

= Battle of Short Hills =

The Battle of Short Hills (also known as the Battle of Metuchen Meetinghouse and other names) was a conflict between a Continental Army force commanded by Brigadier General William Alexander (" Lord Stirling ") , and an opposing British force commanded by Lieutenant General William Howe . The battle took place on June 26 , 1777 , at Scotch Plains and Metuchen , New Jersey , during the American Revolutionary War . Despite the name , no fighting occurred in modern @-@ day Short Hills , a section of Millburn .

In mid @-@ June General Howe marched most of his army into central New Jersey in an attempt to lure George Washington 's Continental Army to a place where it might be better attacked than its defensive position in the Watchung Mountains . When Washington refused to abandon his position Howe returned to Amboy on June 22 . Washington 's forward divisions , including that of Lord Stirling , shadowed this British movement , and Washington moved his main army out of the hills . Howe seized this opportunity , and on June 26 marched two columns of troops out in an attempt to cut Washington off from the high ground . These troops skirmished with Lord Stirling 's troops , and eventually engaged in a pitched battle in Scotch Plains . Stirling 's outnumbered force retreated , but Washington , alerted to the British movement , had by then retreated back into the hills .

= = Background = =

In March 1776 the British forces of Lieutenant General William Howe withdrew from Boston after Major General George Washington fortified high ground threatening the city and its harbor . With this army augmented by reinforcements from Europe , General Howe captured New York City , forcing Washington to retreat all the way across New Jersey . At the end of 1776 , Washington crossed the Delaware River and surprised German troops at Trenton , New Jersey , and eventually regained control of most of the state . The two armies then settled into winter quarters , and engaged in a war of skirmishes during the winter months .

General Howe spent the winter planning a campaign to capture the seat of the rebel Congress , Philadelphia . The constant skirmishing throughout the winter had taken its toll on his troops stationed in New Jersey , and even a major attack on the Continental Army outpost at Bound Brook in April had not been entirely successful . Howe apparently did not divulge his plans or his intended route to Philadelphia to many people , and General Washington did not know what his intentions were , although Philadelphia was one target he suspected Howe was interested in . On May 29 , Washington moved most of his army from its winter quarters near Morristown to a strong position at Middlebrook in the Watchung Mountains from which he could observe and interfere with British moves toward Philadelphia .

Historians who mention this battle only occasionally give it a name . It is often called " Short Hills " , even though the battle took place primarily in present @-@ day Edison and Scotch Plains , New Jersey . Historians also give the battle other names ; David Martin calls it " Flat Hills " or " Metuchen Meeting House " ; one British regimental history refers to it by " Westfield " .

= = Prelude = =

On June 9 , Howe began moving troops from Staten Island to Perth Amboy . On June 11 , almost his entire army moved up the roads along the Raritan River to New Brunswick . Washington 's intelligence reports indicated that Howe had left behind equipment needed for crossing the Delaware River and was unlikely to be heading for Philadelphia ; Washington , as a precautionary measure , called out the militia in southern New Jersey . On June 14 , Howe 's army marched again , its destination Somerset Court House (present @-@ day Millstone) . Apparently seeking to draw Washington into battle on open terrain , Howe remained there five days . Washington refused to move out of the hills , and on June 19 , Howe began the march back to Perth Amboy , which he reached on June 22 , having completely evacuated New Brunswick .

After refusing to fall for Howe 's trap , Washington followed the retreating British , bringing his army

down from Middlebrook to Quibbletown , and sent a strong forward detachment under Brigadier General William Alexander (aka " Lord Stirling ") to the Scotch Plains area north of New Brunswick , to cover his left flank and to harass the British . Stirling 's command , numbering about 2 @, @ 500 , comprised William Maxwell 's New Jersey brigade , Thomas Conway 's Pennsylvania brigade , Daniel Morgan 's Corps of Riflemen and Ottendorf 's Corps . Maxwell 's brigade consisted of the 1st through 4th New Jersey Continentals and Oliver Spencer 's Additional Regiment , while Conway 's consisted of the 3rd , 6th , 9th , and 12th Pennsylvania Continentals . Ottendorf 's Corps , although it was named for its principal recruiter , a German mercenary named Nicholas Dietrich , Baron de Ottendorf , was commanded by Charles Armand , a French soldier of fortune who was given its command in May 1777 after Ottendorf abruptly left the army .

Howe took advantage of Washington 's movement , and launched a sudden attack against Lord Stirling 's position , meant to devastate Stirling 's forces , cut off Washington 's retreat back to Middlebrook , and engage the Americans in a pitched battle on relatively open terrain . At 1 : 00 am on the morning on June 26 Howe marched two columns of troops out of Perth Amboy . The first column , under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis , consisted of several companies of Hessian jägers , three battalions of Hessian grenadiers and one British , mounted Hessian chasseurs and some British dragoons from the 16th Light Dragoons , a battalion from the Brigade of Guards , and the Loyalist provincial unit of Queen 's Rangers . The second column was under the command of Major General John Vaughan and accompanied by General Howe . It consisted of jäger companies from Hesse @-@ Kassel and Ansbach @-@ Bayreuth , and battalions of British light infantry and grenadiers .

= = The battle = =

The column of General Cornwallis marched for Woodbridge , while Vaughan 's marched toward Bonhamton . As the two columns moved on roughly parallel paths through the Short Hills area , they came into contact with Stirling 's guards , and a running skirmish began , with the Americans firing on the British from the underbrush as they fell back . The retreating Americans lead both of the armies into the Ash Swamp and Scotch Plains areas , where Stirling prepared a defensive position . Severe cannon fire and strength of British numbers forced Stirling , as determined as he was to stand against them , to retreat even further back , toward Westfield . There the British , suffering under the extreme heat of the day , ended the pursuit , and Stirling was able to fall back in good order toward the post at Middlebrook . A messenger had alerted Washington to Howe 's proximity , prompting Washington to precipitately withdraw to a more secure position further in the hills . Later in the day , Howe arrived to inspect Washington 's lines and adjudged them too strong to attack . Because Stirling 's resistance may have provided Washington with enough time to manage his withdrawal to more secure ground , the battle is considered a strategic victory for the Americans . The British , after spending the night at Westfield , returned to their post at Perth Amboy , and completely evacuated New Jersey by June 30 . In mid @-@ July , Howe embarked much of his army on transports , and sailed off toward Philadelphia , destination unknown to Washington .

A local tale arose in Westfield about an encounter between General Cornwallis and " Aunt Betty " Frazee , a local resident who had been baking bread for the Americans . When Cornwallis arrived , he requested a loaf of bread from her . When she offered it to him , saying " I give this not in love but in fear " , Cornwallis graciously declined the offer , responding " Not a man of my command shall touch a single loaf . "

= = Casualties = =

A British officer recorded the British and Hessian casualties as 5 killed and 30 wounded . The only officer casualty was Captain The Honourable John Finch of the Guards Light Infantry . He had been to the forefront of the attack and , at one point , called out to Lord Stirling , " Come here , you damned rebel , and I will do for you ! " Stirling 's response was to instruct four marksmen to concentrate their fire upon the captain . Finch soon received a wound , from which he died three

days later .

The American casualties are not fully known ; the British claimed the Americans suffered 100 killed and wounded , and both sides acknowledged the American loss of three cannons , and the capture of 70 men . Ottendorf 's Corps , who had formed Stirling 's advance guard appear to have been hardest hit : out of 80 men , 32 were killed or captured . Colonel Israel Shreve , commander of the 2nd New Jersey Regiment wrote on July 6 , 1777 that Maxwell 's Brigade " had 12 killed and about 20 wounded and as many taken prisoners ... " ; he also noted in his journal , " We had between 20 & 30 Wounded ... mostly slightly Except 3 or 4 ... " Two officers are recorded as having been lost in the 2nd New Jersey : Captain Ephraim Anderson , killed , and Captain James Lawrie , captured .

= = Legacy = =

An area of the battlefield , encompassing about 300 acres (120 ha) in Edison Township , was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2014 . The area includes portions of the municipal land , as well as a part of the Plainfield Country Club . Edison 's Oak Tree Pond Park is used as a reenactment site of the battle .