



Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, 28 December 1776.

My Dearly Beloved Friend,—

You will before this have heard of our success on the morning of the 26th instant. The enemy, by their superior marching, had obliged us to retire on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware, by which means we were obliged to evacuate or give up nearly all the Jerseys. Soon after retiring over the river, the preservation of Philadelphia was a matter exceedingly precarious—the force of the enemy three or four times as large as ours. However, they seemed content with their success for the present, and quartered their troops in different and distant places in the Jerseys. Of these cantonments Trenton was the most considerable.

Trenton is an open town, situated nearly on the banks of the Delaware, accessible on all sides. Our army was scattered along the river for nearly twenty-five miles. Our intelligence agreed that the force of the enemy in Trenton was from two to three thousand, with about six field cannon, and that they were pretty secure in their situation, and that they were Hessians—no British troops. A hardy design was formed of attacking the town by storm. Accordingly a part of the army, consisting of about 2500 or 3000 passed the river on Christmas night, with almost infinite difficulty, with eighteen fieldpieces. The floating ice in the river made the labor almost incredible. However, perseverance accomplished what at first seemed impossible. About two o'clock the troops were all on the Jersey side; we then were about nine miles from the object. The night was cold and stormy; it hailed with great violence; the troops marched with the most profound silence and good order.

They arrived by two routes at the same time, about half an hour after daylight, within one mile of the town. The storm continued with great violence, but was in our backs, and consequently in the faces of our enemy. About half a mile from the town was an advanced guard on each road, consisting of a captain's guard. These we forced, and entered the town with them pell-mell; and here succeeded a scene of war of which I had often conceived, but never saw before.

The hurry, fright, and confusion of the enemy was [not] unlike that which will be when the last trump shall sound. They endeavoured to form in streets, the heads of which we had previously the possession of with cannon and howitzers; 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. Here they formed in an instant.

During the contest in the streets measures were taken for putting an entire stop to their retreat by posting troops and cannon in such passes and roads as it was possible for them to get away by. The poor fellows after they were formed on the plain saw themselves completely surrounded, the only resource left was to force their way through numbers unknown to them. The Hessians lost part of their cannon in the town; they did not relish the project of forcing, and were obliged to surrender upon the spot, with all their artillery, six brass pieces, army colors, &c. A Colonel Rawle commanded, who was wounded. The number of prisoners was above 1200, including officers—all Hessians. There were few killed or wounded on either side. After having marched off the prisoners and secured the cannon, stores, &c., we returned to the place, nine miles distant, where we had embarked.

Providence seemed to have smiled upon every part of this enterprise. Great advantages may be gained from it if we take the proper steps. At another post we have pushed over the river 2000 men, today another body, and tomorrow the whole army will follow. It must give a sensible pleasure to every friend of the rights of man to think with how much intrepidity our people pushed the enemy, and prevented their forming in the town.

His Excellency the General has done me the unmerited great honour of thanking me in public orders in terms strong and polite. This I would blush to mention to any other than you, my dear Lucy; and I am fearful that even my Lucy may think her Harry possesses a species of little vanity in doing [it] at all.

Source: William S. Stryker, *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton* (Boston, 1898), 371-72.