he filled so grand and controlling a part been unduly neglected or subordinated. The work, in its present abbreviated form, still presents a continuous and complete record of American history during the period of Washington's official life. Mr. Irving's language, as a rule, has been retained; but in cases where a variation from his sentences has been necessary, in order to secure the requisite brevity, the paragraphs are enclosed in brackets.<sup>1</sup>

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## TELLING THE STORY OF WASHINGTON A BRIEF HISTORY

The story of George Washington's heroic life is well known to most Americans, in fact few men in history have generated more biographies. Washington died on 14 December, 1799 at his home, Mt. Vernon. "First in war, first in peace, first in the eyes of his countrymen, he was second to none, in the humble and endearing scenes of private life."<sup>1</sup> No one would have dared to attempt a biography of the man who had gained such great fame for his humility while he was living but there does seem to be at least one such work. The first biography of Washington I can locate in the historical record is the 1777, A Compendious History of General Washington, Commander in Chief of the Americans authored by Frenchman J. L. Audibert Roubaud. This demonstrates the fame Washington generated long before his life would become legend. There appears to be no surviving copies of this edition although evidence of its existence is ample as it appears in every edition of W.S. Baker's Bibliotheca Washingtonia, first published in 1889. The citation contains a description that describes a physical copy of the work that was examined. "No title page and signed 'J. L. Audibert Roubaud,' "1777.<sup>2</sup>

SAL

<sup>1.</sup> Eulogy on Washington, 26 Dec., 1799, Henry Lee, at the request of Congress on 24 December,

<sup>1799.</sup> Delivered at the German Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, PA

It is curious that Baker cites O. Rich's Bibliotheca Americana Nova, 1834 as his source, yet an inspection of that work reveals no such listing. However, the listing does appear verbatim in

Following Washington's death on 14 December, 1799, there begins an unbroken string of biographies that continues to this day. The first book length biography of Washington that has survived is by John Corry, an man of Irish birth, published in 1800 *The Life of George Washington, Late President and Commander In Chief of the Armies of America.* Corry's treatise begins with the passage that would be quoted in dozens of pirated editions of his Life and would be repeated in countless newspapers, journals, pamphlets and oral conversations.

"In the history of man, we contemplate with particular satisfaction, those legislators, heroes and philosophers, whose wisdom, valour and virtue have contributed to the happiness of the human species.... Among those patriots who have a claim to our veneration, George Washington appears in a conspicuous place in the first rank."

One of the most widely read and not surprisingly one of the most notorious biographies is *Life of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army of the United States and the First president of the United States* published in 1804 by future Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Marshall. Marshall's work spans 5 volumes with the fifth volume being published in 1808. Marshall was actually given permission from Washington's estate to write his Life which he never stopped editing and refining until near his death in 1835. This makes Marshall's Life an "authorized biography" and Marshall

the 1864 Bibliographer's Manual of English Literature, Vol. X, by William Thomas Lowndes of London. The citation from Lowndes is nearly verbatim from that credited to Rich, the difference being Baker has added an employment title to Roubaud "ex-secretary to the British Academy of Sciences". This is also curious when considering that I could not locate any past member or fellow of the Royal Society (there was no British Academy of Sciences) matching Roubaud's name or title. This leads to three possible conclusions. First, Baker is confusing one work for the other though since records were kept in longhand at the time it is difficult to misread Bibliotheca for Bibliographer. What is more puzzling is Baker's citation appears to have been from someone who saw Roubaud's work and transcribed what was written on the cover-page. This is unlikely since his source doesn't hold up to scrutiny and there is currently no explanation for the faulty attribution. Two, Baker wanted to credit the Bibliotheca series for business or personal reasons. Three, Baker actually viewed a copy of Roubaud's volume. This is highly unlikely because he would then have no need to cite Rich as a second generation source. In either event, the mystery of The Compendium and its whereabouts cannot be settled at this time but there is sufficient credibility to rely on Lowndes as a legitimate source.

took the task seriously which comported happily with his abiding admiration and respect for his subject. The early 20th century historian Charles Beard wrote of Life that Marshall had "...expounded in a few passages of that remarkable clarity and precision which characterized his opinions from the bench, the economic nature of the grievances on which the Republicans thrived."<sup>3</sup>

The final edition of *Life* appeared in 1835. Marshall had condensed his original 5 volumes down to one, 400 page edition published 3 years after his death in 1838. Marshall summed up his efforts at condensing his own work. "I have at length completed an abridgment of the Life of Washington for the use of schools. I have endeavored to compress it as much as possible. ... After striking out every thing which in my judgment could be properly excluded the volume will contain at least 400 pages."<sup>4</sup> Because Marshall had access to all the papers archived at Mount Vernon by Washington's nephew Bushrod Washington, his 5 volume work remains the most comprehensive biography of Washington from the historian's point of view. That however, doesn't crown it with the title of any other accomplishment such as most entertaining or exciting. Nevertheless, inspired by Marshall, at least five other authors took their turns at writing biographies of Washington. Aaron Bancroft, a Pastor, hailing from Worcester MA, was the first, publishing his *Life of Washington* in 1808. Bancroft made Life "... his leading authority for facts, and has in some measure followed [Marshall] in the order of events"<sup>5</sup> for his edition that he felt necessary to publish because of the sheer size (5 volumes) and thus expense of Life. "Marshall, in his valuable life of this illustrious patriot, has embraced not only the settlement and general history of the North American Colonies, but also the political history of the United States. His work is therefore necessarily too expensive to be obtained by all classes of the American people." Bancroft's Life spanned 539 pages<sup>6</sup>, a number that exceeds Marshall's condensed, 1 volume, final edition, a future irony the author could not possibly have been aware of in 1808.

6. Ibid

<sup>3.</sup> Beard, Charles, Economic Origins Of Jeffersonian Democracy, 1918

<sup>4.</sup> John Marshall to Carey & Lea, Publishers, 13 June, 1833

<sup>5.</sup> Life of Wahsington, Bancroft, Aaron, 1808, p. iv

## PAGES 18-22 ARE NOT PART OF THIS PREVIEW

book. There has been an Index added as well. I hope the additions are worthy of the original work's charm and thoroughness.

- Mike Church, 04 March, 2015, Madisonville, Louisiana

To read Mike's entire essay on the history of George Washington biographies and of this work, order your copy of Washington Irving's Life of Washington in hardback and limited edition, 1876, hand-made collector's edition today!

## PREFACE.

The following work has long been announced as forthcoming, to the great annoyance of the author. It was, indeed, commenced several years since, but the prosecution of it has been repeatedly interrupted by other occupations, by a long absence in Europe, and by occasional derangement of health. It is only within the last two or three years that I have been able to apply myself to it steadily. This is stated to account for the delay in its publication. The present volume treats of the earlier part of Washington's life previous to the war of the Revolution, giving his expeditions into the wilderness, his campaigns on the frontier in the old French war; and the other "experiences," by which his character was formed, and he was gradually trained up and prepared for his great destiny.

Though a biography, and of course admitting of familiar anecdote, excursive digressions, and a flexible texture of narrative, yet, for the most part, it is essentially historic. Washington, in fact, had very little private life, but was eminently a public character. All his actions and concerns almost from boyhood were connected with the history of his country. In writing his biography, therefore, I am obliged to take glances over collateral history, as seen from his point of view and influencing his plans, and to narrate distant transactions apparently disconnected with his concerns, but eventually bearing upon the great drama in which he was the principal actor.

I have endeavored to execute my task with candor and fidelity; stating facts on what appeared to be good authority, and avoiding as much as possible all false coloring and exaggeration. My work is founded on the correspondence of Washington, which, in fact, affords the amplest and surest groundwork for his biography. This I have consulted as it exists in manuscript in the archives of the Department of State, to which I have had full and frequent access. I have also made frequent use of "Washington's Writings," as published by Mr. Sparks; a careful collation of many of them with the originals having convinced me of the general correctness of the collection, and of the safety with which it may be relied upon for historical purposes; and I am happy to bear this testimony to the essential accuracy of one whom I consider among the greatest benefactors to our national literature; and to whose writings and researches I acknowledge myself largely indebted throughout my work.

W.I

SUNNYSIDE, 1855.

## PREFACE. [Volume V]

THE present volume completes a work to which the author had long looked forward as the crowning effort of his literary career. The idea of writing a life of Washington entered at an early day into his mind. It was especially pressed upon his attention nearly thirty years ago while he was in Europe, by a proposition of the late Mr. Archibald Constable, the eminent publisher of Edinburgh, and he resolved to undertake it as soon as he should return to the United States, and be within reach of the necessary documents. Various circumstances occurred to prevent him from carrying this resolution into prompt effect. It remained, however, a cherished purpose of his heart, which he has at length, though somewhat tardily, accomplished.

The manuscript for the present volume was nearly ready for the press some months since, but the author, by applying himself too closely in his eagerness to finish it, brought on a nervous indisposition, which unfitted him for a time for the irksome but indispensable task of revision. In this he has been kindly assisted by his nephew, Pierre Munro Irving, who had previously aided him in the course of his necessary researches, and who now carefully collated the manuscript with the works, letters, and inedited documents from which the facts had been derived. He has likewise had the kindness to superintend the printing of the volume, and the correction of the proof sheets. Thus aided, the author is enabled to lay the volume before the public.

How far this, the last labor of his pen, may meet with general acceptation is with him a matter of hope rather than of confidence. He is conscious of his own short-comings and of the splendid achievements of oratory of which the character of Washington has recently been made the theme. Grateful, however, for the kindly disposition which has greeted each successive volume, and with a profound sense of the indulgence he has experienced from the public through a long literary career, now extending through more than half a century, he resigns his last volume to its fate, with a feeling of satisfaction that he has at length reached the close of his task, and with the comforting assurance that it has been with him a labor of love, and as such has to a certain degree carried with it its own reward.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

SUNNYSIDE, APRIL 1860.



And now, enjoy CHAPTER XXXVI from Mike Church's edition of Washington Irving's Life of Washington.



## RECRUITMENT OF THE ARMY

Before you receive this letter," writes Washington to his brother Augustine, "you will undoubtedly have heard of the captivity of General Lee. This is an additional misfortune and the more vexatious, as it was by his own folly and imprudence, and without a view to effect any good that he was taken. As he went to lodge three miles out of his own camp, and within twenty miles of the enemy, a rascally tory rode in the night to give notice of it to the enemy, who sent a party of light-horse that seized him, and carried him off with every mark of triumph and indignity."

This is the severest comment that the magnanimous spirit of Washington permitted him to make on the conduct and fortunes of the man who would have supplanted him and this is made in his private correspondence with his brother. No harsh strictures on them appear in his official letters to Congress or the Board of War nothing but regret for his capture, as a loss to the service.

In the same letter he speaks of the critical state of affairs: "If every nerve is not strained to recruit the army with all possible expedition, I think the game is pretty nearly up. \* \* You can form no idea of the perplexity of my situation. No man I believe ever had a greater choice of evils and less means to extricate himself from them. However, under a full persuasion of the justice of our cause, I cannot entertain an idea that it will finally sink, though it may remain for some time under a cloud."

Fortunately, Congress, prior to their adjournment, had resolved that "until they should otherwise order, General Washington should be possessed of all power to order and direct all things relative to the department and to the operations of war." Thus empowered, he proceeded immediately to recruit three battalions of artillery. To those whose terms were expiring, he promised an augmentation of twenty-five per cent, upon their pay, and a bounty of ten dollars to the men for six weeks' service. "It was no time," he said, "to stand upon expense nor in matters of self-evident exigency, to refer to Congress at the distance of a hundred and thirty or forty miles." "If any good officers will offer to raise men upon continental pay and establishment in this quarter, I shall encourage them to do so, and regiment them when they have done it. It may be thought that I am going a good deal out of the line of my duty, to adopt these measures, or to advise thus freely. A character to lose, an estate to forfeit, the inestimable blessings of liberty at stake, and a life devoted, must be my excuse."<sup>1</sup>

The promise of increased pay and bounties, had kept together for a time the dissolving army. The local militia began to turnout freely. Colonel John Cadwalader, a gentleman of gallant spirit, and cultivated mind and manners, brought a large volunteer detachment, well equipped, and composed principally of Philadelphia troops. Washington, who held Cadwalader in high esteem, assigned him an important station at Bristol, with Colonel Reed, who was his intimate friend, as an associate. They had it in charge to keep a watchful eye upon Count Donop's Hessians, who were cantoned along the opposite shore from Bordentown to the Black Horse.

On the 20th of December arrived General Sullivan in camp, with the troops recently commanded by the unlucky Lee. They were in a miserable plight destitute of almost every thing many of them fit only for the hospital, and those whose terms were nearly out, thinking of nothing but their discharge. About four hundred of them, who were Rhode Islanders, were sent down under Colonel Hitchcock to reinforce Cadwalader who was now styled brigadier-general by courtesy, lest the Continental troops might object to act under his command.

On the same day arrived General Gates, with the remnants of four regiments from the Northern army. "With him came Wilkinson, who now resumed his station as brigade-major in St.Clair's brigade, to which he belonged. To his Memoirs we are indebted for notices of the

<sup>1.</sup> Letter of exhortation to Congress, 20 December, 1776. See Jared Sparks, *Life of George Washington* 

commander-in-chief." "When the divisions of Sullivan and Gates joined General Washington," writes Wilkinson, "he found his numbers increased, yet his difficulties were not sensibly diminished ten days would disband his corps and leave him 1,400 men, miserably provided in all things I saw him in that gloomy period dined with him, and attentively marked his aspect always grave and thoughtful, he appeared at that time pensive and solemn in the extreme."

There were vivid schemes forming under that solemn aspect. The time seemed now propitious for the coup de main whichWashington had of late been meditating. Every thing showed careless confidence on the part of the enemy. Howe was in winter quarters at New York. His troops were loosely cantoned about the Jerseys, from the Delaware to Brunswick, so that they could not readily be brought to act in concert on a sudden alarm. The Hessians were in the advance, stationed along the Delaware, facing the American lines, which were along the west bank.Cornwallis, thinking his work accomplished, had obtained leave of absence, and was likewise at New York, preparing to embark for England. Washington had now between five and six thousand men fit for service with these he meditated to cross the river at night, at different points, and make simultaneous attacks upon the Hessian advance posts.

He calculated upon the eager support of his troops, who were burning to revenge the outrages on their homes and families, committed by these foreign mercenaries. They considered the Hessians mere hirelings, slaves to a petty despot, fighting for sordid pay, and actuated by no sentiment of patriotism or honor. They had rendered themselves the horror of the Jerseys, by rapine, brutality, and heartlessness. At first, their military discipline had inspired awe, but of late they had become careless and unguarded, knowing the broken and dispirited state of the Americans, and considering them incapable of any offensive enterprise.

A brigade of three Hessian regiments, those of Rahl,<sup>2</sup> Lossberg, and Knyphausen, was stationed at Trenton. Colonel Rahl had the command of the post at his own solicitation, and in consequence of

Seldom has a name of so few letters been spelled so many ways as that of this commander. We find it written Rail in the military journals before us yet we adhere to the one hitherto adopted by us, apparently on good authority.

the laurels he had gained at White Plains and Fort Washington. We have before us journals of two Hessian lieutenants and a corporal, which give graphic particulars of the colonel and his post. According to their representations, he, with all his bravery, was little fitted for such an important command. He lacked the necessary vigilance and forecast.

One of the lieutenants speaks of him in a sarcastic vein, and evidently with some degree of prejudice. According to his account, there was more bustle than business at the post. The men were harassed with watches, detachments, and pickets, with-out purpose and without end. The cannon must be drawn forth every day from their proper places, and paraded about the town, seemingly only to make a stir and uproar.

The lieutenant was especially annoyed by the colonel's passion for music. Whether his men when off duty were well or ill clad, whether they kept their muskets clean and bright, and their ammunition in good order, was of little moment to the colonel, he never inquired about it — but the music ! that was the thing ! the hautboys — he never could have enough of them. The main guard was at no great distance from his quarters, and the music could not linger there long enough. There was a church close by, surrounded by palings the officer on guard must march round and round it, with his men and musicians, looking, says the lieutenant, like a Catholic procession, wanting only the cross and the banner, and chanting choristers.

According to the same authority, Rahl was a boon companion made merry until a late hour in the night, and then lay in bed until nine o'clock in the morning. When the officers came to parade between ten end eleven o'clock, and presented themselves at headquarters, he was often in his bath, and the guard must be kept waiting half an hour longer. On parade, too, when any other commander would take occasion to talk with his staff officers and others upon duty about the concerns of the garrison, the colonel attended to nothing but the music — he was wrapped up in it to the great disgust of the testy lieutenant.

And then, according to the latter, he took no precautions against the possibility of being attacked. A veteran officer Major Von Dechow, proposed that some works should be thrown up, where the cannon might be placed, ready against any assault. "Works ! — pooh — pooh" — the colonel made merry with the very idea — using an unseemly jest, which we forbear to quote. "An assault by the rebels! Let them come! We'll at them with the bayonet."

The veteran Dechow gravely persisted in his counsel. "Herr Colonel," said he, respectfully, "it costs almost nothing; if it does not help, it does not harm." The pragmatical lieutenant, too, joined in the advice, and offered to undertake the work. The jovial colonel only repeated his joke, went away laughing at them both, and no works were thrown up.

The lieutenant, sorely nettled, observes sneeringly: "He believed the name of Rahl more fearful and redoubtable than all the works of Yauban and Cohorn, and that no rebel would dare to encounter it. A fit man truly to command a corps! and still more to defend a place lying so near an enemy having a hundred times his advantages. Every thing with him was done heedlessly and without forecast."<sup>3</sup>

Such is the account given of this bravo, but inconsiderate and light-hearted commander; given, however, by an officer not of his regiment. The honest corporal already mentioned, who was one of Rahl's own men, does him more justice. According to his journal, rumors that the Americans meditated an attack had aroused the vigilance of the colonel, and on the 21st of December he had reconnoitered the banks of the Delaware, with a strong detachment, quite to Frankfort, to see if there were any movements of the Americans indicative of an intention to cross the river. He had returned without seeing any but had since caused pickets and alarm posts to be stationed every night out-side the town.<sup>4</sup>

Editor's note: It is not known the precise source Irving used to recreate the Hessian side of this story but there are ample choices from the historical record and Irving does cite *Piel's* journal (see below). The most likely other source is the proceedings of the Hessian inquiry into the events of Trenton. I located several publications from Irving's time, printed in Munich. These publications contained the diaries of officers who were at the Battle of Trenton including Wilhelm Knyphausen. In 1904, the Pennsylvania German Society gathered these documents together and published an index including maps and excerpts. *AMERICAN HISTORY FROM GERMAN ARCHIVES, WITH REFERENCE TO THE GERMAN SOLDIERS IN THE REVOLUTION AND FRANKLIN'S VISIT TO GERMANY*. PREPARED AT THE REQUEST OF The Pennsylvania-German Society. LANCASTER, PA. 1904"

<sup>3.</sup> Tagebuch eines Hessischen officers. - MS.

Tagebuch des corporals Johannes Renter. — MS.

Such was the posture of affairs at Trenton at the time the *coup de main* was meditated.

Whatever was to be done, however, must be done quickly, before the river was frozen. An intercepted letter had convinced Washington of what he had before suspected, that Howe was only waiting for that event to resume active operations, cross the river on the ice, and push on triumphantly to Philadelphia.

#### GATES DECLINES TO CO-OPERATE.

He communicated his project to Gates, and wished him to go to Bristol, take command there, and co-operate from that quarter. Gates, however, pleaded ill health, and requested leave to proceed to Philadelphia.

The request may have surprised Washington, considering the spirited enterprise that was on foot but Gates, as has before been observed, had a disinclination to serve immediately under the commander-in-chief; like Lee, he had a disparaging opinion of him, or rather an impatience of his supremacy. He had, moreover, an ulterior object in view. Having been disappointed and chagrined, in finding himself subordinate to General Schuyler in the Northern campaign, he was now intent on making interest among the members of Congress for an independent command. Washington urged that, on his way to Philadelphia, he would at least stop for a day or two at Bristol, to concert a plan of operations with Reed and Cadwalader, and adjust any little questions of etiquette and command that might arise between the continental colonels who had gone thither with Lee's troops and the volunteer officers stationed there.<sup>5</sup>

Diary references therein e.g. *Piel*, Lossberg Regiment, 1776-1783, includes diary of voyage and extracts from Trenton Court of Inquiry. Also of note from History is this index item: Schlözer's *Briefwechsel* 10 volumes, 1776-1782, and his *Staats Anzeigen*, a continuation, in 18 volumes, contain many papers of interest relating to the American War of Independence, notably a series of letters from an officer who served under Burgoyne, and dragged out weary months as a prisoner of war in Cambridge and later in Virginia. The Frankfort *Neuestcn Staatsbegebenheiten* published letters by German officers describing the Battle of Long Island, *v. Sendens Tagebuch* appeared in *Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Krieges*, Berlin, Mittler, 8th and 9th parts, 1839. He too was a general officer at the time of his death.

5. Washington to Gates

He does not appear to have complied even with this request. According to Wilkinson's account, he took quarters at Newtown, and



set out thence for Baltimore on the 24th of December. the very day before that of the intended coup de main. He prevailed on Wilkinson to accompany him as far as Philadelphia. On the road he appeared to be much depressed in spirits but he relieved himself, like Lee, by criticising the plans of the commander-in-chief. "He frequently," writes Wilkinson, "expressed the opinion that, while Washington was watching the enemy above Trenton, they would construct bateaux, pass the Delaware in his rear, and take possession of Philadelphia

before he was aware and that, instead of vainly attempting to stop Sir William Howe at the Delaware, General Washington ought to retire to the south of the Susquehanna, and there form an army. He said it was his intention to propose this measure to Congress at Baltimore, and urged me to accompany him to that place but my duty forbade the thought."

Here we have somewhat of a counterpart to Lee's project of eclipsing the commander-in-chief. Evidently the two military veterans who had once been in conclave with him at Mount Vernon, considered the truncheon of command falling from his grasp.

The projected attack upon the Hessian posts was to be threefold.

1st. Washington was to cross the Delaware with a considerable force, at McKonkey's Ferry (now Talyorsville), about nine miles above Trenton, and march down upon that place, where Rahl's cantonment comprised a brigade of fifteen hundred Hessians, a troop of British light-horse, and a number of chasseurs. 2d. General Ewing, with a body of Pennsylvania militia, was to cross at a ferry about a mile below Trenton secure the bridge over the Assunpink creek, a stream flowing along the South side of the town, and cut off any retreat of the enemy in that direction.

3d. General Putnam, with the troops occupied in fortifying Philadelphia, and those under General Cadwalader, was to cross below Burlington, and attack the lower posts under Count Donop. The several divisions were to cross the Delaware at night, so as to be ready for simultaneous action, by five o'clock in the morning.

### PLAN OF OPERATIONS

Seldom is a combined plan carried into full operation. Symptoms of an insurrection in Philadelphia, obliged Putnam to remain with some force in that city but he detached five or six hundred of the Pennsylvania militia under Colonel Griffin, his adjutant-general, who threw himself into the Jerseys, to be at hand to cooperate with Cadwalader.

A letter from Washington to Colonel Reed, who was stationed with Cadwalader, shows the anxiety of his mind, and his consciousness of the peril of the enterprise.

"Christmas day at night, one hour before day, is the time fixed upon for our attempt upon Trenton. For Heaven's sake keep this to yourself, as the discovery of it may prove fatal to us; our numbers, I am sorry to say, being less than I had any conception of; yet nothing but necessity, dire necessity, will, nay must, justify an attack. Prepare, and in concert with Griffin, attack as many of their posts as you possibly can, with a prospect of success; the more we can attack at the same instant, the more confusion we shall spread, and the greater good will result from it. \* \* \* I have ordered our men to be provided with three days' provision ready cooked, with which, and their blankets, they are to march for if we are successful, which Heaven grant, and the circumstances favor, we may push on. I shall direct every ferry and ford to be well guarded, and not a soul suffered to pass without an officer's going down with the permit. Do the same with you."

It has been said that Christmas night was fixed upon for the enterprise, because the Germans are prone to revel and carouse on that festival, and it was supposed a great part of the troops would be intoxicated, and in a state of disorder and confusion but in truth Washington would have chosen an earlier day, had it been in his power. "We could not ripen matters for the attack before the time mentioned," said he in his letter to Reed, "so much out of sorts, and so much in want of every thing are the troops under Sullivan."

Early on the eventful evening (Dec. 25th), the troops destined for Washington's part of the attack, about two thousand four hundred strong, with a train of twenty small pieces, were paraded near McK-U onkey's Ferry, ready to pass as soon as it grew dark, in the hope of being all on the other side by twelve o'clock.

Washington repaired to the ground accompanied by Generals Greene, Sullivan, Mercer, Stephen, and Lord Stirling. Greene was full of ardor for the enterprise; eager, no doubt, to wipeout the recollection of Fort Washington. It was, indeed, an anxious moment for all.

We have here some circumstances furnished to us by the Memoirs of Wilkinson. That officer had returned from Philadelphia, and brought a letter from Gates to Washington. There was some snow on the ground, and he had traced the march of the troops for the last few miles by the blood from the feet of those whose shoes were broken. Being directed to Washington's quarters, he found him, he says, alone, with his whip in his hand, prepared to mount his horse. "When I presented the letter of General Gates to him, before receiving it, he exclaimed with solemnity, — 'What a time is this to hand me letters !' I answered that I had been charged with it by General Gates. 'By General Gates ! Where is he ?' 'I left him this morning in Philadelphia.' 'what was he doing there ?' 'I understood him that he was on his way to Congress.' He earnestly repeated, 'On his way to Congress!' then broke the seal, and I made my bow and joined General St. Clair on the bank of the river."

Did Washington surmise the incipient intrigues and cabals, that were already aiming to undermine him? Had Gates's eagerness to push on to Congress, instead of remaining with the army in a moment of daring enterprise, suggested any doubts as to his object? Perhaps not. Washington's nature was too noble to be suspicious; and yet he had received sufficient cause to be distrustful. Boats being in readiness, the troops began to cross about sunset. The weather was intensely cold; the wind was high, the current strong, and the river full of floating ice. Colonel Glover, with his amphibious regiment of Marblehead fishermen, was in advance; the same who had navigated the army across the Sound, in its retreat from Brooklyn on Long Island, to NewYork. They were men accustomed to battle with the elements, yet with all their skill and experience, the crossing was difficult and perilous. Washington, who had crossed with the troops, stood anxiously, yet patiently, on the eastern bank, while one precious hour after another elapsed, until the transportation of the artillery should be effected. The night was dark and tempestuous, the drifting ice drove the boats out of their course, and threatened them with destruction. Colonel Knox, who attended to the crossing of the artillery, assisted with his labors, but still more with his "stentorian lungs," giving orders and directions.

It was three o'clock before the artillery was landed, and nearly four before the troops took up their line of march. Trenton was nine miles distant; and not to be reached before daylight. To surprise it, therefore, was out of the question. There was no making a retreat without being discovered, and harassed in re-passing the river. Beside, the troops from the other points might have crossed, and cooperation was essential to their safety. Washington resolved to push forward, and trust to Providence.

He formed the troops into two columns. The first he led himself, accompanied by Greene, Stirling, Mercer, and Stephen; it was to make a circuit by the upper or Pennington road, to the north of Trenton. The other led by Sullivan, and including the brigade of St. Clair, was to take the lower river road, leading to the west end of the town. Sullivan's column was to halt a few moments at a cross-road leading to Howland's Ferry, to give Washington's column time to effect its circuit, so that the attack might be simultaneous. On arriving at Trenton, they were to force the outer guards, and push directly into the town before the enemy had time to form.

The Hessian journals before us enable us to give the reader a glance into the opposite camp on this eventful night. The situation of Washington was more critical than he was aware. Notwithstanding the secrecy with which his plans had been conducted, Colonel Rahl had received a warning from General Grant, at Princeton, of the intended

[ 379 ]

attack, and of the very time it was to be made, but stating that it was to be by a detachment under Lord Stirling, Rahl was accordingly on the alert.

It so happened that about dusk of this very evening, when Washington must have been preparing to cross the Delaware, there were alarm guns and firing at the Trenton outpost. The whole garrison was instantly drawn out under arms, and Colonel Rahl hastened to the outpost. It was found in confusion, and six men wounded. A body of men had emerged from the woods, fired upon the picket, and immediately retired.<sup>6</sup> Colonel Rahl, with two companies and a field-piece, marched through the woods, and made the rounds of the outposts, but seeing and hearing nothing, and finding all quiet, returned. Supposing this to be the attack against which he had been warned, and that it was "a mere flash in the pan," he relapsed into his feeling of security; and, as the night was cold and stormy, permitted the troops to return to their quarters and lay aside their arms. Thus the garrison and its unwary commander slept in fancied security, at the very time that Washington and his troops were making their toilsome way across the Delaware. How perilous would have been their situation had their enemy been more vigilant!

It began to hail and snow as the troops commenced their march, and increased in violence as they advanced, the storm driving the sleet in their faces. So bitter was the cold that two of the men were frozen to death that night. The day dawned by the time Sullivan halted at the cross-road. It was discovered that the storm had rendered many of the muskets wet and useless. "What is to be done?" inquired Sullivan of St. Clair. "You have nothing for it but to push on, and use the bayonet," was the reply. While some of the soldiers were endeavoring to clear their muskets, and squibbing off priming, Sullivan despatched an officer to apprise the commander-in-chief of the condition of their arms. He came back half-dismayed by an indignant burst of Washington, who ordered him to return instantly and tell General Sullivan to "advance and charge."

<sup>6.</sup> Who it was that made this attack upon the outpost is not clearly ascertained. The Hessian lieutenant who commanded at the picket, says it was a patrol sent out by Washington, under command of a captain, to reconnoitre, with strict orders not to engage, but if discovered, to retire instantly as silently as possible. Colonel Reed, in a memorandum, says, it was an advance party returning from the Jerseys to Pennsylvania.— See Life and Corresp. vol. i, pg 277.

#### LIFE OF WASHINGTON, VOLUME I

[ 380 ]

977 elaware Flags

ILLUS. XIII Map & Plan of Andreas Weiderhold "Affair at Trenton, Which Occurred on the 26th of December 1776"

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Hessian, Andreas Wiederholdt drew this map and plan from memory after his capture by Washington's men on the 26th of December, 1776. The map's key explains key positions beginning with "A. Trenton" and ending wth "T. Plan [place] where General Washington posted himself and issued his orders."

[ 382 ] LIFE OF WASHINGTON, VOLUME I



PLAN OF OPERATIONS



Created in 1777, using pen-and-ink and watercolor, artists unknown. Scale ca. 1:113,000. *Courtesy of:* Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

### THE SURPRISAL.

It was about eight o'clock when Washington's column arrived in the vicinity of the village. The storm, which had rendered the march intolerable, had kept every one within doors, and the snow had deadened the tread of the troops and the rumbling of the artillery. As they approached the village, Washington, who was in front, came to a man that was chopping wood by the road-side, and inquired, "Which way is the Hessian picket?" "I don't know," was the surly reply. "You may tell," said Captain Forest of the artillery, "for that is General Washington." The aspect of the man changed in an instant. Raising his hands to heaven, "God bless and prosper you!" cried he. "The picket is in that house, and the sentry stands near that tree."<sup>7</sup>

The advance guard was led by a brave young officer, Captain William A. Washington, seconded by Lieutenant James Monroe (in after years President of the United States). They received orders to dislodge the picket. Here happened to be stationed the very lieutenant whose censures of the negligence of Colonel Rahl we have just quoted. By his own account, he was very near being entrapped in the guard-house. His sentries, he says, were not alert enough and had he not stepped out of the picket house himself and discovered the enemy, they would have been upon him before his men could scramble to their arms. "Der feind I der feind ! heraus ! heraus !" (the enemy ! the enemy ! turn out ! turn out !) was now the cry. He at first, he says, made a stand, thinking he had a mere marauding party to deal with; but seeing heavy battalions at hand, gave way, and fell back upon a company stationed to support the picket but which appears to have been no better prepared against surprise.

By this time the American artillery was unlimbered, Washington kept beside it, and the column proceeded. The report of fire-arms told that Sullivan was at the lower end of the town. Colonel Stark led his advance guard, and did it in gallant style. The attacks, as concerted, were simultaneous. The outposts were driven in; they retreated, firing from behind houses. The Hessian drums beat to arms; the trumpets of the light-horse sounded the alarm; the whole place was in an uproar. Some of the enemy made a wild and undirected fire from the win-

<sup>7.</sup> Memoirs Of My Own Times, By General James Wilkinson, Vol. I, p 129

dows of their quarters others rushed forth in disorder, and attempted to form in the main street, while dragoons hastily mounted, and galloping about, added to the confusion. Washington advanced with his column to the head of King Street; riding beside Captain Forest of the artillery. When Forest's battery of six guns was opened the general kept on the left and advanced with it, giving directions to the fire. His position was an exposed one, and he was repeatedly entreated to fall back but all such entreaties were useless, when once he became heated in action.

The enemy were training a couple of cannon in the mainstreet to form a battery, which might have given the Americans a serious check; but Captain Washington and Lieutenant Monroe, with a part of the advance guard rushed forward, drove the artillerists from their guns, and took the two pieces when on the point of being fired. Both of these officers were wounded the captain in the wrist, the lieutenant in the shoulder.<sup>8</sup>

While Washington advanced on the north of the town, Sullivan approached on the west, and detached Stark to press on the lower or south end of the town. The British light-horse, and about five hundred Hessians and Chasseurs, had been quartered in the lower part of the town. Seeing Washington's column pressing in front, and hearing Stark thundering in their rear, they took headlong flight by the bridge across the Assunpink, and so along the banks of the Delaware toward Count Donop's encampment at Bordentown. Had Washington's plan been carried into full effect, their retreat would have been cutoff by General Ewing but that officer had been prevented from crossing the river by the ice.

Colonel Rahl, according to the account of the lieutenant who had commanded the picket, completely lost his head in the confusion of the surprise. The latter, when driven in by the American advance, found the colonel on horseback, endeavoring to rally his panic-stricken and disordered men, but himself sorely bewildered, he asked the lieutenant what was the force of the assailants. The latter answered that he had seen four or five battalions in the woods; three of them had fired upon him before he had retreated — "but," added he,

<sup>8.</sup> Monroe was treated by a local physician Dr. Riker who may have saved him from bleeding to death. See e.g. *James Monroe*, by Debbie Levy, 2003

"there are other troops to the right and left, and the town will soon be surrounded." The colonel rode in front of his troops: -- "Forward! march! advance! advance!" cried he. With some difficulty he succeeded in extricating his troops from the town, and leading them into an adjacent orchard. Now was the time, writes the lieutenant, for him to have pushed for another place, there to make a stand. At this critical moment he might have done so with credit, and without loss. The colonel seems to have had such an intention. A rapid retreat by the Princeton road was apparently in his thoughts but he lacked decision. The idea of flying before the rebels was intolerable. Some one, too, exclaimed at the ruinous loss of leaving all their baggage to be plundered by the enemy. Changing his mind, he made a rash resolve. "All who are my grenadiers, forward!" cried he, and went back, writes his corporal, like a storm upon the town. "What madness was this!" writes the critical lieutenant. "A town that was of no use to us that but ten or fifteen minutes before he had gladly left; that was now filled with three or four thousand enemies, stationed in houses or behind walls and hedges, and a battery of six cannon planted on the main street. And he to think of retaking it with his six or seven hundred men and their bayonets!"

#### SURRENDER OF THE HESSIANS.

Still he led his grenadiers bravely but rashly on, when, in the midst of his career, he received a fatal wound from a musket ball, and fell from his horse. His men, left without their chief, were struck with dismay; heedless of the orders of the second in command, they retreated by the right up the banks of the Assunpink, they were intending to escape to Princeton. Washington saw their design, and threw Colonel Hand's corps of Pennsylvania riflemen in their way while a body of Virginia troops gained their left. Brought to a stand, and perfectly bewildered, Washington thought they were forming in order of battle, and ordered a discharge of canister shot. "Sir, they have struck," exclaimed Forest. "Struck !" echoed the general. "Yes, sir, their colors are down." "So they are !" replied Washington, and spurred in that direction, followed by Forest and his whole command. The men grounded their arms and surrendered at discretion; "but had not Colonel Rahl been severely wounded," remarks his loyal corporal, "we would never have been taken alive!"

The skirmishing had now ceased in every direction. Major Wilkinson, who was with the lower column, was sent to the commander-in-chief for orders. He rode up, he says, at the moment that Colonel Rahl, supported by a file of sergeants, was presenting his sword. "On my approach," continues he, "the commander-in-chief took me by the hand, and observed, 'Major Wilkinson, this is a glorious day for our country!' his countenance beaming with complacency whilst the unfortunate Rahl, who the day before would not have changed fortunes with him, now pale, bleeding, and covered with blood, in broken accents seemed to implore those attentions which the victor was well disposed to bestow on him."

He was, in fact, conveyed with great care to his quarters, which were in the house of a kind and respectable Quaker family.

The number of prisoners taken in this affair was nearly one thousand, of which thirty-two were officers. The veteran Major Von Dechow, who had urged in vain the throwing up of breast-works, received a mortal wound, of which he died in Trenton. Washington's triumph, however, was impaired by the failure of the two simultaneous attacks. General Ewing, who was to have crossed before day at Trenton Ferry, and taken possession of the bridge leading out of the town, over which the light-horse and Hessians retreated, was prevented by the quantity of ice in the river. Cadwalader was hindered by the same obstacle. He got part of his troops over, but found it impossible to embark his cannon, and was obliged, therefore, to return to the Pennsylvania side of the river. Had he and Ewing crossed, Donop's quarters would have been beaten up, and the fugitives from Trenton intercepted.

By the failure of this part of his plan, Washington had been exposed to the most imminent hazard. The force with which he had crossed, twenty-four hundred men, raw troops, was not enough to cope with the veteran garrison, had it been properly on its guard and then there were the troops under Donop at hand to cooperate with it. Nothing saved him but the utter panic of the enemy; their want of proper alarm places, and their exaggerated idea of his forces: for one of the journals before us (the corporal's) states that he had with him 15,000 men, and another 6,000.<sup>9</sup> Even now that the place was in his

<sup>9.</sup> The lieutenant gives the latter number on the authority of Lord Stirling but his lordship meant

possession he dared not linger in it. There was a superior force under Donop below him, and a strong battalion of infantry at Princeton. His own troops were exhausted by the operations of the night and morning in cold, rain, snow and storm. They had to guard about a thousand prisoners, taken in action or found concealed in houses; there was little prospect of succor, owing to the season and the state of the river. Washington gave up, therefore, all idea of immediately pursuing the enemy or keeping possession of Trenton, and determined to recross the Delaware with his prisoners and captured artillery. Understanding that the brave but unfortunate Rahl was in a dying state, he paid him a visit before leaving Trenton, accompanied by General Greene. They found him at his quarters in the house of a Quaker family. Their visit and the respectful consideration and unaffected sympathy manifested by them, evidently soothed the feelings of the unfortunate soldier; now stripped of his late won laurels, and resigned to die rather than outlive his honor <sup>10</sup>

## CHARACTER OF RAHL.

We have given a somewhat sarcastic portrait of the colonel drawn by one of his lieutenants another; Lieutenant Piel, paints with a soberer and more reliable pencil.

"For our whole ill luck," writes he, "we have to thank Colonel Rahl. It never occurred to him that the rebels might attack us and, therefore, he had taken scarce any precautions against such an event. In truth I must confess we have universally thought too little of the rebels, who, until now, have never on any occasion been able to withstand us. Our brigadier (Rahl) was too proud to retire a step before such an enemy although nothing remained for us but to retreat.

"General Howe had judged this man from a wrong point of view, or he would hardly have intrusted such an important post as Trenton to him. He was formed for a soldier, but not for a general. At the capture of Fort Washington he had gained much honor while under the command of a great general, but he lost all his renown at Trenton where he himself was general. He had courage to dare the hardiest enterprise; but he alone wanted the cool presence of mind necessary in a

the whole number of men intended for the three several attacks. The force that actually crossed with "Washington was what we have stated.

<sup>10.</sup> Ibid, Piel.

surprise like that at Trenton. His vivacity was too great one thought crowded on another so that he could come to no decision. Considered as a private man, he was deserving of high regard. He was generous, open-handed, hospitable; never cringing to his superiors, nor arrogant to his inferiors; but courteous to all. Even his domestics were treated more like friends than servants."

The loyal corporal, too, contributes his mite of praise to his dying commander. "In his last agony," writes the grateful soldier, "he yet thought of his grenadiers, and entreated General Washington that nothing might be taken from them but their arms. A promise was given," adds the corporal, "and was kept."

Even the satirical lieutenant half mourns over his memory. "He died," says he, "on the following evening, and lies buried in this place which he has rendered so famous, in the graveyard of the Presbyterian church. Sleep well! dear Commander! (theurer Feldherr.) The Americans will hereafter set up a stone above thy grave with this inscription:

"Hier liegt der Oberst Rahl,! Rahl ihm ist alles all ! (Here lies the Colonel Rahl, With him all is over,)"

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