

= Battle of the Assunpink Creek =

The Battle of the Assunpink Creek , also known as the Second Battle of Trenton , was a battle between American and British troops that took place in and around Trenton , New Jersey , on January 2 , 1777 , during the American Revolutionary War , and resulted in an American victory .

Following a surprise victory at the Battle of Trenton early in the morning of December 26 , 1776 , General George Washington of the Continental Army and his council of war expected a strong British counter @-@ attack . Washington and the council decided to meet this attack in Trenton , and established a defensive position south of the Assunpink Creek .

Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis led the British forces southward in the aftermath of the December 26 battle . Leaving 1 @, @ 400 men under Lieutenant Colonel Charles Mawhood in Princeton , Cornwallis advanced on Trenton with about 5 @, @ 000 men on January 2 . His advance was significantly slowed by defensive skirmishing by American riflemen under the command of Edward Hand , and the advance guard did not reach Trenton until twilight . After assaulting the American positions three times , and being repulsed each time , Cornwallis decided to wait and finish the battle the next day . Washington moved his army around Cornwallis 's camp that night and attacked Mawhood at Princeton the next day . That defeat prompted the British to withdraw from most of New Jersey for the winter .

= = Background = =

On the night of December 25 ? 26 , 1776 , George Washington , Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Continental Army crossed the Delaware River with his army , and attacked the Hessian garrison at Trenton on the morning of December 26 . The Hessian garrison was surrounded and quickly defeated . Washington crossed the river again and returned to his camp in Pennsylvania that afternoon . On December 30 , Washington moved his army back to Trenton and stationed his men on the south side of the Assunpink Creek .

= = Prelude = =

= = = Washington 's appeal = = =

At Trenton Washington faced a dilemma . All but a handful of his men 's enlistments were expiring on December 31 , and he knew that the army would collapse unless he convinced them to stay . So , on the 30th , Washington appealed to his men to stay one month longer for a bounty of ten dollars . He asked any men who wanted to volunteer to poise their firelocks , but not a man turned out . Washington then wheeled his horse around and rode in front of the troops , saying " My brave fellows , you have done all I asked you to do , and more than could be reasonably expected ; but your country is at stake , your wives , your houses and all that you hold dear . You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships , but we know not how to spare you . If you will consent to stay only one month longer , you will render that service to the cause of liberty and to your country which you probably never can do under any other circumstances . " At first no one stepped forward , but then one soldier stepped forward , and he was followed by most of the others , leaving only a few in the original line .

= = = Preparations = = =

On January 1 , money from Congress arrived in Trenton and the men were paid . Washington also received a series of resolves from Congress including one that gave Washington powers similar to those of a military dictator . Washington decided that he would stand and fight at Trenton , and ordered General John Cadwalader , who was at Crosswicks with 1 @, @ 800 militia , to join him in Trenton . On December 31 Washington learned that an army of 8 @, @ 000 men under the

command of General Charles Cornwallis was moving to attack him at Trenton .

Washington ordered his men to build earthworks that were parallel to the south bank of the Assunpink Creek . The lines extended about three miles (4 @. @ 8 km) down the south end of the stream . However , one of Washington 's aides , Joseph Reed , pointed out that there were fords up stream that the British could cross , and then they would be in position to drive in Washington 's right flank . Washington could not escape across the Delaware because all of his boats were a few miles upstream . Washington told his officers that he planned to move the army and that their current position was only temporary .

= = = British movement = = =

Cornwallis , who had been planning to return to Britain , had his leave canceled . He rode to Princeton to catch up with General James Grant , who had moved with 1 @, @ 000 troops to reinforce Princeton . Cornwallis arrived , and was convinced by Grant and Carl von Donop to attack Trenton with their combined forces .

By January 1 , 1777 , Cornwallis and his army had reached Princeton . On January 2 , Cornwallis left part of his force there under the command of Charles Mawhood , and with 5 @, @ 500 men , set off down the road to Trenton , 11 miles (18 km) away . Cornwallis 's army had 28 cannon and marched in three columns . When Cornwallis reached Maidenhead , he detached Colonel Alexander Leslie with 1 @, @ 500 men and ordered them to remain there until the following morning .

= = The battle = =

= = = Delaying actions = = =

Out in front of his army , Cornwallis placed a skirmish line of Hessian jägers and British light infantry . Two days before , Washington had troops under the command of Matthias Alexis Roche de Fermoy place an outer defensive line halfway between Trenton and Princeton , with the goal of delaying the British advance . As the British approached , Fermoy returned to Trenton , drunk . Colonel Edward Hand took over his command .

As the British came within range , the American riflemen opened fire . The American riflemen took cover in the woods , ravines and even in bends in the road , and each time the British would line up in a battle line , the riflemen would fall back and fire from cover . After Hand was forced to abandon the American position along Five Mile Run , he took up a new position , a heavily wooded area on the south bank of Shabakunk Creek . Hand deployed his men in the trees where they were so well protected from view that the British could not see them as they crossed the bridge over the stream . The riflemen fired at them from point @-@ blank range . The intense fire confused the British into thinking that the entire American army was up against them and they formed into battle lines , bringing up their cannon . The British searched the woods for a half an hour looking for the Americans , but Hand had already withdrawn to a new position .

By three in the afternoon , the British had reached a ravine known as Stockton Hollow , about a half a mile (0 @. @ 8 km) from Trenton where the Americans were forming another line of defense . Washington wanted to hold the British off until nightfall , when darkness would prevent the British from attacking his defenses on the south side of Assunpink Creek . The British , with artillery in position , attacked Hand 's new position , and he gave way , slowly falling back into Trenton . Along the way , Hand had his troops fire from behind houses . As Hand 's troops came to the creek , the Hessians charged at them with bayonets fixed , causing chaos among the Americans . Washington , seeing the chaos , rode out through the crowd of men crossing the bridge , and shouted that Hand 's rear guard pull back and regroup under the cover of the American artillery .

= = = British assault = = =

As the British prepared to attack the American defenses , cannon and musket fire was exchanged between the opposing sides . The British moved across the bridge , advancing in solid columns , and the Americans all fired together . The British fell back , but only for a moment . The British charged the bridge again , but were driven back by cannon fire . The British charged one final time , but the Americans fired canister shot this time , and the British lines were raked with fire . One soldier said , " The bridge looked red as blood , with their killed and wounded and their red coats . "

= = American withdrawal = =

= = = Cornwallis ' decision = = =

When Cornwallis arrived in Trenton with the main army , he called a council of war as to whether or not he should continue to attack . Cornwallis ' quartermaster general , William Erskine , urged Cornwallis to strike right away , saying " If Washington is the General I take him to be , his army will not be found there in the morning . " But James Grant disagreed , and argued that there was no way for the Americans to retreat , and that the British troops were worn out , and that it would be better for them to attack in the morning after they had rested . Cornwallis did not want to wait until morning , but he decided that it would be better than sending his troops out to attack in the dark . Cornwallis said , " We 've got the old fox safe now . We 'll go over and bag him in the morning . " Cornwallis then moved his army to a hill north of Trenton for the night .

= = = Washington 's decision = = =

During the night , the American artillery , under the command of Henry Knox , occasionally fired shells into Trenton to keep the British on edge . As Cornwallis had , Washington also called for a council of war . Using the road leading to Princeton , and his council of war agreed to make an attempt against the British garrison there . By 2 am the army was on its way to Princeton . Washington left behind 500 men and two cannons to keep the fires burning and to make noise with picks and shovels to make the British think they were digging in . By morning , these men too had evacuated , and when the British came to attack , all of the American troops were gone .

= = Casualties = =

Casualty estimates are widely divergent . Howard Peckham records the fighting on January 2 as two separate engagements , both of which he categorizes as " skirmishes " . In the first , at Five Mile Run , he gives no American losses . In the second , at Stockton Hollow , he gives the American casualties as 6 killed , 10 wounded and 1 deserted . William S. Stryker , on the other hand , gives the entire American loss on January 2 as 1 killed and 6 wounded , while David Hackett Fischer says that they had 100 killed and wounded .

Peckham gives the British losses at Five Mile Run as 1 Hessian killed and those for Stockton Hollow as " at least " 10 killed , 20 wounded and 25 captured . Edward J. Lowell gives the Hessian losses on January 2 as 4 killed and 11 wounded . David Hackett Fischer gives the British casualties as 365 killed , wounded or captured .

= = Aftermath = =

By morning , Washington had reached Princeton . After a brief battle , the British there were decisively defeated and a substantial number of the garrison under command of Mawhood was captured . With their third defeat in ten days , Cornwallis ' superior , General William Howe ordered the army to withdraw from southern New Jersey and most of the way back to New York . This they did , leaving forward positions at New Brunswick . Washington moved his army to Morristown for winter quarters .

