

= Battle of White Marsh =

The Battle of White Marsh or Battle of Edge Hill was a battle of the Philadelphia campaign of the American Revolutionary War fought December 5 ? 8 , 1777 , in the area surrounding Whitemarsh Township , Pennsylvania . The battle , which took the form of a series of skirmish actions , was the last major engagement of 1777 between British and American forces .

George Washington , commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the American revolutionary forces , spent the weeks after his defeat at the Battle of Germantown encamped with the Continental Army in various locations throughout Montgomery County , just north of British @-@ occupied Philadelphia . In early November , the Americans established an entrenched position approximately 16 miles (26 km) north of Philadelphia along the Wissahickon Creek and Sandy Run , primarily situated on several hills between Old York Road and Bethlehem Pike . From here , Washington monitored British troop movements in Philadelphia and evaluated his options .

On December 4 , Gen. Sir William Howe , the commander @-@ in @-@ chief of British forces in North America , led a sizable contingent of troops out of Philadelphia in one last attempt to destroy Washington and the Continental Army before the onset of winter . After a series of skirmishes , Howe called off the attack and returned to Philadelphia without engaging Washington in a decisive conflict .

With the British back in Philadelphia , Washington was able to march his troops to winter quarters at Valley Forge .

= = Background and movement to battle = =

After their October 4 , 1777 , defeat at the Battle of Germantown , Washington 's army retreated along Skippack Pike to Pawling 's Mill , beyond the Perkiomen Creek , where they remained encamped until October 8 . They then marched east on Skippack Pike , turned left on Forty @-@ Foot Road (present @-@ day Old Forty @-@ Foot Road) , and marched to Sumneytown Pike , where they camped on the property of Frederick Wampole near Kulpsville in Towamencin Township . While there , Brig. Gen. Francis Nash died of wounds incurred at Germantown and was buried in the Mennonite Meeting Cemetery . Washington remained at Towamencin for one week , gathering supplies and waiting to see if Howe would move against him . On October 16 , Washington moved his forces to Methacton Hill in Worcester Township . After learning of Howe 's withdrawal from Germantown to Philadelphia , Washington moved his army to Whitpain , 5 miles (8 @. @ 0 km) closer to Philadelphia , on October 20 . On October 29 , Washington 's army numbered 8 @, @ 313 Continentals and 2 @, @ 717 militia , although the terms of enlistment of many soldiers from Maryland and Virginia were due to expire . With his ranks reinforced , Washington dispatched a brigade to assist with the defense of Forts Mifflin and Mercer , on the Delaware River . On November 2 , at the recommendation of his council of war , Washington marched his forces to White Marsh , approximately 13 miles (21 km) northwest of Philadelphia . At White Marsh , the army began to build redoubts and defensive works .

After the surrender of British Lt. Gen. John Burgoyne after the Battles of Saratoga , Washington began drawing troops from the north , including the 1 @, @ 200 men of Varnum 's Rhode Island brigade , and about 1 @, @ 000 more men from various Pennsylvania , Maryland and Virginia units . Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates sent Col. Daniel Morgan 's rifle corps , and the brigades of Paterson and Glover . With these additional forces , and the pending onset of winter , Washington had to face the problem of supplying his army . A quarter of the troops were barefooted , and there were very few blankets or warm clothing . Washington became so desperate that he even offered a reward of \$ 10 to the person who could supply the " best substitute for shoes , made of raw hides " . Morale was so low and desertion so common that Washington offered a pardon on October 24 to all deserters who returned by January 1 . Washington 's loss of Philadelphia and inactivity brought criticism from Congress , who pressured him to attack the city . He therefore called a council of war on November 24 which voted against an attack 11 to 4 . Nonetheless , Washington rode out the next day to view the British defenses , which turned to be stronger than he had expected .

On October 19 , Howe withdrew the British forces from Germantown and focused on the defense of Philadelphia . British military engineer Capt. John Montresor supervised the building of a series of fourteen formidable redoubts that began at Upper Ferry , along the Schuylkill River , and extended eastward to the shores of the Delaware River , just north of Philadelphia . Howe took advantage of his time in Philadelphia to raise additional forces from the loyalist population in the region . Newly promoted Maj. John Graves Simcoe reinforced his unit , the Queen 's Rangers , which had lost over a quarter of its men at the Battle of Brandywine . William Allen , Jr . , the son of notable loyalist William Allen , raised the 1st Battalion of Pennsylvania Loyalists , and was made its lieutenant colonel . Loyalist James Chalmers raised the 1st Battalion of Maryland Loyalists , and was given its command . Recruitment also took place among the city 's Irish Catholic population , with the formation of the Irish Catholic Volunteers , and in the counties immediately surrounding Philadelphia . In mid November , the fall of Forts Mifflin and Mercer effectively ended American control of the Delaware River , and much needed supplies began arriving at the city 's docks , along with 2 000 additional British soldiers .

The weeks with two major armies sitting within miles of each other were not without conflict , and a petite guerre ensued in the no man 's land between White Marsh and Northern Liberties . Minor skirmishes between light troops increased in intensity throughout November , with almost daily losses being incurred by both the British and the Americans . In retaliation , on November 22 , Howe ordered his troops to set fire to several large country houses in the Germantown area , including Fair Hill , a mansion and country estate that had previously belonged to John Dickinson . Eleven houses in all were burned to the ground , and residents of Philadelphia climbed onto rooftops and church steeples to watch the spectacle . Just one day earlier , crowds had gathered to watch the burning of Commodore John Hazelwood 's Pennsylvania Navy in the Delaware . On the same morning the mansions were burned , an earthquake struck Philadelphia , and was felt as far away as Lancaster . On November 27 , an aurora borealis lit up the night skies . The two events caused quite a stir among both the residents of Philadelphia and the troops , British and American alike , who took them as an ominous sign of things to come .

By early December , Howe decided , despite having written to Colonial Secretary Lord George Germain requesting to be relieved of his command , that he was in a position to make one last attempt to destroy Washington 's army before the onset of winter , and he began preparations for an attack on the American forces . Washington 's intelligence network in Philadelphia , led by Maj. John Clark , became aware of British plans to surprise the Americans . According to a historically unsubstantiated story , Howe 's movements were revealed to the Americans by a Quaker woman named Lydia Darrah , who overheard British officers quartered in her house discussing Howe 's plan , and crossed the British lines to deliver this information to Col. Elias Boudinot of the Continental Army , who was at the Rising Sun Tavern between Germantown and Northern Liberties , (located at the present day intersection of Germantown Avenue and Old York Road) attempting to secure provisions . Boudinot immediately relayed this information to Washington , and the Continental Army was ready when Howe , with a force of approximately 10 000 men , marched out of Philadelphia just prior to midnight on December 4 . The advance column , led by Lt. Gen. Lord Cornwallis , headed up Germantown Pike . A second column , led by Lt. Gen. von Knyphausen , marched toward the American left .

= = First day of battle = =

Just after midnight on December 5 , Cornwallis ' vanguard , which consisted of two British light infantry battalions , skirmished with an American cavalry patrol under the command of Capt. Allen McLane near Three Mile Run on Skippack Road . McLane sent a messenger to Washington , alerting him of the British movements . While the main body of the British troops marched through Germantown , Beggarstown , and Flourtown , American alarm cannons were sounded and positions manned . At 3 : 00 am , the British halted on Chestnut Hill , just south of the American defenses , and waited for daybreak . During the night , Washington ordered his troops to build additional campfires to deceive the British . " ... [I] t looked as if fifty thousand men were encamped there . By

day we could see this was merely a trick ... , " wrote Hessian Maj. Carl von Bauermeister .

Expecting a confrontation , Washington took the precaution of striking his tents before sunrise , and sent the heavy baggage north to Trappe . He then dispatched troops to find out the size and intent of the British column . Brig. Gen. James Irvine of the Pennsylvania militia took 600 men and marched them through the Wissahickon Valley toward Chestnut Hill . Brig. Gen. James Potter 's brigade of about 1 @, @ 000 Pennsylvania militia and Webb 's 2nd Connecticut Regiment of 200 men moved to screen Irvine 's right . Around noon , Irvine 's detachment encountered the British light infantry on the north side of Chestnut Hill . The Pennsylvania militia got off the first volley , but were soon routed by the British . While attempting to rally his fleeing troops , Irvine had three fingers shot off , and was taken prisoner when he fell from his horse . Potter 's brigade immediately fled , despite orders to advance and skirmish with the British light infantry . The 2nd Connecticut made a brief stand , killing three and wounding eleven , including British Capt. Sir James Murray @-@ Pulteney .

British Lt. Col. Robert Abercromby decided to push his advantage after scattering Irvine 's troops . He pushed north and captured St. Thomas Episcopal Church , located on a hillock . Howe arrived a short while later , and ascended to the top of the church 's bell tower in an attempt to view the American positions . Deciding the American defenses were too strong to attack with his present force , he opted to shell their defenses with artillery fire ; however , his guns did not have the range to hit Washington 's defenses . His forces camped on Chestnut Hill that night , and planned a new way of attack for the following day .

= = Second and third days of battle = =

The two armies spent December 6 watching each other across the Wissahickon Valley . Howe hoped that Washington would leave his positions to attack the British ; Washington did not , preferring instead to let the British do the maneuvering . By day 's end , Howe decided upon a flanking movement toward the Americans ' left , toward Jenkintown and Cheltenham Township , while Maj. Gen. Charles Grey 's forces would create a distraction by attacking the American center .

Sometime after 1 : 00 am on December 7 , Howe marched the British Army back through Germantown , and then to Jenkintown , where they remained until noon . As the British movements were concealed by a ridge on Chestnut Hill , Washington did not become aware of Howe 's maneuvering until 8 : 00 am . He immediately moved Morgan 's Rifle Corps. and Col. Mordecai Gist 's Maryland militia eastward to cover his left flank . About a mile to the right of this detachment , Brig. Gen. James Potter 's brigade of Pennsylvania militia , and Webb 's 2nd Connecticut Regiment , under Lieut . Col. Isaac Sherman , proceeded down Lime Kiln road toward Edge Hill . Movement of the British rear guard , including the Jägers and the Queen 's Rangers , was hindered by the burning of the villages of Cresheim and Beggarstown by troops at the front of the column . Howe 's right was now situated near the Abington Presbyterian Meeting . His main force moved to situate itself on Edge Hill , a ridge that ran parallel to , and a mile in front of , the American lines . Grey 's column had broken off from the main column , and proceeded up Whitemarsh Church Road toward the American center .

Gen. Grey had been instructed not to attack until he heard the sound of firing from Howe 's column , but after several hours , he became impatient and decided to proceed on his own . He formed his column into three divisions , with the Queen 's Rangers were on the left , the Jägers on each side of the road , and the light infantry of the Guards on the right , and headed in the direction of Tyson 's Tavern on Limekiln Road . As Grey advanced toward the American center , his troops took fire from American militia on Edge Hill . The militia were quickly routed , with between twenty and thirty killed , and fifteen of them taken as prisoners . Gens . John Cadwalader and Joseph Reed , out reconnoitering on horse near Twickenham , the country estate of Thomas Wharton Jr . , attempted to rally the Potter 's fleeing Pennsylvania militia . Lieut . Col. Sherman , the officer in charge of the 2nd Connecticut Continentals , resented Reed 's assumption of command , and later complained to Washington that it put " ... Officers and Men into such confusion that it rendered it impossible to keep that regularity so necessary when going into Action . " The British soon had them surrounded

and outnumbered , and the Pennsylvania militia again panicked and fled . The 2nd Connecticut Continentals made a stand , firing between two and five rounds per man ; Sherman only gave the order to retreat when the Jägers were within 15 ? 20 yards of his position . At some point , Cadwalader and Reed became separated from the militia , and Reed 's horse was shot out from under him . A body of Hessians charged at the two officers with bayonets , but Capt. McLane rode up with a few dragoons and ordered a charge that scattered the Hessians . McLane then took the two officers to safety .

The Pennsylvania militia fled in panic down Edge Hill , across Sandy Run , and toward the main American camp . Right behind them were men of the 2nd Connecticut , also in disorderly retreat . They were pursued to within yards of their encampment by the Queen 's Rangers and Jägers , who then fell back and took a position on Edge Hill , between Grey 's troops and Howe 's main column .

Morgan 's Rifle Corps. and Gist 's Maryland militia had taken position on Edge Hill , about a mile to the east of Grey 's troops , and higher up on the ridge . A small group of Americans moved down to attack Col. Twistleton 's Light Infantry of the Guards , but were quickly repulsed by the British . William Augustus West , Lord Cantelupe , who was stationed with the light infantry , noted that the 4th and 23rd Regiments engaged the Americans with 9 men killed and 19 wounded . British Maj. John André reported that one American was killed .

Meanwhile , the main body of Morgan 's and Gist 's troops engaged Howe 's main column in dense woods , where they fought " Indian style " , from tree to tree . The Maryland militia attacked Abercromby 's 1st Light Infantry Battalion with unusual vigor : British officers , who were used to encountering militia who would flee at the first sign of battle , would later express admiration at the skill of Morgan 's and Gist 's men . Morgan 's troops were not reinforced , and were forced to retreat back to the main camp after Cornwallis sent in the 33rd Regiment of Foot .

= = British withdrawal = =

On the morning of December 8 , British generals and engineers once again studied the American positions , looking for any advantage they could exploit in the American defenses . To the astonishment of both the British and the Americans , Howe decided to withdraw and return to Philadelphia . Despite being successful in two major skirmishes over the previous days , his maneuvering had not gotten as far around the American flank as he had hoped and his troops ' provisions were running low . Also , the nights were getting colder and the troops had left their tentage and gear in Philadelphia .

Mark Boatner says that Howe " decided that Washington 's defenses were too strong to warrant the risk of a general assault . At 2 : 00 pm , the British began their withdrawal , lighting numerous campfires ? in a tactic similar to one used by Washington three days prior ? to conceal their movements . An American reconnaissance party , led by Capt. McLane , discovered that Howe was marching back down Old York Road into Philadelphia and communicated this information back to Washington . Morgan 's troops harassed the enemy 's rear , in particular Grey 's column , which was hindered by the weight of the artillery that it was transporting . A contingent of Hessians formed to oppose them with their fieldpieces and Morgan 's troops retreated . The British arrived in Philadelphia later that day .

= = Casualties = =

No American official casualty return from December 5 to 8 is known to exist . Some information , however , can be pieced together from various sources . For December 5 , David Martin says that General Irvine 's force took about 40 casualties , while a Loyalist officer with the British Army wrote that Irvine was captured along with 23 of his men . For December 6 , Howard Peckham says that the Americans lost 30 killed , 40 wounded and 15 captured . The figure of 15 prisoners taken was confirmed by John André in his journal .

For December 7 , Colonel John Laurens stated that ? the loss of Morgan 's riflemen was 27 killed and wounded ? , while John Donaldson , an American cavalryman wrote that ? Morgan had 44 killed

& wounded & among them was Major Morris a brave & gallant officer ? This reference was to Major Joseph Morris of the 1st New Jersey Regiment , so Donaldson 's figure was evidently for the whole force under Morgan 's command , while Laurens ' figure was for the Corps of Riflemen only . Benson Lossing confirms that ? twenty @-@ seven were killed and wounded in Morgan 's Corps ? , while Major Morris was badly wounded and the Maryland Militia lost ? 16 or 17 ? wounded . For December 8 , David Martin says that the Maryland Militia lost 20 killed or wounded and 15 prisoners . From these sources , the aggregate American loss from December 5 ? 8 would appear to have been 16 killed or wounded and 24 captured on the 5th ; 70 killed or wounded and 15 captured on the 6th ; 44 killed or wounded on the 7th and 20 killed or wounded and 15 captured on the 8th . This gives 150 killed or wounded and 54 captured , for a total loss of 204 men .

Lord Cantelupe wrote in his diary that " the number of killed & wounded on our side amount to one hundred & twenty , one officer killed . Cantelupe 's figure agrees approximately with Howe 's official casualty return for ? the different skirmishes from 4th to 8th December ? , which gives 19 killed , 60 wounded and 33 missing . David Martin gives the total British loss , including deserters , as 350 , which would suggest that 238 men deserted .

= = Aftermath = =

Washington , frustrated at not being able to confront Howe in a more decisive action , wrote in his report to Henry Laurens , president of Congress , " I sincerely wish , that they had made an Attack ; the Issue in all probability , from the disposition of our Troops and the strong situation of our Camp , would have been fortunate and happy . At the same time I must add that reason , prudence , and every principle of policy , forbade us quitting our post to attack them . Nothing but Success would have justified the measure , and this could not be expected from their position . "

On December 11 , the Continental Army left White Marsh for Valley Forge . It took the soldiers eight days to make the 13 @-@ mile (21 km) journey . The following April , Howe resigned his post and returned to Britain , and was replaced by Gen. Sir Henry Clinton . Following France 's entry into the war , the British evacuated Philadelphia overland the following spring , and while en route to New York City , they were attacked by Washington at the Battle of Monmouth .

Remains of the American redoubts were visible near Farmar Mill , as were vestiges of stone chimneys from the soldier 's makeshift huts , as late as 1860 . The battle is alluded to in Sally Wister 's Journal , and the author later views the remains of the nearby camp . Fort Washington State Park , which encompasses a portion of the area occupied by the American forces , was established in the early 1920s by Philadelphia 's Fairmount Park Commission and is today managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources . The park 's Fort Hill marks the spot where a temporary fort once stood at the western end of the American position . The Pennsylvania Militia (under Gens . Armstrong , Cadwalader and Irvine) held positions on the park 's Militia Hill . Nearby , Emlen House , Washington 's headquarters between November 2 and December 11 , remains standing despite destructive modernization in 1854 .