

= Battle of Bound Brook =

The Battle of Bound Brook (April 13 , 1777) was a surprise attack conducted by British and Hessian forces against a Continental Army outpost at Bound Brook , New Jersey during the American Revolutionary War . The British objective of capturing the entire garrison was not met , although prisoners were taken . The American commander , Major General Benjamin Lincoln , left in great haste , abandoning papers and personal effects .

Late on the evening of April 12 , 1777 , four thousand British and Hessian troops under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis marched from the British stronghold of New Brunswick . All but one detachment reached positions surrounding the outpost before the battle began near daybreak the next morning . During the battle , most of the 500 @-@ man garrison escaped by the unblocked route . American reinforcements arrived in the afternoon , but not before the British plundered the outpost and began the return march to New Brunswick .

= = Background = =

Following the Battles of Trenton and Princeton in December 1776 and January 1777 , the Continental Army of Major General George Washington entered winter quarters in Morristown , New Jersey , while the British and German forces of Lieutenant General William Howe settled into winter quarters in New York City and northeastern New Jersey . Throughout the winter months , a guerrilla war of sorts went on , in which American militia companies , sometimes with Continental Army support , harassed British and German outposts and ambushed their foraging and raiding expeditions . One of the forward bases used for these operations was at Bound Brook , located on the Raritan River upriver from New Brunswick , the major British camp in New Jersey . The post was responsible for patrolling three bridges across the Raritan likely to be used by the British in moves against the main camp at Morristown .

In February 1777 , the Bound Brook outpost consisted of 1 @, @ 000 men under the command of Major General Benjamin Lincoln , but this was reduced by expiring militia enlistments to 500 in mid @-@ March . The troops that remained were from the 8th Pennsylvania Regiment , a company from the 4th Continental Artillery , and two independent companies from the Wyoming Valley in what is now northeastern Pennsylvania , but was then also claimed by Connecticut as Westmoreland County . Lincoln expressed concern over his exposed position to General Washington , noting that many units were not in a position to " render the least assistance to this post in case it is attacked " , and that he was keeping wagons ready in case a precipitate departure was needed . Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis , in command of the British forces in New Jersey , had had enough of the ongoing petite guerre , and organized a reprisal action against the Bound Brook outpost . According to the Hessian jäger Captain Johann Ewald , Cornwallis asked him to draft a plan of attack in February , but the plan could not be executed until springtime because it necessitated fording the Raritan . On the night of April 12 , the plan was put into action .

= = Battle = =

Under the overall command of Cornwallis , 4 @, @ 000 British and Hessian troops marched from New Brunswick to make a multi @-@ pronged surprise attack . The right flank , under the command of Major General James Grant , consisted of the Hessian jäger corps , grenadiers from the English Brigade of Guards , and a detachment of British light dragoons . While most of this column advanced from Raritan Landing (opposite New Brunswick on the left , or Bound Brook side , of the river) , two companies of light infantry went further right , aiming to cut off the main road from Bound Brook to the Continental Army camp at Morristown . The center , under the command of Hessian Colonel Carl von Donop , consisted of the Hessian grenadier battalions von Linsing and Minnigerode , and the left , commanded by Cornwallis , consisted of two battalions of British light infantry , the 1st battalion of grenadiers , and another detachment of light dragoons . Donop 's column advanced up the right bank of the Raritan , aiming to gain control of the bridge directly at

Bound Brook , while Cornwallis took a longer route to ford the river above Bound Brook and thus cut off the possibility of retreat in that direction .

Ewald and a few of his jägers were in the vanguard of Grant 's column and engaged the American sentries to the south of Bound Brook . Unaware that this was supposed to be a feint , Ewald drove the sentries back nearly to the main redoubt where the outpost 's cannons were located . By sunrise he was nearly surrounded ; the timely arrival of von Donop 's column just over the river , and the attack by Cornwallis 's column prompted the Americans to begin abandoning the post . The surprise was very nearly complete ; the Pennsylvania artillery company , which had been manning the redoubt , was severely mauled , with numerous killed and captured . Colonel von Donop reported that General Lincoln " must have retired en Profond Négligé " (" profoundly undressed " , or naked) , and Lincoln 's papers were taken . The British plan was marred by the early skirmishing involving Ewald , and the too @-@ late arrival of the companies sent to cut off the road to Morristown ; Many Americans escaped via this route . The British captured also cannons , ammunition , and supplies , and looted Bound Brook , but returned to New Brunswick later that morning .

= = Aftermath = =

The Continental Army response was immediate ; Washington sent a large force under Major General Nathanael Greene to reoccupy Bound Brook . The British had already left by the time they arrived ; Greene sent a detachment to harass their rear guard . This detachment caught up with the British near Raritan Landing , where they killed 8 and captured 16 .

General Howe reported that about 30 Americans were killed and 80 to 90 were captured , while General Lincoln reported that 60 of his men were killed or wounded . Howe claimed no deaths and seven wounded among the British and Hessians . Washington reported that " [t] he enemy lost the post at Eleven O 'Clock the same day , & our people took possession of it again " , and that the army 's losses were " trifling and not worth mentioning " . He did , however , also report that between 35 and 40 killed or captured , and the loss of three field cannons . In a report to the Board of War , Washington admitted the capture of two cannons , two officers and 20 men from Colonel Proctor 's Regiment . General Greene reported to his wife , " The British Generals breakfasted and I [dined] at the same house that day " .

Washington , concerned that the attack presaged an early start to the campaign season , worried that his troops were not yet in place to deal with major British movements . Two weeks later , after no further major activity , the Americans learned that " the Enemy are to take the field the first of June . "

Washington recognized that Bound Brook itself was a difficult place to defend . On May 26 he withdrew the garrison , and on May 28 , he moved part of his army from Morristown to a new entrenched camp near Middle Brook , just north of Bound Brook but well protected between the first and second Watchung Mountain ranges ; other troops were stationed near Princeton . From the top of the Watchung Mountains Washington monitored British movements while the two sides continued to skirmish . Both sides also engaged in intelligence gathering , each trying to determine the strength and intentions of the other .

On June 12 Howe marched a significant force (more than 18 @,@ 000 men) out of New Brunswick , through Bound Brook , and as far as Somerset , apparently in an attempt to draw Washington out of the hills . Washington , aware that Howe had left the army 's heavy baggage behind , was not fooled and refused to move . Howe then abruptly retreated back to Piscataway on June 19 , upon which Washington had some of his troops give chase , and he moved down out of the hills . A week later Howe tried to spring a trap on one of Washington 's detachments that would have cut the American retreat into the hills off ; this effort was repulsed in the Battle of Short Hills . After this failure , Howe embarked his army on transports and set sail for Chesapeake Bay , intending to take Philadelphia from the south .

The battle site in Bound Brook is marked by signs and interpretive plaques .