

The Battle of Brandywine Creek

Written by Darrell Osburn c. 1998

[pics of ships sailing]

On July 23rd, 1777, British General Sir William Howe boarded his army on 260 ships.

[pic of Richard Howe]

This large fleet was commanded by Sir William's brother, Admiral Richard Howe.

[Pic of G. Washington]

American General George Washington had no idea where the British fleet would land.

[ships sailing]

His best guess was that the fleet was sailing to unite with British General John Burgoyne's army advancing on Albany, New York.

[map, American generals planning]

If so, Washington should send a large part of his army north.

Perhaps the British were sailing to capture Philadelphia, PA. The Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and it was therefore the closest thing the Americans had to a capitol city.

Maybe Howe's force would sail south to the Chesapeake or perhaps on to Charlestown, SC. No one could tell where the fleet would land- until it landed.

[Washington asks his officers- SPEAKING PART:

"What's become of Billy Howe?"

"No word yet, General. We have no idea where that huge British army is." [Washington looks frustrated].

[British marchby]

It landed 32 days later at Head of Elk, Maryland. General Howe had a force of about 15,000 men. These soldiers were well-trained, well disciplined and splendidly equipped.

[Hessen marchby]

In addition to the British regulars, there was a large contingent of German mercenaries known as Hessens.

[pic of Knyphausen]

The Hessen commander was General Wilhelm Von Neephausen.

[American marchby]

Washington quickly moved his army to block Howe from taking Philadelphia. Washington had approximately 11,000 soldiers at his command. As usual, the American army was not so well-trained and well-equipped as the British. They had lost many more battles than they had won. And yet, the British had never been able to completely destroy Washington's army. The British knew that the destruction of Washington's army was the key to ending the rebellion.

[Hessens in formation]

Howe divided his army into 2 parts. Von Neephausen's Hessens formed one wing.

[British marchby]

The other wing, consisting of mostly British soldiers, was commanded by

[pic of Cornwallis]

General Charles Cornwallis.

[British marchby]

By advancing on the American capitol, Howe hoped to lure Washington into a battle where the Americans would not be merely defeated, but completely destroyed.

[pan WS, both armies formed along river bank]

On September 11, 1777, the 2 armies met on the banks of Brandywine Creek, just north of Wilmington, Delaware. Washington placed his troops on the east side of the river, to defend the fords.

[pan militia, formed to defend]

On his left was a small unit of Pennsylvania militia.

[pan some continentals with some militia]

In the center were the forces of Generals Nathaniel Greene and Anthony Wayne.

[Pan some different continentals and militia]

On Washington's right were the troops of Generals John Sullivan, Adam Steven and William Sterling.

[outtakes from Bunker Hill]

Washington was hoping for a repeat of the battle of Bunker Hill. In that engagement, the British repeatedly charged straight at the American lines and were mowed down by American musket fire. Though the British eventually took the hill, the victory was not worth the cost of so many lives.

[Hessens "demonstrating" firing cannons, maneuvering here and there, etc.]

But General Howe had other ideas. Howe wanted to hold Washington in place with the threat of a frontal attack. Howe ordered Von Neepousen to make a "demonstration," firing his cannons and making it appear the Hessens were about to attack across the river.

[Americans marchby]

Washington ordered General Maxwell and his 800 men to cross the Brandywine. These were to guard the road leading to Chad's Ford. Chad's was probably the best place to cross the creek.

[British advance in battle lines hollering "haloo."]

At approximately 8 in the morning, Maxwell's men caught sight of the British coming toward them.

[Hessens fire cannons and threaten to charge]

So the Hessens fired their artillery and formed for battle, with instructions not to advance until they heard the sounds of battle coming from across the river.

[British marchby]

Howe decided to make a flanking movement with the largest part of his army. He had beaten Washington before with this tactic. Howe ordered Cornwallis to wake the soldiers at 4 in the morning to make a 17-mile march.

[British crossing the river]

He crossed Brandywine Creek far enough to the north that no Americans saw him do it. Howe planned to hit Washington in the rear of his right flank.

[Washington gets reports]

It was reported to General Washington that the British were on the move to attack him.

[British march by]

However, those reports were disputed by an American officer, who had personally obtained his information by checking the local tavern.

Finally, it was revealed that the British were indeed making the flanking movement.

[Americans quickly form ranks]

Washington then set his army in motion, ordering his troops into battle positions.

[British rest and eat on hillside]

Meanwhile the Cornwallis wing of Howe's army rested on Osburn's Hill.

[SPEAKING PARTS-British soldiers talk among themselves]:

#1 How many miles have we marched today?

#2 17 miles, I would say.

#3 It looks as though we shall finally bag the fox.

#4 We shall thrash Mr. Washington right out of his boots.

[SPEAKING PARTS-Alarmed American officer to G. Washington]:

Officer #1: Sir, the redcoats are about to flank us on the right! They are in the vicinity of Osburn's Hill!

Washington: Where is that? I must get there quickly. Is there anyone who knows the way?

[American officer #2 pulls a civilian into Washington's presence]

Officer #2: General, this is farmer Brown. He knows the way.

Brown: I ain't goin' into no battle!

[American officer #2, threatening Brown with a pistol: You will take General Washington wherever he wishes to go!

Brown: Very well.

[Sounds of riders galloping-

Washington and his staff rode at a gallop behind Brown yelling "Push along, old man. Push along!"

Once they arrived, Brown quickly disappeared.

[British advancing in battle line, at charge bayonets. Americans flee when they see them coming]

Three regiments of Marylanders, part of Steven's division, panicked and ran when they saw the out-thrust British bayonets steadily coming toward them.

[Fighting and volleys, Americans forced from the hill]

About 3,000 Americans, part Sterling's division and part Steven's stayed to fight. But these were driven from the hill.

[Americans charge and drive British from the hill]

But the Americans counter-attacked and drove the British from the hill.

[British counter-attack and drive the Americans off the hill]

Soon, it became clear that the British would prevail.

[SPEAKING PART -Howe looks through a telescope and says to an aide:

By Jove, we've got him now!

[SPEAKING PART- Aide says:

Veddy good, suh.

[Americans advancing in battle-line]

Just then, General Nathaniel Greene's division arrived.

[Fighting and volleys]

For a while, Greene's division held off Howe and Cornwallis.

[Americans fall back fighting]

But the pressure was too great and Greene had to conduct a fighting retreat.

[Hessen commander tells his cannons to fire, then leads his troops across the creek]

Von Neephusen personally led his army in a furious charge across Chad's Ford.

[Lafayette leads an American counter-attack and is shot in the leg by a Hessen. The Americans retreat and Lafayette is picked up and carried away by Everheart]

Washington's favorite general, the Marquis de Lafayette, bravely led the Americans in a counter-attack to drive the Hessens back across the river. But he went down when a Hessen soldier shot him in the leg. The Americans panicked and ran when they saw their leader go down. But Sgt. Lawrence Everheart and another soldier stepped forward and picked up Lafayette, saving him from capture or death, and carried him 2 miles to a cabin where he could recover from his wound.

[Militia, yelling "fall back!", are seen coming out of the trees. Chasing them are British grenadiers and guards. The American militia creates a screen for the British, so that the Americans cannot shoot without hitting their own militia. The panic also sweeps away the continentals who were formed to stop the redcoats.]

General Wayne's troops fought well. But fate smiled upon the British that day. It so happened that a large group of guards and grenadiers got separated from the main body as they chased some American militiamen. These elite British soldiers struck the right flank of Wayne's force at the same time Wayne was fighting the Hessens in his front.

[Americans fall back fighting]

So Wayne's men were forced to fall back fighting, just as Greene's men had been forced to do.

[Pan the Dead as the wounded are being attended]

Nightfall and exhaustion put an end to the fighting.

[Battered American marchby]

Washington retreated toward Philadelphia. Congress fled and set up shop in York, Pennsylvania.

[As British army enters town, civilians [Tories] cheer for them]

Soon afterwards, Howe entered Philadelphia as a hero, while throngs of Tories cheered.

{American dead]

In the Battle of Brandywine Creek, the Americans lost as many as 1,000 soldiers, killed, captured, wounded or missing.

[British and Hessian dead]

The British and Hessians lost something around 5 to 600 casualties. The fight was clearly a British victory.

[outtakes of battle]

Howe had driven Washington from the field, as he had done so many times before. He had forced the American congress to flee. But Washington's army had fought well, for the most part. The British were quite surprised at the ability and determination of the American army.

[British army marching through town to more cheers]

General Howe did not achieve his main objective. This was to destroy Washington's army once and for all.

[American battered marchby]

The Americans went on to lose many more battles in the 8 years that the Revolutionary War lasted. But they won just enough times, that through determination, great sacrifice and help from France, the American cause survived. It is likely that, had Howe moved north to support Burgoyne, the outcome of the rebellion would have taken a very different turn. But as it happened, the hardships that were endured by Washington and his supporters resulted in a new nation,

[American 13-star flag] The United States of America