

Thacher Grill Item—News Account of Washington Crossing the Delaware

THE FIRST BROADSIDE PRINTING OF THE NEWS OF WASHINGTON CROSSING THE DELAWARE: CHRISTMAS DAY: 1776

Broadside, 9-¼ × 6-½ inches; one (1) page. Baltimore, Maryland: Printed by John Dunlap (Printer of the Declaration of Independence).

The document is signed in print by Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Continental Congress. It is headed "Head Quarters, Newtown, Bucks County." This is an unrecorded printing of the news of the crossing of the Delaware by George Washington and his troops on Christmas Day, 25 December 1776.

General George Washington's crossing of the Delaware is generally recognized as the "turning-point of the Revolution." This daring exploit of Washington checked the British advance and restored the American morale, then in danger of collapse. Under his command, about three in the afternoon of Christmas Day, 1776, some 2400 men and 18 field pieces set out from a position west of the Delaware River above Trenton to surprise the British, chiefly Hessians, in their quarters between Trenton and New York. The weather was terrible, the river covered with floating ice, the supporting columns failed or refused to make the crossing. Between three and four o'clock the next morning Washington's command made its way across the river, marched to Trenton, surprised the Hessian garrison, killed some, including the Hessian commander, Rall, took 946 prisoners, 1200 muskets, 6 cannon and the regimental colors. Having accomplished this daring raid, the American troops recrossed the Delaware, with half of their number disabled by the cold. The Hessian commander, Donop, hearing of the defeat of his fellow officer, Rall, hastily retired to Princeton, leaving his stores, sick and wounded to be captured by Cadwallader, who hearing of Washington's exploit on 27 December, crossed into New Jersey. On 29 December Washington again crossed the Delaware, advanced into Trenton, and, attacked there by the British under Cornwallis, marched to Princeton, hoping to capture the British supplies at Brunswick. There ensued the battle of Princeton, in which the British lost some 200 men killed and more than that taken prisoner. Thence Washington retired to Somerset Courthouse, then to Morristown, and meanwhile in various skirmishes at Springfield, Hackensack and Elizabethtown, the Americans were successful. Washington established his headquarters at Morristown, and for the moment the American cause was saved.

This was the most daring exploit of the Revolutionary War and not merely saved the American cause from collapse but raised the reputation and influence of Washington to a point where he could, at last, be free to carry out his plans with a minimum of hindrance from his rivals and authorities.

BALTIMORE, December 30.

CONGRESS received the following Intelligence from the Council of Safety, as coming from “an Officer of distinction in the Army.”

Head Quarters, Newtown, Bucks county, Dec. 27.

It was determined some days ago, that our army should pass over to Jersey at three different places and attack the enemy, accordingly about 2,500 men and 20 brass field pieces with his Excellency General Washington at their head, and Major General Sullivan and General Green in command of two divisions passed over on the night of Christmas, and about three o'Clock A. M. were on their march by two roots towards Trenton—The night was fleety and cold and the roads slippery, that it was day break when we were two miles from Trenton, but happily the enemy were not apprized of our design, and our advance party were on their guards at half a mile from town where General Sullivan and General Green's divisions soon came into the same road.

Their guard gave our advance party several smart fires as we drove them, but we soon got two field pieces at play and several others in a small time, and one of our columns pushing down on the right while the other advanced on the left into the town. The enemy consisting of about 1500 Hessians under Col. Rohl formed and made some smart fires from their musquetry and 6 field pieces, but our people pressed from every quarter and drove them from their cannon—They retired towards a field behind a piece of woods up the creek from Trenton and formed in two bodies, which I expected would have brought on a smart action from our troops who had formed very near them, but at that instant as I came in full view of them from the back of the woods with his Excellency General Washington, an officer informed him that one party had grounded their arms and surrendered prisoners—The other soon followed their example except a part which had got off in the hazy weather towards Princeton; their light horse made off on our first approach—Too much praise cannot be given to the officers and men of every regiment, who seemed to vie with each other, and by their active spirited behaviour, they soon put an honorable issue to this glorious day.

You may rejoice and be exceeding glad at this intelligence of our success, which I hope and believe will prevent the enemy from passing the river.

We took three standards, 6 fine brass cannon and near 1000 stand of arms. They must have had about 20 or 30 killed.

“I was immediately sent off with the prisoners to M'Conkey's ferry, and have got about seven hundred and fifty safe in town and a few miles from here, on this side the ferry, viz. one Lieutenant Colonel, two Majors, four Captains, seven Lieutenants, and eight Ensigns. We left Col. Rohl, the Commandant, wounded, on his parole, and several other officers and wounded men at Trenton. We lost but two of our men that I can hear of, a few wounded, and one brave officer, Capt. Washington, who assisted in securing their artillery, shot in in both hands. Indeed every officer and private behaved well, and it was a fortunate day to our arms, which I the more rejoice at, having an active part in it. The success of this day will greatly animate our friends, and add fresh courage to our new army, which, when formed, will be sufficient to secure us from the depredations or insults of our enemy.

“Gen. Ewing's division could not pass at Trenton for the ice, which also impeded Gen. Cadwalander passing over with all his cannon and the militia, though part of his troops were over, and if the whole could have passed, we should have swept the coast to Philadelphia.

Published by order of Congress.

CHARLES THOMSON, Sec'ry,

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