

= Battle of Iron Works Hill =

The Battle of Iron Works Hill , also known as the Battle of Mount Holly , was a series of minor skirmishes that took place on December 22 and 23 , 1776 , during the American War of Independence . They took place in Mount Holly , New Jersey , between an American force mostly composed of colonial militia under Colonel Samuel Griffin and a force of 2 @, @ 000 Hessians and British regulars under Carl von Donop .

While the American force of 600 was eventually forced from their positions by the larger Hessian force , the action prevented von Donop from being in his assigned base at Bordentown , New Jersey and in a position to assist Johann Rall 's brigade in Trenton , New Jersey when it was attacked and defeated by George Washington after his troops crossed the Delaware on the night of December 25 ? 26 .

= = Background = =

In July 1776 forces of Great Britain under the command of General William Howe landed on Staten Island . Over the next several months , Howe 's forces , which were British Army regulars and auxiliary German troops usually referred to as Hessian , chased George Washington 's Continental Army out of New York City and across New Jersey . Washington 's army , which was shrinking in size due to expiring enlistments , and desertions due to poor morale , took refuge in Pennsylvania on the western shore of the Delaware River in November , removing all the available watercraft to deny the British any opportunity to cross the wide river .

General Howe established a chain of outposts across New Jersey , and ordered his troops into winter quarters . The southernmost outposts were located at Trenton and Bordentown . The Trenton outpost was manned by about 1 @, @ 500 men of a Hessian brigade under the command of Johann Rall , and the Bordentown outpost was manned by Hessians and the British 42nd Regiment contingents , about 2 @, @ 000 troops in all , under the command of the Hessian Colonel Carl von Donop . Bordentown itself was not large enough to house all of von Donop 's force . While he had hoped to quarter some troops even further south at Burlington , where there was strong Loyalist support , floating gun batteries from the Pennsylvania Navy threatened the town , and Donop , rather than expose Loyalist allies to their fire , was forced to scatter his troops throughout the surrounding countryside .

As the troops of von Donop and Rall occupied the last outposts , they were often exposed to the actions of rebel raids and the actions of Patriot militia forces that either arose spontaneously or were recruited by Army regulars . These actions frayed the nerves of the troops , as the uncertainty of when and where such attacks would take place , and by what size force , put the men and their commanders on edge , leading them to jump up to investigate every rumored movement . Rall went so far as to order his men to sleep " fully dressed like [they were] on watch . "

One militia force that rose in December 1776 was a company under the command of Virginia Colonel Samuel Griffin . Griffin (whose name is sometimes misspelled " Griffith ") was the adjutant to General Israel Putnam , who was responsible for the defense of Philadelphia . Griffin 's force , whose exact composition is uncertain , probably included some Virginia artillerymen , Pennsylvania infantry , and New Jersey militia , and numbered five to six hundred . By mid @-@ December he had reached Moorestown , about ten miles southwest of Mount Holly . By December 21 , Griffin had advanced to Mount Holly and established a rough fortification atop a hill near an iron works , south of the Rancocas Creek and the village center . Von Donop sent a Loyalist to investigate , who reported a force of " not above eight hundred , nearly one half boys , and all of them Militia a very few from Pennsylvania excepted " . Thomas Stirling , who commanded a contingent of the 42nd positioned about seven miles north of Mount Holly at Blackhorse (present @-@ day Columbus) , heard rumors that there were 1 @, @ 000 rebels at Mount Holly and " 2 @, @ 000 more were in the rear to support them " . When von Donop asked Stirling for advice , he replied , " You sir , with the troops at Bordentown , should come here and attack . I am confident we are a match for them . "

= = Battle = =

On December 21 , about 600 of Griffin 's troops overwhelmed a guard outpost of the 42nd located about one mile south of Blackhorse at Petticoat Bridge . On the evening of December 22 , Washington 's adjutant , Joseph Reed , went to Mount Holly and met with Griffin . Griffin had written to Reed , requesting small field pieces to assist in their actions , and Reed , who had been discussing a planned attack on Rall 's men in Trenton with Washington , wanted to see if Griffin 's company could participate in some sort of diversionary attack . Griffin was ill , and his men poorly equipped for significant action , but they apparently agreed to some sort of actions the next day .

On the morning of December 23 , von Donop brought about 3 @, @ 000 troops (the 42nd British (Highland) Regiment and the Hessian Grenadier battalions Block and Linsing) to Petticoat Bridge where they overwhelmed Griffin 's men . Griffin 's troops retreated to Mount Holly where von Donop reported scattering about 1 @, @ 000 men near the town 's meeting house . Jäger Captain Johann Ewald reported that " some 100 men " were posted on a hill " near the church " , who " retired quickly " after a few rounds of artillery were fired . Griffin , whose troops had occupied Mount Holly , slowly retreated to their fortified position on the hill , following which the two sides engaged in ineffectual long @-@ range fire .

= = Aftermath = =

Von Donop 's forces bivouacked in Mount Holly on the night of December 23 , where , according to Ewald , they plundered the town , breaking into alcohol stores of abandoned houses and getting drunk . Von Donop himself took quarters in the house that Ewald described as belonging to an " exceedingly beautiful widow of a doctor " , whose identity is uncertain . The next day , December 24 , they moved in force to drive the militia from the hill , but Griffin and his men had retreated to Moorestown during the night . For whatever reason , von Donop and his contingents remained in Mount Holly , 18 miles (29 km) and a full day 's march from Trenton , until a messenger arrived on December 26 , bringing the news of Rall 's defeat by Washington that morning .

News of the skirmishes at Mount Holly was often exaggerated . Published accounts of the day varied , including among participants in the battle . One Pennsylvanian claimed that sixteen of the enemy were killed , while a New Jersey militiaman reported seven enemy killed . Both Donop and Ewald specifically denied any British or German casualties occurred during the first skirmish on December 22 , while the Pennsylvania Evening Post reported " several " enemy casualties with " two killed and seven or eight wounded " of the militia through the whole action .

Some reporters , including Loyalist Joseph Galloway , assumed that Griffin had been specifically sent to draw von Donop away from Bordentown , but von Donop 's decision to attack in force was apparently made prior to Reed 's arrival . Reed noted in his journal that " this manouver [sic] , though perfectly accidental , had a happy effect as it drew off Count Donop " The planning for Washington 's crossing of the Delaware did include sending a militia force to Griffin in an attack on von Donop at Mount Holly ; this company failed to cross the river .

= = Legacy = =

The hill that Griffin 's militia occupied is located at Iron Works Park in Mount Holly . The battle is reenacted annually .