

## THE CHRISTMAS NIGHT CROSSING AND THE BATTLE OF TRENTON

Using the words of the participants, from diaries, letters and journals, I will attempt to describe this dramatic and inspiring story that occurred on Christmas Night, 1776.

To really appreciate the Christmas Night Crossing and the Victory at Trenton, one must first know what had been happening in the months prior. For the events that preceded the Christmas Night crossing play a dramatic role in setting the scene.

Following the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, George Washington and the Continental Army experienced a series of shattering defeats. By August the British, intent on capturing the city of New York, had landed an army on Staten Island. And soon defeated Washington's Continental Army at the Battle of Long Island. By September, the city of New York had fallen. A devastating blow to American morale. On November 16, Fort Mifflin was forced to surrender nearly 3,000 Americans. One of the worst defeats of the war. Washington's leadership ability was beginning to be questioned. Four days later, on November 20th, the Americans evacuated Fort Mifflin in such haste that supplies, tents and other important equipment were left to the pursuing British. By late November the retreat through New Jersey had begun.

George Washington had hoped to defend New Jersey, but the morale of the army and Nation was sinking fast. The unbeaten British army together with their Hessian mercenaries were beginning to look invincible. The once proud Continental Army was now just a shell of its former self. Casualties from battle and disease were taking its toll, many enlistments would soon expire and few new recruits were joining the army. The end was drawing near. By December 1776, the British and many Americans were beginning to believe the war was all but over.

### ---RETREAT---

But Washington persevered. As early as November 30th, Washington wrote:

*The advantages they have gained over us in the past have made them so proud and sure of success that they are determined to go to Philadelphia this winter.... Should they now really risk this undertaking then there is a great probability that they will pay dearly for it for I shall continue to retreat before them so as to lull them into security.*

Not having the strength, to stop the British, Washington had no choice but to continue retreating. His only hope was to escape across the Delaware River, and attempt to use it as a barrier between the two armies and in so doing protect the Capitol of Philadelphia. Every boat for 70 miles north of Philadelphia would have to be confiscated. On December 1st, Washington ordered the gathering of all the boats along the Delaware River. And it reads in part:

*You are to proceed to the two ferry's near Trentown and to see all the boats there put in the best order... and at the same time to collect all the additional boats... from both above and below and have them brought to those ferry's and secured for the purpose*

*of carrying over the troops and baggage in most expeditious manner....*

Washington would reach Trenton on December 2<sup>nd</sup> having left a rearguard in Princeton. The following days were spent gathering boats and transporting the army's baggage, stores and sick and wounded men across the river. On December 7<sup>th</sup> word arrived that the British had finally left Brunswick and were on the march to Princeton.

The escape across the Delaware thus began on the afternoon of December 7<sup>th</sup> and continued throughout the night and into the next day. Observing the army's retreat crossing, on the night of December 7<sup>th</sup>, Charles Wilson Peale wrote:

*All the shores were lighted up with large fires. The boats continually passing and repassing.... The sick and half naked veterans of the long retreat streamed past. I thought it the most hellish scene I have ever beheld. (PG 102)*

The British bivouacked for the night in Princeton and renewed their march the next morning. Arriving in Trenton, General William Howe sent some light infantry and Hessian Jagers through the town toward the river. According to Hessian Captain Johann Ewald their mission was:

*...to seize the rear guard of the enemy at the crossing... but the last boats were already leaving the shore when we were still 300 paces away.*

The American artillery would greet the British by cannonading them. And a brief artillery duel was fought with the river in between.

According to Lt. Enoch Anderson the night of December 8<sup>th</sup>:

*"...we lay amongst the leaves without tents or blankets, laying down with our feet to the fire. We had nothing to cook with, but our ramrods, which we run through a piece of meat and roasted it over the fire, and to hungry soldiers it tasted sweet." (Ket 202)*

#### ----PENNSYLVANIA----

Referring to the retreat through New Jersey Thomas Paine would write:

*With a handful of men we sustained an orderly retreat for near an hundred miles, brought off our ammunition, all our field pieces, the greatest part of our stores, and had four rivers to pass. None can say that our retreat was precipitate, for we were near three weeks in performing it, that the country might have time to come in....*

But the "country" militia from Pennsylvania and New Jersey did not come in as hoped. So Washington was left with no choice but to abandon New Jersey to the enemy. But he had successfully escaped from the pursuing British. The army now at least temporarily safe in Pennsylvania was positioned along the river near the ferry landings, from present day New Hope south to Bristol. Here along the bank of the Delaware River George Washington's Continental Army would make a stand to defend the river and protect the American Capitol of Philadelphia, ". . . with hopes that some lucky chance may yet turn up. . . ."

General Charles Cornwallis was ordered to march with a strong corps in the early hours of December 9<sup>th</sup> to Coryell's Ferry (present day Lambertville) and force a crossing of the Delaware. According to Captain Muenchhausen:

*News was received from Lord Cornwallis that a crossing was impossible, because he could find neither boats nor a ferry. Besides, the rebels had been informed of his intentions.*

In the following days the British continued to search the river bank in vain for boats. On December 12th, George Washington wrote:

*The Delaware now parts the two armies; and nothing hinders the passage of the enemy, but the want of boats, which we have been lucky enough to secure.*

On that same day Washington wrote to Congress fearing that the British:

*"...will pass the Delaware as soon as possible. Happy should I be, if I could see the means of preventing them; at present I confess I do not.... Our little handful is daily decreasing by sickness and other causes...."*

*(Washington Writings, Vol. 7, pg.130)*

So, the next day, on December 13th, Congress adjourned to Baltimore. The situation was indeed desperate.

### ---PHILADELPHIA---

With Congress fleeing Philadelphia, the citizens of the city soon followed. Captain Thomas Rodney, on the march to Philadelphia from Dover, Delaware, wrote:

*We saw, the road full of the citizens of Philadelphia who had fled with their families and effects, expecting the British army would be there in a few days. (DWY PG190)*

On December 18th, Rodney wrote:

*When we arrived in Philadelphia it made a horrid appearance, more than half the houses appeared deserted... and nobody appeared in the streets. (PG.192)*

The Loyalists in Philadelphia, who before had remained quiet, could now hardly, restrain their joy. Rodney met with some of his Quaker in-laws:

*"They seemed glad to see me and were all extremely cheerful. Said that the contest would soon be over now; that the British would be in town in a day or two." (PG. 193)*

### ---WINTER QUARTERS---

But by December 14th, British General William Howe had given up the search for boats and had decided to go into winter quarters. Believing that the war was almost over the main British army would return to New York, but a chain of outposts would be left throughout New Jersey. The Hessian mercenaries would be left along the Delaware River in Trenton and near Bordentown with British posts strung out all the way north to New York. General Howe would later explain to Lord Germain:

*"The passage of the Delaware being thus rendered impracticable... the weather having become too severe to keep the field...the troops marched to their respective stations. The Chain, I own, is rather too extensive... but I conclude the troops will be in perfect security." (Stryker 328)*

The command of British troops in New Jersey would be given to General James Grant. General Cornwallis who was preparing to return to England, according to Hessian Captain Muenchhausen, would return in the spring:

*"...that is, if there is to be another campaign, which we doubt."*

### ---OATH OF ALLEGIANCE---

During the pursuit through New Jersey, the British had offered an Oath of Allegiance to all Americans. This Oath would give all persons a pardon for rebellious past deeds. In

occupied New Jersey many citizens, with the undefeated British now in their backyards, were beginning to take this Oath in alarmingly growing numbers.

According to a Hessian officer as many as fifty to sixty rebels a day were taking the oath of allegiance to the king and receiving Protection papers in return.

### ---LEE---

As if things couldn't get worse, more bad news reached Washington by December 15th. Major General Charles Lee had been captured by the British. The loss of Lee, second in rank only to Washington, was another devastating blow to morale. Lee who had been enjoying an independent command detached from Washington had repeatedly ignored his superiors request to march and join his force with Washington's. His capture however would be a fortunate occurrence in that General John Sullivan would immediately march Lee's men to Washington arriving just days before Christmas. Also, General Horatio Gates was marching south from New York with additional reinforcements. These troops, many from New England, enlistments would soon expire by January 1st.

On December 18th, Washington wrote:

*I have, as yet, baffled all their attempts to cross.... But we are in a very disaffected part of the province; and, between you and me, I think our affairs are in a very bad condition; not so much from the apprehension of General Howe's army, as from the defection of New York, the Jerseys, and Pennsylvania. In short, the conduct of the Jerseys has been most infamous. Instead of turning out to defend their country, and affording aid to our army, they are making their submissions as fast as they can.... if every nerve is not strained to recruit the new army with all possible expedition, I think the game is pretty nearly up.... (Washington's Writings, Vol. 7, pg. 230)*

### ---LOYALISTS---

Though the American army was safe in Pennsylvania, Bucks County however, did not offer a warm welcome. The County was full of Loyalists and neutral Quakers who were not happy to see the army arrive.

Captain John Lacey, a Quaker from Bucks County, found upon returning home in December:

*"...a sullen, vindictive and malignant spirit seemed to have taken hold of a large portion of the people in this County, whose hostility to the Revolution was too apparent not to be noticed.... A radical change had taken place in the political sentiments of my neighbours... during my absence." (PG. 158)*

### ---HESSIANS AND OCCUPIED TRENTON---

Now the Hessians in Trenton were mercenaries, but not mercenaries in the modern term. Today we think of a mercenary as a well paid volunteer soldier. But the Hessians were already soldiers in a not yet united Germany and were sold or "rented" by their Princes to the British. The money was going to the Princes not to the soldiers.

Three Hessian regiments, six 3-pound brass field pieces, 50 jagers and 20 British light dragoons under Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall, occupied Trenton. Nearly 1,500 men. According to a Hessian officer's Diary:

*We marched to Trenton... in order to take up a sort of winter quarters here, which are*

wretched enough. This town consists of about one hundred houses, of which many are mean and little... The inhabitants... are almost all fled, so that we occupy bare walls.... We are obliged to be constantly on our guard, and do very severe duty, ...our people begin to grow ragged.... We have not slept one night in peace since we came to this place. The troops have lain on their arms every night, but they can endure it no longer. (Striker 483-484)

### ---HESSIANS HARASSED---

As this diary suggests the Hessians were not in a celebratory mood that Christmas. The myth that they were drunk and hung over from their Christmas celebrations is just that, a myth. The only possible evidence of drinking is that of their commander Colonel Rall. Rall, on Christmas Night, had been playing checkers at his headquarters at Stacy Potts' house and later attended a party at Abraham Hunt's house and it is assumed that he may have been drinking. But the soldiers were not negligent by getting drunk. If anything they were fatigued from the constant patrols, guard posts and duties that were required of them. American raiding parties were crossing the river on an almost daily basis and skirmishing with the Hessians. And as a result, every night, one of the three Hessian regiments had orders to sleep in uniform to be ready in case of attack. This constant skirmishing and harassment had affected Colonel Rall and in the days before Christmas he sent numerous letters to his superiors complaining about his situation.

On December 20th, Rall wrote in response to a request for some of his troops:

*It is impossible... to spare a battalion of my brigade as I am liable to be attacked at any moment. I have the enemy before me, behind me and at my right flank. The road from here to Princeton is very unsafe so that I have to send you letters by escort of fifty men. ...the enemy is very bold in front of me at the landings....*

In a letter dated December 21<sup>st</sup>, General James Grant would reply to the concerned Rall:

*"I have this moment received your three letters of yesterday's date. I am sorry to hear your Brigade has been fatigued or alarmed. You may be assured that the rebel army in Pennsylvania... does not exceed eight thousand men who have neither shoes nor stockings, are in fact almost naked, dying of cold, without blankets and very ill supplied with provisions." (stryker 334)*

In reply to Rall's request for a detachment of British troops to occupy Maidenhead (Lawrenceville) to keep his line of communications open to Princeton, Grant wrote:

*"For as General Howe does not approve of Maidenhead for a Post, I can not send troops there, but I have desired Brig. General Leslie to send patrols frequently from Princetown....*

Grant's verbal reply to the messenger supposedly went like this:

*"Tell the Colonel he is safe; I will undertake to keep the peace in New Jersey with a corporal's guard." (Stryker, pg 108)*

On December 24<sup>th</sup>, Rall ordered a heavy patrol to Pennington. Two detachments of 100 men each would march by separate routes. Rall would personally follow Major Matthaues' patrol north, along the main road to Pennington. Captain Steding's detachment would march north along the River road to Johnson's Ferry (Today's WCSP) and then east to Pennington.

This 2<sup>nd</sup> patrol would encounter and chase a small force of Americans back to their boats near Johnson's Ferry, wound three Americans, and receive 4 cannon shots in reply from across the river. Patrols like this however could not be undertaken every day without wearing out the limited number of Hessians under Rall's command. And as luck would have it, it would occur a day too early.

On the morning of December 25<sup>th</sup> Rall would receive an amazing letter, dated Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, past eleven at night from General Grant at Brunswick (sent to Col. von Donop a copy was sent also to Rall), stating that Washington had convened a council of War. According to Grant:

*"Washington has been informed that our troops have marched into Winter quarters and have been told that we are weak at Trenton and Princetown and Lord Sterling expressed a wish to make an attack upon these two places. I don't believe he will attempt it, but be assured that my information is undoubtedly true, so I need not advise you to be upon your guard against an unexpected attack at Trenton. I think I have got into a good line of intelligence which will be of use to us all..." (Stryker, pg 116)(Dwyer220-221)*

An understatement by Grant to say the least. It boggles my mind how he got this bit of information. Someone in the Council, the family of the house or a spy in the basement.

### ---THOMAS PAINE---

During the retreat through New Jersey, Thomas Paine wrote the American Crisis, to raise the spirits of the patriots and steady the morale of the soldiers. It appeared in print on December 19th in the Pennsylvania Journal:

*These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.*

### ---THE PLAN---

With the end of 1776 quickly approaching, Washington found himself in a desperate situation. Nearly half his army's enlistments were to expire at the end of the month. On December 20th, Washington wrote:

*...I rather think the design of General Howe is to possess himself of Philadelphia this winter, if possible; and in truth I do not see what is to prevent him, as ten days more will put an end to the existence of our army... the enemy are daily gathering strength from the disaffected. This strength, like a snow-ball rolling, will increase, unless some means can be devised to check effectually the progress of the enemy's arms... Could anything but the river Delaware have saved Philadelphia? (Washington's Writings, Vol. 7, pg.234)*

With the arrival of reinforcements from Generals Sullivan and Gates, Washington could finally formulate his plan of attack. And on December 23rd he wrote:

*...Christmas-day at night, one hour before day is the time fixed upon for our attempt on Trenton. For Heaven's sake keep this to yourself, as the discovery of it may prove fatal to us... but necessity, dire necessity, will, nay must, justify an attempt....*

General Horatio Gates had arrived from New York on December 20<sup>th</sup> with about 500

much needed men. Washington had requested Gates to take command of Colonel John Cadwalader's force near Bristol, mainly to ease the grumbling from Continental regiments under the command of Cadwalader (a militia officer), but Gates reported himself sick and was in fact on his way to Congress at Baltimore to work his own star at Washington's expense.

The plan of attack was for three separate crossings of the river. Washington with the striking force (2,400 men) would cross from McConkey's Ferry and land at Johnson's Ferry. The army would then march nine miles and, before daylight, surprise and attack the outnumbered Hessians in Trenton. General James Ewing's force (about 600 men) was to cross at Trenton Ferry and take possession of the Assunpink Creek bridge, cutting off the road leading south from Trenton. Colonel Cadwalader's division (nearly 2,000 men) crossing from Bristol to Burlington was to keep another enemy force, in the Bordentown area, from assisting Rall. But only Washington's force would successfully cross the river that night. The ice conditions down river would prevent both Ewing and Cadwalader from Crossing. Ewing would encounter and ice jam at the Trenton Falls (a Rapids really) due to the river being tidal and Cadwalader would encounter flow ice packed hundreds of feet out from the Jersey bank. Some of Cadwalader's men would actually walk across the ice to shore, but the boats with the artillery were unable to land. Washington would be on his own.

According to Benjamin Rush who visited Washington on the night before the crossing: *I observed him to play with his pen and ink upon several small pieces of paper. One of them by accident fell upon the floor near my feet. I was struck with the inscription upon it. It was 'Victory or Death.'*"

### ---XMAS SKIRMISH---

On Christmas Night, (at about 7 or 8 pm) while the American army was crossing the river, an unauthorized small band (of about 30) Americans attacked the Hessian picket of 15 men on the Pennington Road. Six Hessians were wounded and were forced to fall back as the Americans advanced then quickly withdrew. This small affair quickly had the town in an uproar as small parties of Hessians quickly rushed toward the scene of action. According to Hessian Lieutenant Andreas Wiederholdt:

*The entire garrison was aroused and ordered under arms and a detachment... was sent out to see what was going on.... But that was all....*

No sign of the Americans could be found and believing this to be just another skirmish, the Hessians were ordered to return to their quarters. The rest of the night passed quietly in Trenton as Washington was landing undetected up river at Johnson's Ferry.

### ---BOATS---

There were two important but different types of boats that were used for the crossing. The Durham boats were large deep-sided boats used for carrying iron ore and could hold about 40 men. The Ferryboats were flat-bottomed rafts that were used by the many ferry operators to transport civilians and commerce. These boats would cross the 18 cannon, their horses and ammunition carts. The entire crossing would be under the direction of Colonel Henry Knox. Knox who had earlier in the war transported the captured artillery from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston over the snowy mountains was the ideal man for the job. According

to one soldier his voice was

*...heard above the crash of the ice which filled the river.*

### **---THE CROSSING---**

It had been expected that the 2,400 men, 100 or so horses and 18 cannons, might be ferried over by midnight and the army reach Trenton before daybreak. The river had been clear of ice on the 24th, but before noon on the 25th, was full of floating cakes of ice, however not very thick. A full moon would be shrouded by dense clouds so that the night would be extremely dark. At about 11 o'clock a severe storm would strike.

According to Colonel Henry Knox:

*...the army... passed the river on Christmas Night, with almost infinite difficulty... The floating ice in the river made the labor almost incredible. However, perseverance accomplished what at first seemed impossible.... The night was cold and stormy; it hailed with great violence....*

Having crossed earlier in the night, John Greenwood would later recall that:

*"We had to wait for the rest and so began to pull down the fences and make fires to warm ourselves, for the storm was increasing rapidly. After a while it rained, hailed, snowed, and froze and at the same time blew a perfect hurricane...."*

General Adam Stephen's brigade was the first to embark and once across was ordered to "appoint a guard to form a chain of sentries round the landing- place at a sufficient distance from the river to permit the troops to form, this guard not to suffer any person to go in or come out, but to detain all persons who attempt either."

Washington would cross over soon after. The men were to carry 3 days cooked rations, 40 rounds of ammunition and a blanket.

*"A profound silence to be enjoined, and no man to quit his ranks on the pain of death."*

### **---THE MARCH TO TRENTON---**

It was nearly four in the morning, on December 26, by the time Washington's army was prepared for the march to Trenton. The ordeal of the crossing had taken much longer than expected and Washington had feared the element of surprise was now lost, it would be after daybreak before the army would reach Trenton.

From the landing site the army marched inland for about a mile then turned South onto the Bear Tavern Road toward Birmingham (Now West Trenton). After about a miles march the army came to Jacob's Creek. The road continued down a steep decline into a deep ravine cut by the creek which was running high and fast towards the Delaware. According to Lt. Elisha Bostwick:

*...our horses were then unharness'd & the artillery prepared.*

The cannons were lowered by the drag ropes wrapped around trees for mooring posts. Then once across the creek they had to be hauled up the other side of the ravine. This ordeal had to be repeated again for the nearby flooded tributary of Jacobs Creek.

At Birmingham the army halted for a brief rest and hasty meal, and then the army was divided into two columns. Both divisions had about a four and one half-mile march, which led to opposite ends of the town. Captains Washington and Flahaven were to appoint a



guard:

*“of 40 men each, to march before the divisions and post themselves on the road about three miles from Trenton, and make prisoners of all going in or coming out of town.”  
(Stryker 115)*

John Greenwood described the march:

*...we began an apparently circuitous march, not advancing faster than a child ten years old could walk, and stopping frequently, though for what purpose I knew not. During the whole night it alternately hailed, rained, snowed, and blew tremendously. At one time, when we were halted on the road, I sat down on the stump of a tree and was so benumbed with cold that I wanted to go to sleep. Had I been passed unnoticed I should have frozen to death without knowing it. But as good luck always attended me, Sergeant Madden came and, rousing me up, made me walk again. We then began to march again, just in the old slow way.”*

### **---THE BATTLE OF TRENTON---**

The bad weather would play a major role. One early morning Hessian patrol had been canceled another shortened due to the intensity of the storm.

After daybreak, at about 8:00 AM, on the morning of December 26th, the Hessian pickets on the outskirts of town were encountered and driven in. The Hessian picket on the Pennington Road was encountered first by General Greene's column. A quick volley was fired at the advancing Americans as the Hessian picket fell back toward town. As ordered General Stephen's brigade boldly advanced on the heels of the retreating Hessians, allowing them no time to form.

Within minutes of the first shots, General Sullivan's Division would engage the Hessian Jaeger picket post on the River Road. Interestingly the post would also receive 10 cannon shots from across the river from General Dickinson's force. One volley was fired by the Jaegers, before they were forced to retire. This picket of 50 jagers would avoid capture by escaping across the Assunpink Creek Bridge.

According to John Greenwood:

*As we advanced, it being dark and stormy so that we could not see very far ahead, we got within 200 yards of about 300 or 400 Hessians... They made a full fire at us, but I did not see that they killed anyone.... As we had been in the storm all night we were not only wet through and through ourselves, but our guns and powder were wet also, so that I do not believe that one would go off, and I saw none fired by our party... orders were given to “Charge bayonets and rush on!” and rush on we did.... Before they had time to reload we were within three feet of them, when they broke... and ran like so many frightened devils....*

General Greene's Division having pushed into the northern end of town placed 6 or 7 artillery pieces at the head of King & Queen Streets (The present location of the Trenton Battle Monument). These cannons would prove the difference by breaking up two Hessian counterattacks and forcing the enemy out of the town.

### **---SURRENDER---**

Colonel Henry Knox wrote of the battle:

*The storm continued with great violence, but was in our backs, and consequently in the faces of our enemy.... They endeavoured to form in the streets, the heads of which we had previously the possession of with cannon... these, in the twinkling of an eye, cleared the streets. The backs of the houses were resorted to for shelter. These proved ineffectual: the musketry soon dislodged them. Finally they were driven through the town into an open plain beyond.... The poor fellows... saw themselves completely surrounded.... and were obliged to surrender upon the spot....*

Surrounded, outnumbered and overpowered, with their Colonel having received mortal wounds, and the weather having affected the musketry, the Hessians were left with no options but surrender.

### ---RETURN MARCH---

Washington, having won the battle held a council of war with his officers and the decision was made to return to Pennsylvania with the prisoners. According to Washington:

*The weather was so amazingly severe, our arms so wet, and the men so fatigued, it was judged prudent to come off immediately with our prisoners and plunder.*

Colonel John Haslett from Delaware would lament:

*We should have gone on and, panick struck, they would have fled before us, but the inclemency of the weather rendered it impossible.*

Haslet sadly would later be killed at the Battle of Princeton.

The army would now have to return, another 9 miles, over the same roads they had marched over just hours before.

Shortly after the battle, Colonel Henry Knox encountered Sergeant Joseph White, whose cannon had been disabled and abandoned during the battle. White had returned to it and was attempting to repair it, but Knox had told him to leave it there. That the piece was beyond repair. But according to White:

*I was determind to get it off. I hired four of our men and one of them had been a mate on a vessel. He contrived it and off we moved. (pg. 262)*

Later according to White he again encountered Knox who told him:

*You had better leave that cannon. I will not take charge of it.*

And still later as White neared the ferry landing he met Knox. This time Knox took a close look at the cannon and asked White which cannon it was.

*I told him the piece that he had ordered to be left. I Wanted the victory to be complete.*

A smiling Knox replied:

*You are a good fellow, I will remember you.*

Over 900 Hessians had been captured after about a one hour long battle. Some twenty had been killed and another 80 wounded. The American losses were according to Washington:

*... very trifling indeed, only two officers and one or two privates wounded.*

However nearly 400 Hessians had escaped some by fording the ice-cold Assunpink creek.

### ---RETURN CROSSING---

During the march back to the river a number of fatigued and sick soldiers found shelter among the local homes. According to William Chamberlin:

*...it began to rain. I had got throughly wet before we began our retrograde march, and... our feet was drenched in water at every step.... I went into a house with my teeth chattering in my head.... After a while, however, I got warm and made shift to get back to the ferry.*

(PG. 274)

An unaccounted number of these men perished during the night. According to Richard Scudder several fatigued and all-but-frozen soldiers took refuge at his home during the night of December 26<sup>th</sup>. Some of them were:

*...very sick in the night...and two or three died.*

The exertions made by the army were astounding. The men had crossed the river twice, had marched well over 18 miles, fought and won the Battle of Trenton and all under horrid conditions and awful weather. An incredible feat. As one can imagine the men suffered greatly and over 1,000 of them were sick and unfit for duty the next day.

### AFTERMATH

The American victory at Trenton was an incredible morale boost and the first battlefield victory of the war for General Washington. Though a small battle in terms of men, its impact was huge and most possibly saved the Revolution. The morale of the army and people, which before had been shaken by earlier defeats, were now, lifted from the depths of despair and what many had perceived as inevitable defeat. Washington had somehow pulled off a miracle and was now seen as a military genius. A turning point had been reached.

The British were quick to realize the impact of this American victory. General William Howe, in a letter to Lord Germain wrote:

*It is with much concern, that I inform his lordship, the unfortunate and untimely defeat at Trenton, has thrown us farther back than was at first apprehended, from the great encouragement it has given to the rebels.*

From Virginia, a Loyalist Nicholas Cresswell wrote:

*The minds of the people are much altered. A few days ago they had given up the cause for lost. Their late successes have turned the scale and now they are all liberty-mad again.*(PG. 279)

The war however had not been won. Six more long years of fighting would grind on until a Peace Treaty was signed in 1783. But never again would the cause of American Independence be so vulnerable and so close to collapse than in the days preceding Christmas, 1776.