

The Battle of Trenton

by Darrell Osburn

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1. [EXT. US march by, ragged, cold, tired, glum- a sad, slow version of “Yankee Doodle” is heard]

Christmas Day, of 1776, was not merry for George Washington and his army. The war was not going well. Except for a few small, isolated victories, Washington’s campaign against the British consisted mostly of retreats, defeats and narrow escapes. There was little money to buy supplies for the army and even less money to pay the soldiers.

2. [INT. Hessen commander Rall is playing cards with a civilian and one of his officers. The table has a half-eaten turkey on it. Servants are pouring drinks. The mood is festive. Rall wins a hand. “Achh du lieber!” – “O Tannenbaum” –“Oh Christmas Tree”- is heard on guitar, yet to be recorded]

The British and their Hessen allies seemed to be holding all of the cards. The British had the world’s most powerful army and navy. British and Hessen troops were well equipped, well-trained and well-supplied.

3. [map of the world showing British empire]

The British Empire reached into nearly every corner of the world. From southern Asia, to North America, to Australia, to the Caribbean Sea, British armies conquered the indigenous peoples, exacted tribute, established trade, and mostly kept the peace. Though very wealthy, Great Britain did not have population enough, to field an army large enough, to police so many parts of the world.

4. [painting of King George the 3rd-cut to period map of Germany]

The leader of the British Empire, King George the 3rd, used family connections and was able to hire soldiers from certain princes in Germany. Many of these soldiers were from the area around Frankfort, Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Darmschtadt.

5. [EXT, Hessens marching, drilling, “Achtung! Forverts, marsh! Kompany halt! Links, oom!”]

These professional soldiers, called Hessens, were often forced into the army. They were not paid well, earning only 25 cents a day. But they were well-trained, had a fearsome reputation, and generally, they were very loyal to King

George the 3rd and the British cause.

6. [US march by]

Washington had to make a desperate gamble. He knew that the enlistment of most of his troops was almost done. In less than a week, most of his soldiers would be able to leave the army and go home. Because the army was very discouraged, it appeared the only chance the American Revolution had for success, was to gain some sort of victory- and to do it quickly.

7. [Map of dispositions of Brits and Hessens along the Delaware River]

Washington spotted an opportunity. He saw that the British were attempting to hold the territory along the Delaware River with a string of outposts. Several of these outposts were manned by the Hessens.

8. [Washington, with map, plans the attack with his officers]

Washington had about 5,000 men at his command. He found out through his spies, that at Trenton, New Jersey, there were 3 regiments of Hessens, numbering about 1,500 troops. Washington planned a surprise attack. He knew that the Hessens would not expect to fight a battle during a blizzard. 18th century armies rarely fought in the wintertime, preferring to stay warm, indoors. Washington also knew that Christmas was a much more celebrated holiday in Germany than it was in America.

9. [INT Rall playing cards]

Washington figured that the Hessans would be partying on Christmas. The commander at Trenton was a German colonel named Johann Rall. Oberst Rall and some of the British commanders in the region were concerned that Trenton could be vulnerable to attack. It was suggested to build barricades for defense, but with the weather as fierce as it was, there was no real sense of urgency.

10. [Painting of Washington crossing the Delaware]

In order to attack Trenton, Washington would have to cross the Delaware River. Because the river was clogged with ice, this was a very dangerous undertaking. Fortunately, Washington had some excellent boatmen, who were up to the task. The crossing was completed by 3 in the morning.

11. [US cannons being dragged through the snow]

Although only 2,500 Americans were able to cross the river, late that Christmas night, they did manage to bring along 18 cannons.

12. [Washington watches his army march through the snow-he sees blood in the snow]

Washington was reported to have cried when he saw that he was able to track the course of his army by the bloody footprints in the snow.

Cut to Rall's spilled red drink on the white table cloth, zoom out to show the "party" getting "sleepy"

13. [Some Americans are ordered to go ahead of the main column]

In the early morning of Dec. 26th, Washington sent some of his German-speaking men ahead to stop anyone traveling to or from Trenton.

14. [A civilian spots the Americans on the march, slinks away]

A civilian loyalist spotted Washington's army and managed to make his way to Trenton.

15. [INT. A Hessen soldier permits the loyalist to enter Rall's party]

He was able to get a note to the Hessens, warning of the Americans' approach.

16. [Loyalist gives note to Rall, loyalist leaves. "Hair Oberst" Rall glances at the note briefly, says "morgan" and puts it into his pocket without reading it]

Washington's spies had assured Rall that the Americans lacked shoes, clothing, food and gunpowder. Rall was certain that the Americans were unable to mount any serious threat to his 3 regiments.

17. [Show Hessen troops drilling]

These 3 regiments were named Lossberg, Knypehausen and Rall. 50 German riflemen, called yagers, and about 20 British horsemen, called dragoons, were also stationed at Trenton.

18. [A small party of armed civilians from the direction of Trenton approach the head of Washington's column. American officers question them]

What was this? A party of about 50 armed men was seen coming toward the continental army. These men had just conducted a small raid and had fired on the Hessens in Trenton. Washington was very upset about this. He told them, "If you have spoiled my surprise, I will see to it you are hanged upside down, by your toes!"

Actually, the little raid helped Washington to keep his surprise. Some of the Hessens expected there could be a fight with the Americans, and they thought

the tiny raid was all there was to it.

19. [American army splits into 2 columns]

The total distance the Americans had to march, from the crossing of the Delaware to Trenton, was about 8 miles. When they were about 3 miles from Trenton, Washington split his army into 2 columns. He sent about half of his force, under General John Sullivan, to take the road by the river and Washington himself accompanied General Nathanael Greene's men toward Trenton, by an inland road.

20. [An American officer said to Washington, "Sir, General Sullivan says that all of the gunpowder is wet! Our guns won't fire!" Washington said, "Tell General Sullivan to use the bayonet! I am resolved to take Trenton!"]

21. [EXT Washington and officers synchronize their watches as American army marches past]

Washington ordered his officers to synchronize their watches. The attack was to begin one hour before daylight. But the Americans were several hours behind schedule. It was already becoming light. At about 8 in the morning, the Americans began to infiltrate the town.

22. [INT Americans enter a building and capture unsuspecting Hessens. Hessens say, eechh ergabuh meecheh! –[I surrender]

23. [EXT A Hessian officer, leaving a cooper shop, is "shot at" by an American. This officer sees lots of Americans coming toward him, runs back to the shop yelling "Der find! Der find! [the enemy!] Ollymon, Ollymon, Herous! Herous! Kompany ontrayten! [form ranks!]

24. [EXT Americans are moving in 2 columns, infiltrating the town. A party of Hessens falls back, firing as Americans advance. Americans fire a return volley. Drummers beat the long roll. Hessens sound the alarm, yelling "herous! herous! Der find!" Hessens can be seen scrambling out of buildings to form ranks]

25. [INT An officer wakes a sleeping Col. Rall, sitting up in his chair. "Herr Oberst! Der Amerikaner!" Rall says, "Voss eest los? Der Amerikaner?" The officer says, "Ya, Ya!" Rall, still groggy, says, "Mine Gott! Mine sewart!" The officer hands Rall his sword, Rall stands shakily and straps on his sword- gunfire and yelling is heard, coming from outside]

26. [EXT Americans push the Hessens back through the town, both sides fire volleys. Hessen officers say, "Fertig machhen, onlegen, foya!" Americans have cannons set up in the town streets, loading and firing. Hessens fall from the cannon fire. American infantry are seen, en masse, surrounding the Hessens front and rear, Hessens retreat. Americans capture 2 Hessen cannons, Hessens

charge to retake their 2 cannons]

The Hessens made an attempt to retake their cannons with a bayonet charge. But this attack was quickly broken up by American musket fire and cannons firing grapeshot.

27. [Hessans retreat and reform in an orchard]

Finding that the bridge to escape Trenton had already been taken by General Sullivan's continentals, the Hessens fell back to an orchard to regroup.

28. [Col. Rall is hit with cannon fire as he leads the Hessen attack]

Col. Rall was mortally wounded by cannon fire and his men finally surrendered.

29. [EXT Americans take the prisoners and the captured supplies back down the road from which they came into town]

Concerned that the British would launch a powerful counter-attack to free the captured Hessens, Washington moved quickly to take his prisoners for safe-keeping, back across the Delaware.

30. [Hessen dead scene]

Of the 1,500 Hessens stationed in Trenton, only 400 to 500 were able to escape over the Assunpink bridge. Washington inflicted over 100 casualties on them and took nearly 900 prisoners.

31. [Americans herding their prisoners]

Washington did not lose a single soldier in the battle itself, although 2 of his men froze to death on the march to Trenton.

32. [pile of captured Hessen Flags]

33. [marching prisoners in chains]

A British officer said, upon hearing of the capture of the 3 Hessen regiments at Trenton, "I wouldn't have believed that all of the rebels in America could have captured that brigade."

34. [Battle outtakes]

The Battle of Trenton was a critical victory at a critical moment in the Revolutionary War. It was the first time Washington had really won a battle. Many American soldiers were encouraged by the victory and, with the promise of a \$10 bounty to re-enlist, most of them stayed in the army.

35. [outtake of American army marching to Trenton]

Many long years of hardship and sacrifice lay ahead for Washington and his band of ragged scarecrows. The goal of these people was to live in a brand new country, with new ideals and opportunities, to achieve basic rights and maybe there would even be a chance to choose their own leaders. The dedication of these soldiers to the cause of liberty eventually led to the creation of a new nation:

36. [13-star American flag]

The United States of America.

[fade to black]