

THE BATTLES OF TRENTON AND PRINCETON

The American army was a weary, ragged and demoralized lot in late 1776, after suffering a series of humiliating defeats at the hands of the far-superior British troops, the most powerful army in the world.

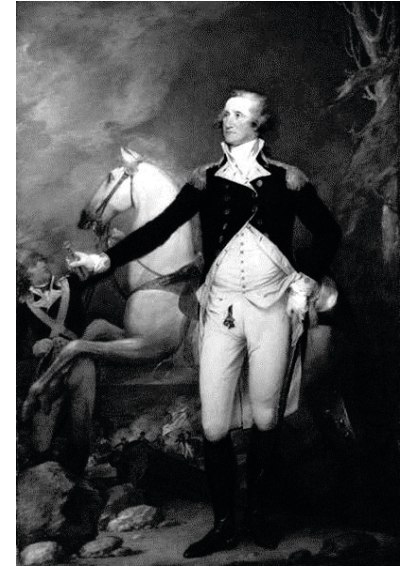
Washington had to do something or the Revolution was lost.

In a bold move, he famously crossed the Delaware River and on Dec. 26, 1776, struck the bewildered Hessians at Trenton, New Jersey, under the command of Col. Johann Gottlieb Rall. The Hessians had been celebrating the Christmas holiday and were taken completely by surprise.

The conflict was brief but decisive. Col. Rall was wounded by a shot fired, it is said, by Col. Frederick Frelinghuysen, and surrendered the troops under his command amounting to 1000 prisoners, with 6 brass field pieces, 1000 stand of arms, and 4 flags.⁹⁰

William S. Stryker cast some doubt on the claim that it was Frelinghuysen who brought down Rall.

Some histories say that Major Frederick Frelinghuysen of the New Jersey militia fired the shot which injured Colonel Rall. It is exceedingly doubtful if such an act could have been verified even at the time, and Major Frelinghuysen, who was an officer on the staff of General Philemon Dickinson, commanding officer of the New Jersey militia, is supposed to have been where his duty required him that day, — on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River, endeavoring to cross with the division of General Ewing.⁹¹



George Washington at Trenton

General Ewing had found it impossible to cross the river with his troops due to the drifting ice. Even if he wasn't directly engaged in the fighting itself, it is clear Frelinghuysen was indeed involved in operations at the Battle of Trenton, serving with the New Jersey militia as an aide de camp to Gen. Philemon Dickinson.⁹² It is possible that Capt. Richard McDonald may have been there, too. Both men received promotions on Feb. 28, 1777, Frelinghuysen to colonel in command of the First Somerset and McDonald to second major.⁹³



Surrender of Col. Rall at the Battle of Trenton

The victory at Trenton was made possible in many respects by the services of John Honeyman, who in the guise of a Tory, served as a spy for General Washington and provided him with essential intelligence that led to the attack. After the war, Honeyman (1729-1822) settled in Bedminster and became a member of Lamington Presbyterian Church. Today he lies buried in its cemetery, honored for his service in one of the most critical battles of the war.⁹⁴

Washington's triumph at Trenton was followed up with another decisive victory over the British at Princeton on Jan. 3, 1777, giving American morale a much-needed boost.

Washington then decided to lead his weary troops to a place of safety on the evening of Jan. 4, so where did he go? Pluckemin.⁹⁵