

The Battle of Long Island

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[Bunker Hill outtakes]

Shortly after the June 17th, 1775 battle of Bunker Hill

[pic of GW]

General George Washington was placed in command of the Continental army.

[pic of Howe]

Washington's opponent was British Gen. Sir William Howe.

[1] [British army marches by]

After a 6-months long siege, Washington was able to capture the high ground above Boston, making life miserable for the British occupying that city. The British were forced to evacuate Boston on March 17, 1776.

[2] [GW and his officers with maps, planning]

Washington guessed what Howe's next move would be. Washington knew that whoever controlled New York City, would gain many advantages. The British would be able to control the Hudson River's entry to the sea, and they would have an excellent harbor for their powerful fleet. This would allow the British an important area to gather reinforcements and supplies. It would also give them a base with which to threaten anyplace they wanted, along the coast of the American colonies.

[Ships]

But Howe surprised Washington. Instead of moving on New York immediately, he instead sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia. Howe used the time to gather all the ships and reinforcements he could, and to prepare for the invasion of Long Island, just east of New York City, which, at the time, was confined to the island of Manhattan.

[3] [Americans building forts and entrenching]

Washington knew that the British would soon be coming to New York, but he did not know exactly where or when the strike would happen. He therefore divided his 23,000-man army to cover a number of possibilities. With a good portion of his men, Washington fortified the high ground on Long Island at Brooklyn, with their backs to the Hudson River. He had constructed another defensive line in front of the Brooklyn Heights, on another piece of high ground, called the Heights of Guan. These and other dispositions were an attempt to guard the Narrows, something of a bottleneck or choke point where the Hudson River empties into the Atlantic Ocean. This would mean Washington's cannons could fire upon any British ships that might try to go up the river.

[4] [British marching]

On July 2nd and 3rd, 1776, Howe brought his massive navy, eventually consisting of 30 warships and 400 transport ships, along with 32,000 soldiers, to land at Staten Island. This island is to the west of Long Island, with the Narrows right in between. Staten Island was mostly populated with Tories and the Howe had no trouble as he landed his troops.

On August 22nd, Howe moved his army to the shores of Long Island.

[5] [PA riflemen flee from advancing British, most not even shooting back]

A battalion of Pennsylvania riflemen, who were told to oppose a landing, barely fired, and quickly withdrew when the British advanced toward them.

[6] [British marching]

For the next 5 days, Howe finished landing his massive army and began to spread out over the lightly defended areas of Long Island.

[7] Minor skirmishes broke out, mostly riflemen firing at redcoats from long range.

The Tories flocked to see, and to give assistance to, Gen. Howe.

[8] [speaking parts -Tories: General there is a path that is not defended, which runs beyond the northern section of the American's first line. It is called the Jamaica road. If you take that path, you can likely outflank the American position, the front line, of the Guan heights.]

There were a fair number of Tories living on Long Island and they were only too happy to help Gen. Howe with the local geography.

But most Americans on the island supported Washington. General Howe asked the assistance of a tavern- owner by the name of William Howard.

[9] [speaking parts] Howard: But Gen Howe, I support the other side!

Gen Howe: You have no choice! Tell me what I wish to know or I will shoot you in the head.

Howard: Very well, General.]

Howe was provided further details on finding the Jamaica road from the unfortunate Mr. Howard.

[10] British marching, forming battle lines]

Howe waited nearly a week before launching his main attack.

[pic of Sir Richard Howe]

Sir Richard Howe was the commander of the British fleet and was also the older brother to Sir William Howe.

[11] [a small party of British officers, one with a letter, approach American lines with a white flag]

In the early part of the war, there were many, both Americans and British, who still believed that a negotiated peace was still possible. Sir Richard was one who believed. Sir William, who had been skirmishing with Washington for a year, was not nearly as hopeful. But Richard convinced his brother to try. Therefore, Sir William sent one of his officers, Lt. Philip Brown, under a white flag, to try to put an end to the war.

[12] [Americans receive the British Lt., put on a blind-fold and lead him to GW. American officers are with GW when the blindfold is released. Lt. Brown gives the letter to one of the American officers]

Brown wished to deliver a letter from Howe, addressed to George Washington, Esquire. The nearly meaningless title of Esq. was Howe's way of trying to be polite and at the same time, it was a snub, to indicate that he did not acknowledge that Washington was a general.

[13] [Reed reads the letter]

One of Washington's officers, Joseph Reed, said: "There is no man in this camp with that name and title" and with that message, Lt. Brown was sent back to Howe.

[14] [Similar meeting, different location, different British officer]

Later, another meeting was arranged between Washington and Col. James Patterson, and at that meeting, Howe offered a pardon for Washington and his men if they would surrender. Washington thought it was a trick, as he did not believe the Howes had the power to negotiate peace. Washington replied that a "man who has done nothing wrong has no need of a pardon," and refused it.

[15] [Americans fortify a hill]

The Americans worked hard to strengthen their positions on the Guan Heights and on Brooklyn Heights. They expected that Howe's troops would come straight at them, as they did at Bunker Hill. From Guan Heights, they believed that they would inflict tremendous damage on Howe's men, and if needed, they could retreat to the even stronger line at Brooklyn Heights, inflicting further damage if the British attacked there.

[16] [Howe surveys American position with telescope]

Gen. Howe had no intention of making a frontal assault on the Guan Heights, or the Brooklyn Heights beyond. Howe was a commander at the battle of Bunker Hill and he remembered how many of his men were shot down by the Americans when his troops advanced up the hill.

[Howe gathers his officers about him and issues orders]

But Howe did want the Americans to believe that a frontal attack was his intention. On the British left, Howe stationed British General James Grant. His orders were to hold the left of the British line.

[17] [pan British line troops]

He had command of the 17th reg. of foot, the 23rd reg of foot, the 40th, the 44th, 46th, 55th, 57th, and 64th. Grant would soon be reinforced by 2,000 British marines.

[18] [pan green-coated Hessians]

In the center, Howe placed his 5,000 Hessians, under the overall command of General Leopold Philip von Hiester. The Hessian contingent included the Jaeger-corps. Many of the Jaegers had been hunters in Germany. They were good marksmen. They carried short-barreled rifles and wore green uniforms.

[19] [pan Hessian grenadiers]

The Hessian units also included grenadiers, who wore blue uniforms and tall brass miters. The grenadiers were considered to be the biggest, strongest and the bravest men in the Hessian portion of Howe's army.

[20] [pan described troops]

The British troops on Howe's left, under Gen. Grant, and the Hessians in the his center, under Gen. Hiester, were ordered to make a demonstration of strength and aggression in order to hold Washington's attention. They were to pretend to attack, but told not to do so until they heard a signal that indicated that the flanking force was in position behind the first American line. The signal would be 2 cannon shots, to be fired by the flanking force.

[21] [pan described troops]

Howe's flanking force was composed of the 10,000 best men in his army.

Howe placed Major General Sir Henry Clinton in charge of the red-coated flanking force. This flank march had, after all, been Sir Henry's idea. The force was composed of the 17th Lt. Dragoons, these were dismounted cavalry who led the way, followed by battalions of light infantry. Light infantry consisted of the most active and intelligent men. Each British regiment, normally with about 600 men per regiment, was composed of 10 companies, eight of these were called center companies. For each regiment, there was one company of grenadiers and one company of light infantry. Often, British commanders would strip the light companies and the grenadier companies from the other regiments and then would create composite battalions of grenadiers or light infantry. Following the light battalions came the composite grenadier battalions, followed by the Highlanders, the 4th reg. of foot, the 15th, the 27th, the 33rd and the 45th. Part of the Royal Artillery, along with several cannons, accompanied this powerful flanking force.

[22] [pan blue-coat and brown-coated continentals]

On Guan, the American right flank was commanded by Gen. Samuel Parsons, and by a Scotsman, who liked to be called Lord Stirling, Gen. William Alexander. This area was held by several regiments of continentals, including a continental regiment from Maryland under Col. William Smallwood.

[23] [pan American militiamen]

The American center was commanded by Gen. Israel Putnum, the same man who said, “don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes” at Bunker Hill, and who was the overall commander on the Guan Heights.

[24] [pan American militiamen, riflemen and white-coated cavalry]

The American left flank, which was Howe’s intended target, was commanded by Gen. John Sullivan and was manned mostly with New Jersey militiamen.

[25] [pan American line]

In addition, scattered throughout the American lines were other continental regiments and militia units from New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

[26] [American cannons and crews]

The Americans also had about 400 artillerymen under the command of Col. Henry Knox.

[27] [British column marching]

Early on the morning of August 27, Howe ordered his 2-mile-long flanking column to move out, quietly.

[28] [British capture 5 American officers]

When the British flanking column reached Jamaica pass, they were delighted to see that the pass was indeed guarded by only 5 militia officers. Those officers thought that the British column was an American column and the 5 officers were quickly captured. Now, the way was clear for the British to come in behind the American positions on the Guan Heights.

[29] [actions described below]

The British left wing and the Hessians in the center did a convincing job of making the Americans believe that a frontal assault was coming their way. They fired their cannons. They advanced somewhat and fired their muskets.

[30] [2 British cannons in the flanking force fire]

But they did not truly advance until they heard the booming of the 2 cannons, the signal they had been waiting for.

[31] [British attack the left of the American line from flank and rear, causing panic]

As the British flanking force crashed into the rear of Washington’s men defending the Guan Heights,

[32] [British left flank and Hessians in the center advance in battle formation]

the British left and the Hessians in the center, moved to attack for real.

[33] [Americans fight back but their formations fall apart, as they see they are being surrounded]

The Americans desperately tried to hold off Howe's flanking force, but seeing they were attacked from the front by the Hessians, and also were attacked in the rear by Howe's elite British troops, the Americans began to panic.

[34] [see below]

Many threw away their guns and ran for their lives, toward the Brooklyn Heights defenses.

The panic spread to the Americans in the center, who quickly followed suit.

[35] [American Continentals are holding off the British]

The Americans holding the right flank thought everything was fine and all was going according to plan. Though outnumbered, they were holding off the 5,000 British under General Grant. Nobody bothered to inform them about the collapse that was taking place on their left. But they soon found out.

[36] [British overrun the American left, capturing an American officer]

The American left had been crushed and Gen. Sullivan had been captured, the highest-ranking officer to be taken prisoner in the battle.

[37] [Americans flee toward their back-up position on the hill behind]

Many Americans in the center were able to escape back to the main defenses on Brooklyn Heights.

[38] [Continentals get hit from all sides]

The American right flank, however, was now greatly outnumbered and was about to be surrounded.

[39] [Continentals attack 6 times, the overwhelming number of British and Hessians as other Americans run for their lives]

The only way out was through a swamp. The Americans needed time to escape. The only truly heroic action taken by the Americans in this battle came when a unit known to history as "The Maryland 400" attacked. In reality, there were perhaps only about 250 of them.

But they charged the British and Hessians, were driven back, yet charged again, a total of 6 times.

[40] [GW speaking part]

Washington, watching this from a distance, said, "What brave fellows I must this day lose."

[41] [a few wounded survivors, continentals, come out of the smoke]

Of the Marylanders, fewer men survived and returned than you could count on your fingers. But the Maryland 400 bought enough time for many on the American right flank, to escape.

[42] [see action, below]

The Hessians had been told that the Americans especially hated them, and that the Americans would kill any Hessians who tried to surrender. The Hessians went about bayoneting the wounded and any Americans who tried to surrender. Their ferocity shocked the British.

[43] [see action, below]

The terrified Americans who had escaped jammed the Brooklyn Heights defenses, creating chaos. Looking at the defenses again, these did not seem so strong and everyone knew that Gen. Howe would easily spot any weaknesses.

[44] [GW places his frightened men into line]

Washington was somewhat able to stabilize the situation and expected the British to attack at any moment.

[45] [GW speaking part, see below]

Washington drew 2 pistols and roared at his men that he would personally shoot the first man who tried to run away.

[46] [pan Americans in fort wait for attack]

Washington held his men in their defensive positions and waited for the British to attack. The Americans waited, and waited, for an attack that never came.

[47][Howe receives messages from numerous officers who report, Howe shakes his head]

British officers from all over the battlefield sent messages to Gen. Howe, imploring him to let them attack the Americans on Brooklyn Heights. Howe refused all of their requests.

Perhaps he was still thinking about Bunker Hill. Perhaps he thought there was still a chance for peace. Either way, Gen. Howe was confident that Washington's army could not escape.

[48] [British dig trenches, construct log fort]

Howe ordered the British army to dig trenches, with the idea of approaching the American lines in relative safety. Then he would attack, if necessary.

[49] [a British fort appears near the American line]

This trench-digging was being accomplished much sooner than anyone expected, and when the Americans saw a small British fort rise up, not far away,

[50] [GW looks through telescope, shakes his head]

Washington realized it was time to retreat across the Hudson river.

[ships]

The problem was, getting past Sir Richard Howe's navy.

[51] [GW issues orders]

Washington sent out a call for as many boats as he could get, with which to evacuate the remainder of his army.

[52] [Americans gather fire wood, smoke effect]

On August 29, Washington had been successful in collecting the needed boats. He ordered campfires to be tended all night long, to make Howe believe his army was still there.

[53] [Americans move their equipment with rags tied to the wheels]

The Americans muffled the wheels of their cannons and wagons with rags so that the British would hear nothing,

[54] [militia men leave the line carrying barrels and boxes]

and with militia units going first, the men left their defenses to board the boats. All supplies and equipment were to be transported as well. British naval captains awaited orders to interfere with Washington's crossing-but the orders never came.

It looked as though the Americans would not make it out in time. If the British officers and naval captains could actually see Washington's men escaping, they would immediately attack, with or without orders.

[55] [thick fog effect]

But just as it seemed that the British would discover the American boats, a thick fog bank rolled in, which prevented the navy from seeing what was taking place.

[56] [continentals march by]

Somehow, Washington and his army escaped without losing a single man.

[pic of Declaration of Independence]

The battle of Long Island was the first battle that was fought following the Declaration of Independence.

Many historians point out that this was the worst defeat Washington suffered throughout the Revolutionary war.

[57] [pan American dead]

Of his force of 10,000 men who were engaged, Washington lost 2,100, killed, captured, wounded, missing or taken prisoner, about 21% of his army was lost.

[58] [pan smaller number of British dead]

Of the 20,000 men Howe had engaged in the battle, only about 400 British and Hessians became casualties, equaling about 2% of his army.

[59] [GW watching as his troops march past him in the background]

Some historians point out that Washington's escape was brilliantly executed, perhaps even miraculous.

[60] [outtakes of Americans running away from battle with British]

A series of further battles occurred, all of which were British victories, at Kip's Bay, at Harlem Heights, at White Plains, and at Ft. Washington. And these victories sealed the British conquest of New York City.

[61] [pic of 1770's New York or scene of Howe and his officers celebrating]

The British held the city throughout the war, right to the very end,

[62] [British flag goes down, American flag goes up]

not leaving until the war for American Independence was concluded in 1783.

SPEAKING PARTS:

- George Washington
- Sir William Howe
- Tories
- William Howard
- Br. Lt. Philip Brown
- Am. Officer Joseph Reed
- Br. Officers

PROPS:

- Entrenching tools
- Truck House
- Telescopes
- Fog and smoke effects
- White flag
- Blind fold
- Fortifications
- Rags for cannon wheels and wagons