



# The Florida Society of the Sons of the American Revolution

## Fort Lauderdale Chapter Newsletter



website: [www.sarfl.weebly.com](http://www.sarfl.weebly.com)

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### January Message from the President:

It was my sincere pleasure to be your President these past two years. I want to welcome Thomas Sheppard as our new President of the Ft. Lauderdale Chapter for the year 2020. This is going to be an exciting year with many events for our members to attend and participate in throughout the new year.

Please attend our monthly meeting this month at the Outback Steak House in Davie Florida. Please contact Joe Motes and RSVP. This should be an exciting meeting with many of our Chapter Presidents and SAR Friends.

Regards,

David Lott, President 2019

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The Fort Lauderdale Chapter presented a Fire Safety Commendation Award to Vincent Cicione at our last meeting.

### The Battle for Fort Washington Saturday, November 16, 1776

#### Overview:

Heavy rains spoiled Maj. Gen. William Howe's planned second attack on the American army near White Plains on October 31. The next day the Americans were found to be apparently well entrenched at North Castle Heights. The rebel earthworks were composed largely of cornstalks pulled from nearby fields, whose roots, full of clinging soil, faced outward. Howe may have been discouraged by these illusory defenses, but his goal remained the complete removal of American troops from Manhattan, not the annihilation of Washington's army. His attention returned to Fort Washington which the American commander in chief had left garrisoned under Col. Robert Magaw after a general rebel evacuation of the island. Synopsis:

On the night of November 2 a defector, William Demont, entered the camp of Lord Hugh Percy at McGowan's Pass, south of Fort Washington. Demont had been Magaw's adjunct; the deserter placed the plans of the fort into Percy's hands. Although Howe had probably already begun to arrange operations against Fort Washington, exact knowledge of the fortification and its defenses would assist his attack.

Fort Washington's works, built the previous July, covered a hill 230 feet high (modern West 184th Street) and a mile long. Vertical cliffs rendered the fort unassailable from the Hudson River below. Additional protection was provided by Fort Tyron on the north, Laurel Hiss on the east, and the old Harlem Heights defenses on the south. Fort Lee stood opposite Fort Washington in New Jersey. Between the two forts ran a line of sunken obstructions to prevent British ships from passing up the Hudson.

#### NEXT MEETING - January 18, 2020

**Davie Outback Steak House**  
2725 South University Dr. Davie, Florida 33328

#### Future Dates:

December Wreaths Across America

Saturday, 01/18/2020

Saturday, 02/15/2020

Saturday, 03/21/2020

Saturday, 04/18/2020

Saturday, 05/16/2020

Time: 11:30 AM social gathering; Lunch at noon

FOR RESERVATIONS CALL: 954-559-3202

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The natural defenses afforded by Fort Washington's position were superior, but the fort itself was less than ideal. A pentagonal earthwork without ditches or palisades, the structure lacked barracks, bombproofs, and an interior source of water. A captain stationed in the fort noted that it had none of "those exterior, multiplied obstacles and defenses, that...could entitle it to the name of fortress, in any degree capable of withstanding a siege." This weakness, recognized by some of the garrison went unnoticed by Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Greene, who was in charge of both forts.

Washington had been out of touch with Greene since October 22. Now, as Howe began moving south to direct the seizure of Fort Washington, the American commander had to consider the fort's defensibility. On November 5 three British vessels passed over the river barricades in the Hudson amidst rebel artillery fire and anchored, undamaged, at the northern tip of the island, Washington, in the process of deploying most of his troops in Westchester County, was much alarmed by this news and wrote to Greene on November 8, "I am inclined to think it will not be prudent to hazard the men and stores," but "as you are on the spot, I leave it to you to give such orders as to evacuating Mount Washington as you judge best."

Greene replied that the fort served some purpose beyond the prevention of ship passage up the Hudson. It hampered British communication between the island and the country to the north, compelled the maintenance of British troops at Kingsbridge (which connected Manhattan to Westchester County), and was clearly regarded as important by the British, or else they would not attempt its capture. These arguments were offset by Greene's assurance that if the situation grew dangerous, the stores and men could be shifted to Fort Lee at any time. Magaw said the garrison could hold out through December. But Washington's second in command, Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, expressed ominous concern. In a letter to Joseph Reed, the adjutant general, Lee wrote, "I cannot conceive what circumstances give to Fort Washington so great a degree of value and importance as to counterbalance the probability or almost certainty of losing 1,400 of our best troops."

With some 2,000 of his troops, Washington moved down the west side of the Hudson and reached Fort Lee on November 13. Meanwhile, Greene had reinforced Magaw's original garrison of about 2,000 men (Lee's figure was low) with an additional 900. Greene continued to favor a defense of the fort, and Washington finally relied upon his subordinate's judgment. The commander in chief would later write that Congress's desire to retain the area's defense and his own wish to keep an impediment in the enemy's way "caused that warfare in my mind and hesitation which ended in the loss of the garrison."

On November 4 Howe dispatched several brigades to march quickly south and reinforce Brig. Wilhelm von Knyphausen. His division had crossed the river at Kingsbridge on November 2 and began harassment of the rebels in the northern outpost of Fort Tyron. During the night of November 14, 30 British flatboats sailed up the river past Fort Washington undetected by the Americans. The following day the enemy approached the fort in force.

Lord Cornwallis and Brig. Edward Matthew were to approach from across the Harlem River on the east, and Percy was to strike from the south. A British officer was sent to summon Magaw to surrender with the threat of no quarter if the fort was stormed. Magaw flatly refused. He had dispersed his forces at the various outposts on the three sides of the fort, posting minor detachments in between. The Americans covered a large perimeter of four to five miles. Early on the morning of November 16, Knyphausen opened the attack against Col. Moses Rawlings's Virginia and Maryland riflemen who managed to stall the Germans temporarily. Percy advanced on Lt. Col. Lambert Cadwalader's Pennsylvania

Pennsylvanians but they halted (to the Americans' surprise) to wait for a signal gun from Cornwallis or Mathew. Washington, Greene, Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam, and Brig. Gen. Hugh Mercer crossed to Fort Washington as the firing commenced, but they could do nothing to help Magaw and so returned to Fort Lee to watch the developing action.

Mathew, who had been somewhat delayed by the tide pushed across the river and established a foothold on Laurel Hill. Cornwallis followed with more troops. Once the signal had gone out to Percy, pressure on the Americans began to mount. Rawlings was forced back and Cadwalader withdrew. Confusion was rampant within the reduced perimeter; the retreating Americans poured into the fort. By 3:00 PM the Germans had reached Fort Washington from the north, and the British were in view on the east and south. Despite the original surrender terms, another flag was sent into Magaw to ask for capitulation. Realizing that to stand now would create a bloodbath within the crowded fort, Magaw surrendered.

The attack cost the British and Germans 67 killed, 335 wounded, and 6 missing. The Americans suffered 54 killed and 2,858 captured, including probably more than 1000 wounded. The loss of all their arms and equipment was especially damaging.

Fort Lee was now untenable and Washington began transporting the ammunition out of the fort. On the night of November 19 the British brought boats through the Harlem River and carried a force under Cornwallis across the Hudson in the rain. They landed about six miles north of Fort Lee and began marching southward. Washington and Greene roused the garrison to a hundred flight and led them to Hackensack, then toward Newark and New Brunswick. Cornwallis marched into the empty fort on November 20 and found tents, military baggage, 50 canon, and 1,000 barrels of flour. More than 100 skulkers were rounded up in the neighborhood, a few were killed.

Cornwallis pursued the Americans with some reinforcements sent from Howe and routed them at each New Jersey town where they stopped. Many of Howe's officers believed he would maintain this drive. As Lt. Frederick Mackenzie noted in his diary for November 21, "This is now the time to push these rascals, and if we do, and not give them time to recover themselves, we may depend upon it they will never make head again. A body of troops landed at this time at Amboy might, in conjunction with those already in Jersey, push on to Philadelphia, with very little difficulty." But Howe had begun preparations for an offensive in Rhode Island. He knew there was not time enough before winter's arrival to employ the same troop force in both New Jersey and Rhode Island.

In addition, Howe was criticized by some for sparing the garrison at Fort Washington. Capt. Lt. Archibald Robertson considered the rebels' losses "trifling." Thomas Jones, a former justice of the New York Supreme Court being held prisoner in Connecticut, believed that a general slaughter would have struck panic through the rebel countryside and forced congressional submission. "The most rigid severity at the first would have been the greatest mercy and lenity in the end." Of the nearly 2,000 Americans captured in the fall of the fort, over 100 were officers. Many of these were paroled and walked the New York streets in their uniforms to the chagrin and even fear of the loyalists and British. The soldiers were eventually put aboard prison ships in the harbor to languish; large numbers of them died under the atrocious conditions.

But Howe's victory had been decisive, and for the Americans, the aftereffects were serious. The loss of the garrison troubled Washington because the enlistments of many of his remaining troops were to expire in less than two months. An alarming percentage of his men were unfit for duty from sickness or want of clothes and shoes. Perhaps even more significant was the tremendous loss of precious material.

The British had seized 146 canon, 12,000 shot and shell, 2,800 muskets, and 400,000 cartridges. American resources had been dispersed and inadequate before this capture; now they were stretched very thin indeed. Washington would soon make his winter headquarters in New Jersey for a number of reasons, one of which was to protect the invaluable forges and furnaces in the northwestern part of the state.

The blame for squandering the men and supplies in the two forts rested naturally with Magaw, Greene, and Washington. Greene recognized that the lines around Fort Mifflin had been too extensive for 2,900 men to defend, especially in a disordered state. Since Washington had some early doubts about the fort's impregnability, his vacillation, finally favoring Greene's discretion, was inexcusable. Washington's trusted friend Reed termed this a "fatal indecision of mind." Many British were light-headed after their successful New York campaign and felt that the end of the war must be near. But Washington's error was not fatal. Nor was his disappointment so deep that he rejected thoughts of raising a new army.

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## The Battle of Princeton

Friday, January 3, 1777

### Overview

Many Americans do not realize that George Washington crossed and re-crossed the Delaware River a total of four times in the waning days of 1776. The first time was in early December when he left New Jersey in retreat from the British. The 2nd was when he crossed to attack Trenton (Dec. 25-26). After Trenton was taken, he deemed it best to put the river between his army and the more powerful British army, and went back to Pennsylvania. When he arrived at the Pennsylvania camp he received word that General Cadwalader had crossed the Delaware and was in Trenton. Cadwalader had not crossed on Christmas due to the bad weather and mistakenly assumed that Washington would not have crossed either. Upon learning that Washington had not only crossed but had beaten the Hessians, the shame-faced Cadwalader crossed and entered the unoccupied Trenton. Washington did not want to put a negative spin on the so far victorious venture by ordering Cadwalader to retreat, and so crossed the river once again and joined the two commands together on the 29th of December. By this time Cornwallis had arrived at Princeton, New Jersey with 8,000 troops. Washington knew he could expect an attack by Cornwallis very shortly and was determined to make a fight of it. Instead of fortifying Trenton he put his lines just south of the town on the south bank of the Assunpink Creek.

On Dec. 27th General Cadwalader, who had been unable to land on the Jersey shore on the 26th due to the ice on that shore, reported he was crossing near Burlington, reinforced by militia which was turning up encouraged by the victory. Cadwalader was unaware that Washington had re-crossed the river. He moved into the now empty Burlington and then to Bordontown, reporting that the citizens were hastily removing the red rags nailed to their doors as symbols of loyalty to the crown. He entreated Washington to join him in advancing on the British who were in a panic.

Washington's troops were at the moment in no condition to advance, further, he was short of food. Also many of his New England troops enlistments were due to expire on the 1st of Jan. By the 30th he had improved his supply situation and re-crossed the river. On the 30th he made an impassioned plea to a regiment whose enlistments were about to expire. No one stepped forth to stay. Once again Washington spoke "My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do and more than could reasonably be expected. But your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear. You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you

will consent to stay only one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty and to your country which you probably never can do under any other circumstances. The present is emphatically the crisis which is to decide our destiny."

Again the drums rolled, calling for men to step forward, and finally about half the men step out to reenlist. Other officers speak to other regiments with the same success. With the other troops on hand, it will have to be enough. If Washington could maintain the initiative, he might save the Revolution. If he loses a battle at this critical time, it was thought the revolution would collapse.

### Synopsis

The British General Howe orders Cornwallis to Princeton to gather all available troops for a counter attack. January 2nd Cornwallis marches on Trenton with about 6000 men, leaving 3 regiments of the 4th Brigade at Princeton as rear-guard, under Colonel. Mawhood. At Maidenhead (now Lawrenceville) the British on Jan 2nd meet with American units who begin a fighting withdrawal, ambushing and delaying the British. It is 4 P.M. when the British finally get to Trenton, to find Washington entrenched but out numbered and outclassed. Washington has but 5,200 men, many unreliable militia. Washington has deployed his troops to on the south side of the Assunpink Creek, a strong position, and repels several attempts of the British to take the bridge. Night fell finally. Since his troops are tired, Cornwallis decides to wait to attack until morning, when he can "bag the fox" as he says. His officers want to attack now, fearful of Washington's known ability to retreat and escape.

During the night, Washington leaves a few men to keep the campfires burning, make entrenchment noises, and keep up appearances, while the rest of the army moves around the British forces toward Princeton, where they can attack the rear of the British forces and maybe even capture the 70,000 pound sterling war treasury of Howe in New Brunswick. Washington orders silence and orders are given in whispers. Taking back roads the Americans move to the south around the British and swing towards Princeton. Main roads at this time are poor tracks-some of these back roads are little more than trails which had already become unused as the area was settled and the troops stagger along them in the dark all night. Luckily a freeze has set in with nightfall and the roads are frozen and passable for both men and cannon.

At dawn, Colonel. Mawhood has begun to follow in the wake of Cornwallis to Trenton, with his 17th Foot of the 4th Brigade followed by the 55th, and the 40th regiment ordered to remain in Princeton. Now the Americans under General Mercer who had been sent to guard the left flank and the 17th under Mawhood discover each other at the same time, and move to attack. The 55th moves back into Princeton. Mercer and Mawhood each believe they have encountered a patrol. Mawhood has about 276 men, and Mercer 120 with 200 following. Both race to the high ground now called Mercer heights. Mercer is surprised to run into Mawhood's men deployed in line. Captain Willie Leslie of the 17th, and nephew of General Alexander Leslie, is killed in the first fire. After exchanging fires, Mawhood's regiment charges with the bayonet. Only 20 or so of Mercers men have muskets and bayonets, most being slow reloading riflemen whose guns can not use bayonets. Mercer is mortally wounded and his troops fall back, but Cadwalader's 600 men of the Pennsylvania militia arrive. They fire and then start to fall back, even though they greatly outnumber the 17th. (Mawhood and the 17th regiment put up a terrific defense, still remembered and honored in Great Britain.)

Washington and his officers rally them, and more troops arrive and Washington himself leads them towards the British. Washington is only 30 yards from the British lines when he orders his men to fire. Both

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Both sides do fire, and Washington disappears in the smoke. When the smoke clears Washington is unharmed but Mawhood's regulars have broken. Washington orders a charge. The British troops retreat, some scattering into the woods, others turning for Cornwallis or New Brunswick. Washington also leads the pursuit, calling "Its a fine fox hunt, boys!"

In Princeton, the 40th and 55th regiments prepared to make a defense of the town. General Sullivan had his wing of the army moving to sweep into town from the other end, and the British sent out a platoon to outflank them. Sullivan in turn sent out 2 regiments to counter this flanking maneuver, forcing the British back. Now Sullivan's men met an equal number of British deployed behind a dike in the area of Frog hollow. Sullivan had his cannon brought up, which sent shot into the dike and drove the British into the area of Nassau hall, the main college building at the time.

The British took shelter in and around Nassau Hall in Princeton. The Americans brought up cannon, and took two shots at the building. The first bounced off, but the second entered the main room where the troops were holding, and allegedly decapitated a picture of King George the 2nd on the wall. The British in Nassau Hall surrendered.

When the British Dragoons make a stand to defend the fleeing troops, Washington called off all pursuit. Cornwallis could move on his rear soon, and he had to keep the army together. Placing a militia unit to destroy the bridge over the Stony Brook, and gathering what supplies could be quickly loaded, he ordered the troops to march to Kingston. Here it was decided that even though New Brunswick and the British treasury were a few miles away, and lightly guarded, the exhausted troops could do no more.

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The American army moved north along the Millstone river to Somerset Court House, now Millstone, where he had to rest his troops.

Back at Trenton, Cornwallis, on the 3rd, at dawn had found that the Americans are gone and at first it was believed they have marched to Bordentown, but soon reports of fighting at Princeton are received. Cornwallis marches on Princeton, and his vanguard arrives as the bridge over the creek is broken up. The militia makes a short stand, forcing the British to stop and form for battle. Washington and the troops are able to get away, and Cornwallis rests his troops for a few hours, then marches to defend Brunswick, following after Washington.

At Kingston, Cornwallis heads for Brunswick and arrives at 6 am and deploys to defend the town. Washington is a few miles away at Somerset Court House ( now Millstone), but his troops are exhausted, some have hardly eaten, and Cornwallis position was not known, except that he was close. Any attack is not considered possible.

On the 4th, after deciding not to attack New Brunswick, Washington continued north, and later that day they arrived in Pluckemin. Protected now by the Watchung Mountains to his east, and with Morristown units behind him, Washington was now safe. He would soon move the army into winter quarters at Morristown.

Captain Leslie of the 17th, whose body was placed in a baggage wagon which was then captured, is buried with full military honors in the Pluckemin churchyard. He had known Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia when the doctor studied medicine in Edinburgh. After the war the doctor put a marker on the grave in respect of the family.

The British, who lost 86 killed and wounded at Princeton and two hundred captured, were now ordered by Howe to abandon NJ, except for a line from Perth Amboy to New Brunswick. Washington, who had about 40 killed and wounded at Princeton, had now driven the British from most of New Jersey, in what is called the Ten Crucial Days., from Dec. 25th to Jan. 3rd.

More importantly, the Revolution now had a chance, morale was improved, and the people once again believed they could stand and face the enemy troops. The British outrages in the invasion of NJ had turned many previously on the fence to the side of the rebels, paper money was acceptable once more and the rebel government and army found support again. Washington had learned to fight not the main British army, but its outposts, forcing the British to give up any effort to control the hinterlands of America. The French government, encouraged by the British defeats, released supplies to the American war effort. In England, the royal government started losing support for the war. The Crisis was past, even if severe hardship and fighting were yet ahead, in a long and bitter struggle for freedom and independence.

