

= Landing at Kip 's Bay =

The Landing at Kip 's Bay was a British amphibious landing during the New York Campaign in the American Revolutionary War on September 15 , 1776 , occurring on the eastern shore of present @-@ day Manhattan .

Heavy advance fire from British naval forces in the East River caused the inexperienced militia guarding the landing area to flee , making it possible for the British to land unopposed at Kip 's Bay . Skirmishes in the aftermath of the landing resulted in the British capture of some of those militia . British maneuvers following the landing very nearly cut off the escape route of some Continental Army forces stationed further southeast on the island . The flight of American troops was so rapid that George Washington , who was attempting to rally them , was left exposed dangerously close to British lines .

The operation was a British success , and resulted in the withdrawal of the Continental Army to Harlem Heights , ceding control of New York City on the lower half of the island . However , the following day , the Battle of Harlem Heights resulted in an American victory . The campaign of 1776 had not been a decisive victory for the British as the enemy 's resistance had not been broken . All the efforts at subjugation of the rebellion had failed and their armies had not been destroyed .

= = Background = =

The American Revolutionary War had not gone well for the British military in 1775 and early 1776 . At besieged Boston , the arrival of heavy guns for the Continental Army camp prompted General William Howe to withdraw from Boston to Halifax , Nova Scotia in March 1776 . He regrouped there , acquired supplies and reinforcements , and embarked in June on a campaign to gain control of New York City . Anticipating that the British would next attack New York , General George Washington moved his army there to assist General Putnam in the defensive preparations , a task complicated by the large number of potential landing sites for a British force .

Howe 's troops began an unopposed landing on Staten Island in early July , and made another unopposed landing on Long Island , where Washington 's Continental Army had organized significant defenses , on August 22 . On August 27 , Howe successfully flanked Washington 's defenses in the Battle of Long Island , leaving Washington in a precarious position on the narrow Brooklyn Heights , with the British Army in front and the East River behind him . On the night of August 29 ? 30 , Washington successfully evacuated his entire army of 9 @,@ 000 troops to York Island (as Manhattan was then known) .

Despite showing discipline and unity during the evacuation , the army quickly devolved in despair and anger . Large numbers of militia , many of whose summertime enlistments ending in August , departed for home . Leadership was questioned in the ranks , with soldiers openly wishing for the return of the colorful and charismatic General Charles Lee . Washington sent a missive to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia asking for some direction ? specifically , if New York City , which then occupied only the southern tip of Manhattan Island , should be abandoned and burned to the ground . " They would derive great conveniences from it , on the one hand , and much property would be destroyed on the other , " Washington wrote .

= = Geography = =

York Island was occupied principally on the southern tip (what would now be considered Lower Manhattan) by New York City , on the western tip by Greenwich village , and in the north by the village of Harlem . The sparsely @-@ populated center of the island featured a few low hills , principally Indianburg and Crown Heights . Ferry services connected the island to the surrounding lands , with the primary ferry to the mainland of Westchester County (now the Bronx) crossing the Harlem River at King 's Bridge near the northern tip of the island . The island was bordered by two rivers , on the west by the Hudson River and on the east by the East River , which separated the island from Long Island . Kip 's Bay was a cove on the eastern shore of the island , extending

roughly from present @-@ day 32nd to 38th Streets , and as far west as Second Avenue . The bay no longer exists as such , having been filled in , but in 1776 , it provided an excellent place for an amphibious landing : deep water close to the shore , and a large meadow for mustering landed troops . Opposite the bay on Long Island , the wide mouth of Newtown Creek , also surrounded by meadowlands , offered an equally excellent staging area .

= = Planning = =

Washington , uncertain of General Howe 's next step , spread his troops thinly along the shores of York Island and the Westchester shore , and actively sought intelligence that would yield clues to Howe 's plans . He also ordered an attempt to be made on HMS Eagle , the flagship of General Howe 's brother and commander of the Royal Navy at New York , Admiral Richard Howe . On September 7 , in the first documented case of submarine warfare , Sergeant Ezra Lee , volunteered to pilot the submersible Turtle to the Eagle and attach explosives to the ship ; the submersible 's drill struck an iron band it could not penetrate , and Lee was unable to attach the required explosives . Lee was able to escape , although he was forced to release his explosive payload to fend off small boats sent by the British to investigate when he surfaced to orient himself . The payload exploded harmlessly in the East River .

Meanwhile , British troops , led by General Howe , were moving north up the east shore of the East River , towards King 's Bridge . During the night of September 3 the British frigate Rose , took advantage of a north @-@ flowing tide and , towing thirty flatboats , moved up the East River and anchored in the mouth of Newtown Creek . The next day , more transports and flatboats moved up the East River . Three warships ? HMS Renown , HMS Repulse and HMS Pearl ? along with the schooner HMS Tryal , sailed into the Hudson .

On September 5 , General Nathanael Greene , recently returned to duty from a serious illness , sent Washington a letter urging an immediate withdrawal from New York . Without possession of Long Island , Greene argued , New York City could not be held . With the army scattered in encampments on York Island , the Americans would not be able to stop a British attack . Another decisive defeat , he argued , would be catastrophic with regard to the loss of men and the damage to morale . He also recommended burning the city ; once the British had control , it could never be recovered without a comparable or superior naval force . There was no American benefit to preserving New York City , Greene summarized , and recommended that Washington convene a war council . By the time the council was gathered on September 7 , however , a letter had arrived from John Hancock stating Congress 's resolution that although New York should not be destroyed , Washington was not required to defend it . Congress had also decided to send a three @-@ man delegation to confer with Lord Howe ? John Adams , Benjamin Franklin , and Edward Rutledge .

= = Preparations = =

On September 10 , British troops moved from Long Island to occupy Montresor 's Island , a small island at the mouth of the Harlem River . One day later , on September 11 , the Congressional delegation arrived on Staten Island and met with Admiral Lord Howe for several hours . The meeting came to nothing , as Lord Howe was not authorized to grant terms the Congressional delegation insisted on . It did , however , postpone the impending British attack , allowing Washington more time to decide if and where to confront the enemy .

In a September 12 war council , Washington and his generals made the decision to abandon New York City . Four thousand Continentals under General Israel Putnam remained to defend the city and lower Manhattan while the main army moved north to Harlem and King 's Bridge . On the afternoon of September 13 , major British movement started as the warships Roebuck and Phoenix , along with the frigates Orpheus and Carysfort , moved up the East River and anchored in Bushwick Creek , carrying 148 total cannons and accompanied by six troop transport ships . By September 14 the Americans were urgently moving stores of ammunition and other materiel , along with American sick , to Orangetown , New York . Every available horse and wagon was employed in what Joseph

Reed described as a " grand military exertion " . Scouts reported movement in the British army camps but Washington was still uncertain where the British would strike . Late that afternoon , most of the American army had moved north to King 's Bridge and Harlem Heights , and Washington followed that night .

General Howe had originally planned a landing for September 13 , recalling the date of James Wolfe 's key landing before the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759 . He and General Clinton disagreed on the point of attack , with Clinton arguing that a landing at King 's Bridge would have cut Washington off once and for all . Howe originally wanted to make two landings , one at Kip 's Bay and another at Horn 's Hook , further north (near modern 90th Street) on the eastern shore . He struck the latter option when ship 's pilots warned of the dangerous waters of the Hell Gate , where the Harlem River and waters of Long Island Sound meet the East River . After delays due to unfavorable winds , the landing , targeted for Kip 's Bay , began on the morning of September 15 .

= = Landing = =

Admiral Howe sent a noisy demonstration of Royal Navy ships up the Hudson River early on the morning of September 15 , but Washington and his aides determined that it was a diversion and maintained their forces at the north end of the island . Five hundred Connecticut militia under the command of Colonel William Douglas had erected a crude breastwork on the American line at Kip 's Bay , but many of these farmers and shopkeepers were inexperienced and had no muskets . They carried instead homemade pikes constructed of scythe blades attached to poles . After having been awake all night , and having had little or nothing to eat in the previous twenty @-@ four hours , at dawn they looked over their meager redoubt to see five British warships in the East River near their position . As the militia at Kip 's Bay lay in their ditches , the British ships , anchored 200 yards (180 m) offshore , also lay quiet . The day was oppressively hot . At about 10 am , General Sir Henry Clinton , to whom Howe had given the task of making the landing , ordered the crossing to begin . A first wave of more than eighty flatboats carried 4 @,@ 000 British and Hessian soldiers , standing shoulder to shoulder , left Newtown Cove and entered the waters of the East River , heading towards Kip 's Bay .

Around eleven , the five warships began a salvo of broadside fire that flattened the flimsy American breastworks and panicked the Connecticut militia . " So terrible and so incessant a roar of guns few even in the army and navy had ever heard before , " wrote Ambrose Serle , private secretary to Lord Howe . Nearly eighty guns fired at the shore for a full hour . The Americans were half buried under dirt and sand , and were unable to return fire due to the smoke and dust . After the guns ceased , the British flatboats appeared out of the smoke and headed for shore . By then the Americans were in a panicked retreat , and the British began their amphibious landing .

Although Washington and his aides arrived from the command post at Harlem Heights soon after the landing began , they were unable to rally the retreating militia . About a mile (1 @.@ 6 km) inland from Kip 's Bay , Washington rode his horse among the men , trying to turn them around and impose some order on them , cursing furiously and violently . By some accounts , he lost control of his temper ; he brandished a cocked pistol and drew his sword , threatening to run men through and shouted , " Take the walls ! Take the cornfield ! " When no one obeyed , he threw his hat to the ground , exclaiming in disgust , " Are these the men with which I am to defend America ? " When some fleeing men refused to turn and engage a party of advancing Hessians , Washington reportedly struck some of their officers with his riding crop . The Hessians shot or bayoneted a number of American troops who were trying to surrender . Two thousand Continental Army troops under the command of Generals Samuel Parsons and John Fellows arrived from the north , but at the sight of the chaotic militia retreat , they also turned and fled . Washington , still in a rage , rode within a hundred yards of the enemy before his aides managed to get him off the field . More and more British soldiers came ashore , including light infantry , grenadiers , and Hessian Jägers . They spread out , advancing in several directions . By late afternoon another 9 @,@ 000 British troops had landed at Kip 's Bay , and Howe had sent a brigade toward New York City , officially taking possession . While most of the Americans managed to escape to the north , not all got away . " I

saw a Hessian sever a rebel 's head from his body and clap it on a pole in the entrenchments , " recorded a British officer . The southern advance pushed for a half mile (0 @. @ 8 km) to Watts farm (near present @- @ day 23rd Street) before meeting stiff American resistance . The northern advance stopped at the Inclenberg (now Murray Hill , a rise west of Kip 's Bay) , just west of the present Lexington Avenue , under orders from General Howe to wait for the rest of the invading force . This was extremely fortunate for the thousands of American troops south of the invasion point . Had Clinton continued west to the Hudson he would have cut off General Putnam 's troops , nearly one third of Washington 's forces , from the main army , trapping them in lower Manhattan .

General Putnam had come north with some of his troops when the landing began . After briefly conferring with Washington about the risk of entrapment to his forces in the city , he rode south to lead their retreat . Abandoning supplies and equipment that would slow them down , his column , under the guidance of his aide Aaron Burr , marched north along the Hudson . The forced march of Putnam 's men was so quick , and the British advance sufficiently slow , that only the last companies in Putnam 's column skirmished with the advancing British . When Putnam and his men marched into the main camp at Harlem after dark , they were greeted by cheers , having been given up for lost . Henry Knox arrived later after a narrow escape made possible by seizing a boat on the Hudson and he too received an excited and enthusiastic greeting , and was even embraced by Washington .

= = Aftermath = =

The British were welcomed by the remaining New York City population , pulling down the Continental Army flag and raising the Union Flag . Howe , who had wanted to capture New York quickly and with minimal bloodshed , considered the invasion a complete success . Not wanting to continue battling with the Americans that day , Howe stopped his troops short of Harlem .

Washington was extremely angry with his troops ' conduct , calling their actions " shameful " and " scandalous " . The Connecticut militia , who already had a poor reputation , were labeled cowards and held to blame for the rout . However , others were more circumspect , such as General William Heath , who said , " The wounds received on Long Island were yet bleeding ; and the officers , if not the men , knew that the city was not to be defended . " If the Connecticut men would have stayed to defend York Island under the withering cannon fire and in the face of overwhelming force , they would have been annihilated .

The next day , September 16 , the two armies fought the Battle of Harlem Heights .