



# Driven to Resistance

A HISTORY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR,  
AS TOLD BY THOSE WHO LIVED IT

VOLUME THREE

Compiled by  
R. A. Sheats



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*A HISTORY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR,  
AS TOLD BY THOSE WHO LIVED IT*

Volume Three

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“We cannot look upon our fellow-subjects in America  
in any other light than that of freemen *driven to resistance*  
by acts of oppression and violence.”

— *Statement of the minority in Parliament, October 26th, 1775*

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*Driven to Resistance: A History of the Revolutionary War, as told by those who lived it, Volume Three*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Battle for New York

**S**ir William Howe, forced to abandon the city of Boston after Washington's men took Dorchester Heights in March of 1776, sailed with his fleet to Halifax. He there awaited the arrival of reinforcements from England while laying plans for the coming campaign. It was Parliament's desire to end the war quickly, and King George III hoped to have the rebellious colonies in submission by the close of the year. To accomplish this task, General Howe left Halifax in June of 1776 and sailed with his army for New York, where he hoped to find many colonists sympathetic to the King and eager to join themselves to the Mother Country.

Descending upon the city of New York by water, the British found General Washington and his army already established in that city awaiting them. Washington had rightly guessed Howe's plan of action, and transported the American army to New York after the abandonment of Boston. Benjamin Tallmadge, son of a New York pastor, had recently enlisted in the Continental Army, and recalls his arrival in New York City:



We arrived at the city of New York in the month of June, 1776, and my place of regimental parade was assigned in Wall Street, where every morning and evening the regiment assembled for exercise. During the heat of the day the men were excused from duty, the heat being too intense to be borne by them in the sun.

The American army, composed principally of levies (or troops raised for short periods) and militia, had now assembled at New York and in its vicinity, when it was announced that a large British fleet was discovered off the Hook [New York Bay] on the 29th of June. In a few days the British fleet entered the Hook, and Sir William Howe (who commanded the army) landed on Staten Island where, by the arrival of [his brother] Lord Howe, he had a force [of] about twenty-five thousand men.

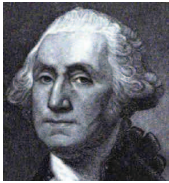
The newly-furnished troops, consisting of foreigners and native subjects, having now joined those who had recently left Boston, General Washington (having arrived also from Boston) began to introduce system and order into the heterogeneous<sup>1</sup> mass of troops that had been brought into the field and were placed under his command.

The war now put on a very serious aspect, as independence had been declared, and it seemed no longer doubtful that the contest on which we had entered must be decided by the sword.

---

<sup>1</sup> heterogeneous – varied

Throughout the month of July Sir William Howe remained aboard ship and examined the American lines—and waited. British reinforcements as well as Hessian troops continued to arrive in the harbor, quickly swelling Howe's forces to 32,000 men. Writing to Congress on August 13th, Washington declared:



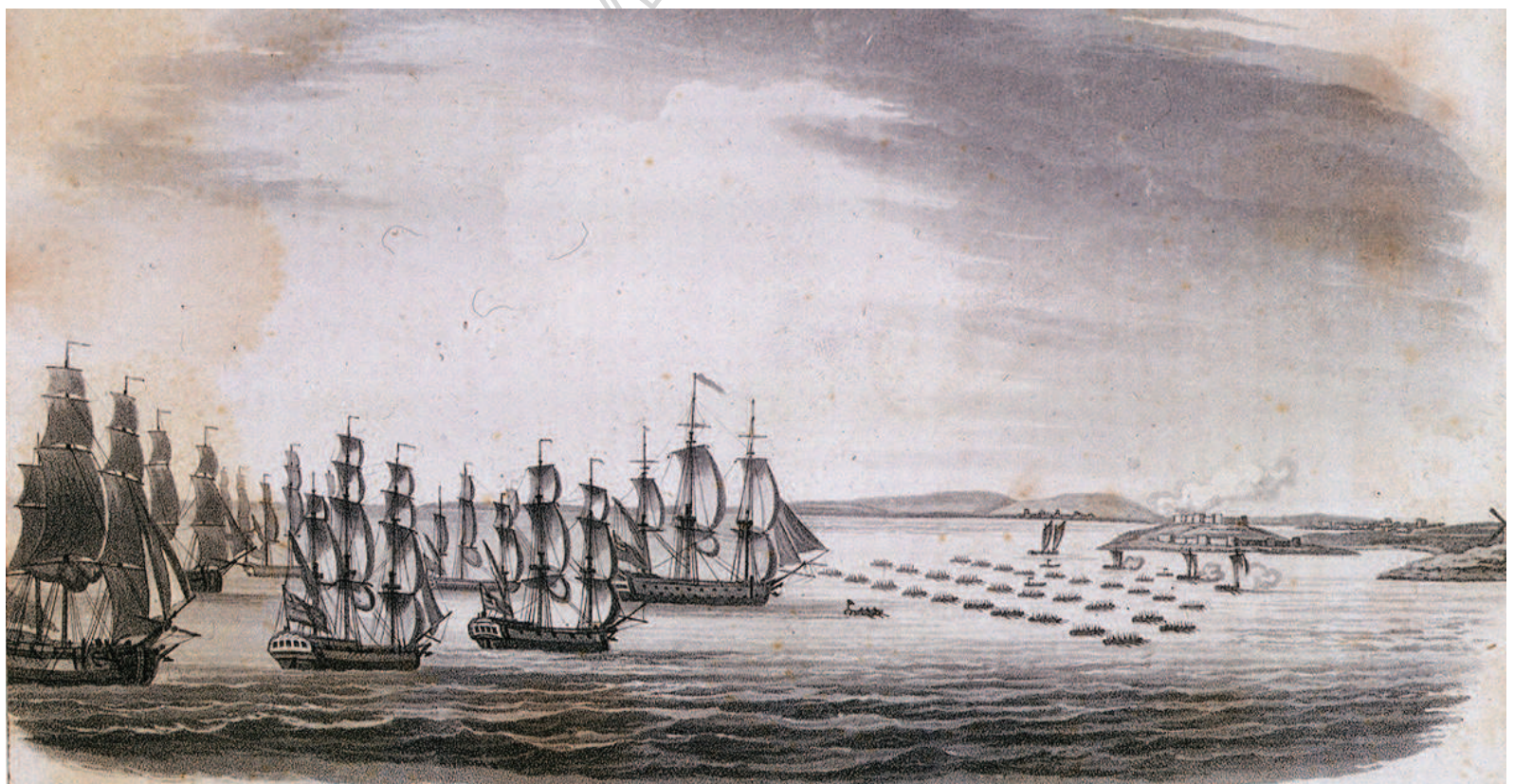
There is reason to believe that but little time will elapse before the enemy make their attack; . . . The enemy since yesterday have received a further augmentation<sup>2</sup> of thirty-six ships to their fleet, making the whole that have arrived since yesterday morning ninety-six.

Against this massive fleet Washington had no way of fighting. Though he had over 20,000 men under his command, he had no ships at his disposal. This lack of a navy placed him in a dangerous position. With the Continental Army located on the southern tip of Manhattan as well as at Brooklyn Heights on Long Island, Washington was unable to prevent the ships of the British fleet from sailing up the Hudson River to attack him in his rear.

Although Washington recognized the vulnerability of his position, he and his officers determined to defend New York as long as possible. Though they knew it was very unlikely that they could permanently retain the position against the overwhelming numbers of British and Hessian soldiers under Howe's command, Washington understood that holding New York City was not as important as delaying the British army and preventing them from making any decisive conquests during the few months that remained of 1776. If the Continental Army could simply prevent the British from descending upon and laying waste the countryside this campaign, the loss of New York would be no great matter.

Sir William Howe made his first move near the end of August. Having examined the American positions at Brooklyn, he determined to send 5,000 of his men against the Americans'

<sup>2</sup> **augmentation** – addition



*right flank. While this maneuver occupied the Americans, Howe himself, with 10,000 men, slipped through an unguarded road under cover of night and attacked the unsuspecting left flank of the Continental forces. Howe's surprise attack worked admirably, as one of the American soldiers recorded:*

About twelve o'clock last Monday night (the 26th) we were alarmed by the return of some of our scouting parties, who advised us that the English were in motion and coming up the island with several field-pieces. It was generally thought not to be the main body, but only a detachment, with a view to possess themselves of some advantageous heights. On which near three thousand men were ordered out, consisting chiefly of the Pennsylvania and Maryland troops, to attack them on their march. About sunrise the next morning we came up with a very large body of them.

The Delaware and Maryland battalions made one party. Colonel Atlee with his battalion, a little before us, had taken post in an orchard and behind a barn. And on the approach of the enemy he gave them a very severe fire, which he bravely kept up for a considerable time until they were near surrounding him, when he retreated to the woods.

The enemy then advanced to us, upon which Lord Stirling (who commanded) drew us up in a line and offered them battle in the true English taste. The British army then advanced within about three hundred yards of us, and began a very heavy fire from their cannon and mortars, for both the balls and shells flew very fast, now and then taking off a head. Our men stood it amazingly well—not even one of them showed a disposition to shrink.

Our orders were not to fire until the enemy came within fifty yards of us. But, when they perceived we stood their fire so coolly and resolutely, they declined coming any nearer, although treble<sup>3</sup> our number.

*It wasn't until noon that the troops realized they'd been fooled by the British attack, and were now surrounded by the enemy:*

In this situation we stood from sunrise till twelve o'clock, the enemy firing upon us the chief part of the time, when the main body of their army (by a route we never dreamed of) had entirely surrounded us and drove within the lines or scattered in the woods all our men except the Delaware and Maryland battalions, who were standing at bay with double their number. Thus situated, we were ordered to attempt a retreat by fighting our way through the enemy, who had posted themselves, and nearly filled every field and road between us and our lines.

We had not retreated a quarter of a mile before we were fired upon by an advanced part of the enemy, and those upon our rear were playing upon us with their artillery. Our men fought with more than Roman virtue, and would have stood until they were shot down to a man. We forced the advanced party which first attacked us to give way, through which opening we got a passage down to the side of a marsh, seldom before waded over, which we passed, and then swam a narrow river, all the time exposed to the fire of the enemy. The companies commanded by Captains Ramsey and Scott were in the front, and sustained the first fire of the enemy, when hardly a man fell.

<sup>3</sup> **treble** – three times, triple





The whole of the right wing of our battalion, thinking it impossible to march through the marsh, attempted to force their way through the woods, where they were almost to a man killed or taken.

*Howe's attack was a brilliant success. The Americans lost over a thousand killed, wounded, and prisoners, while the total British losses were less than four hundred.*

*At the close of the battle the British army took advantage of the ground they had won and began digging siege lines a mere three hundred yards from the American position. General Washington himself examined the position, after which he and his officers determined that it would not be prudent to attempt to hold their lines if the British began a regular siege; the British fleet could easily slip behind the American position and make their lines untenable. They therefore decided to abandon their position and withdraw the army to New York City.*

*Transporting an army of 9,000 men with artillery, tents, and baggage through their lines and across a mile-wide river within sight of their enemy was an undertaking requiring the utmost secrecy and skill. If the retreat were discovered the British would attack immediately, and perhaps cut off the American withdrawal by their fleet. Washington, issuing explicit orders which were to be precisely obeyed to avoid confusion or detection by the enemy, stationed himself at the ferry in order to personally oversee the withdrawal of his men.*

*At nightfall the retreat began. Benjamin Tallmadge remembers:*



After sustaining incessant fatigue and constant watchfulness for two days and nights, attended by heavy rain, exposed every moment to an attack from a vastly superior force in front, and to be cut off from the possibility of retreat to New York by the fleet which might enter the East River, on the night of the 29th of August General Washington commenced recrossing his troops from Brooklyn to New York.

To move so large a body of troops, with all their necessary appendages,<sup>4</sup> across a river full a mile wide with a rapid current, in face of a victorious, well-disciplined army nearly three times as numerous as his own, and a fleet capable of stopping the navigation so that not one boat could have passed over, seemed to present most formidable obstacles. But, in face of these difficulties, the Commander-in-Chief so arranged his business that on the evening of the 29th, by 10 o'clock, the troops began to retire from the lines in such a manner that no chasm was made in the lines, but as one regiment left their station on guard, the remaining troops moved to the right and left and filled up the vacancies, while General Washington took his station at the ferry and superintended the embarkation of the troops.

It was one of the most anxious, busy nights that I ever recollect, and being the third in which hardly any of us had closed our eyes to sleep, we were all greatly fatigued.

*Miraculously, the night passed without the British sentries noticing the changes in the American lines. But, despite the haste with which the troops were transported across the river to New York, because of contrary winds it was clear that day would dawn long before the last of the*

<sup>4</sup> **appendages** – additions, supplies

*Continental troops had left their posts. If the British discovered the retreat, they would quickly invade the weakened American lines and capture or kill the remaining men. Tallmadge, one of the last men to withdraw from the trenches, recorded a providential protection that preserved himself and the men still left at their posts:*



As the dawn of the next day approached, those of us who remained in the trenches became very anxious for our own safety, and when the dawn appeared there were several regiments still on duty. At this time a very dense fog began to rise, and it seemed to settle in a peculiar manner over both encampments. I recollect this peculiar providential occurrence perfectly well; and so very dense was the atmosphere that I could scarcely discern a man at six yards' distance.

When the sun rose we had just received orders to leave the lines, but before we reached the ferry, the Commander-in-Chief sent one of his aides to order the regiment to repair<sup>5</sup> again to their former station on the lines. Colonel Chester immediately faced to the right about and returned, where we tarried until the sun had risen, but the fog remained as dense as ever.

Finally the second order arrived for the regiment to retire, and we very joyfully bid those trenches a long adieu. When we reached Brooklyn ferry, the boats had not returned from their last trip, but they very soon appeared and took the whole regiment over to New York, and I think I saw General Washington on the ferry stairs when I stepped into one of the

<sup>5</sup> repair – return



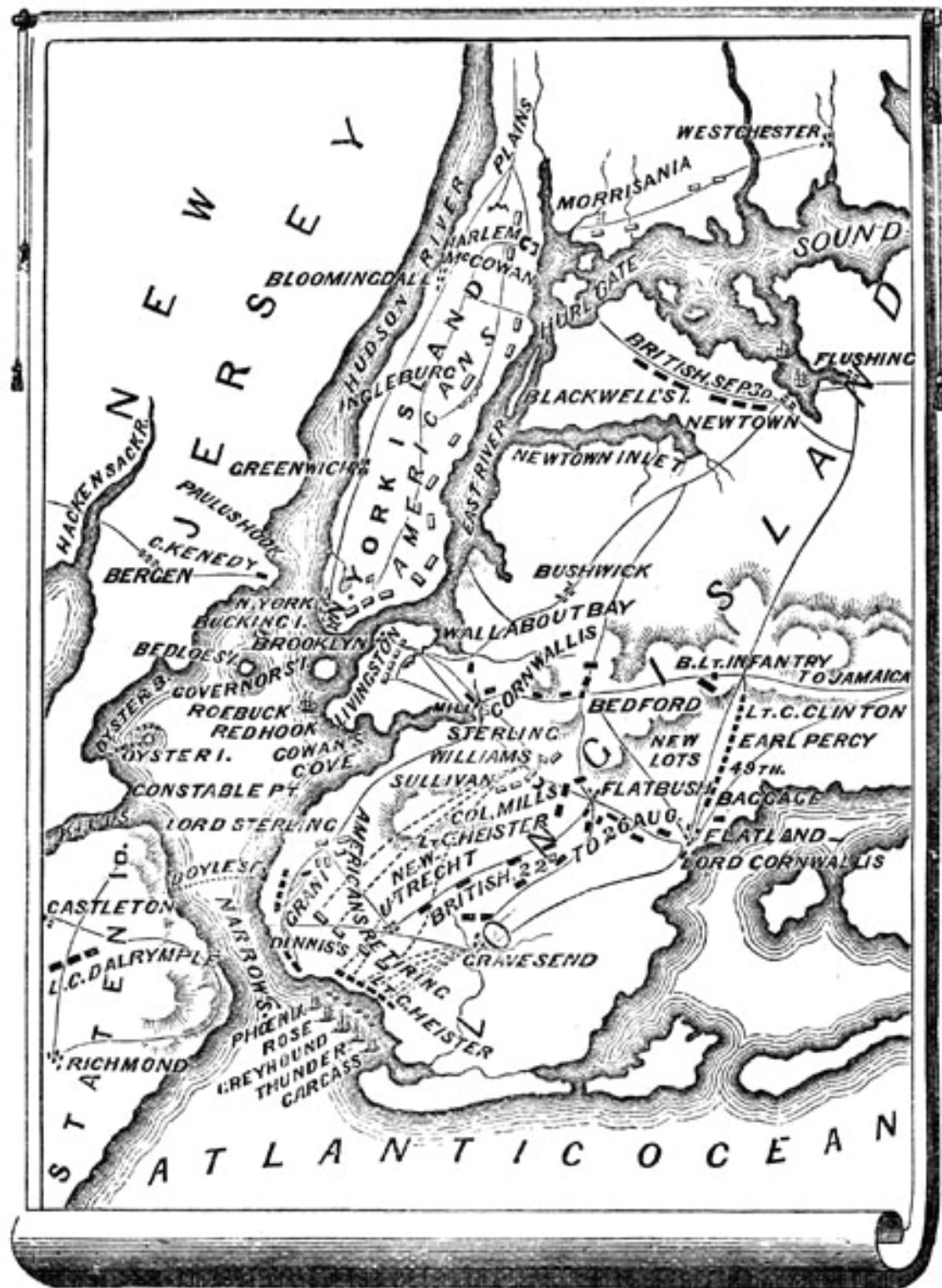
last boats that received the troops. I left my horse tied to a post at the ferry.

The troops having now all safely reached New York, and the fog continuing as thick as ever, I began to think of my favorite horse, and requested leave to return and bring him off. Having obtained permission, I called for a crew of volunteers to go with me. And, guiding the boat myself, I obtained my horse and got off some distance into the river before the enemy appeared in Brooklyn.

As soon as they reached the ferry we were saluted merrily from their musketry, and finally by their field pieces, but we returned in safety.

In the history of warfare I do not recollect a more fortunate retreat. After all, the providential appearance of the fog saved a part of our army from being captured (and certainly myself among others who formed the rear guard). General Washington has never received the credit which was due to him for this wise and most fortunate measure.

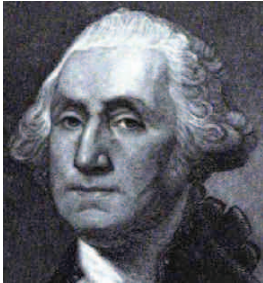
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## CHAPTER TWO

### An American Retreat

**A**fter the American retreat from Long Island, a gloom settled over the Continental Army. This was the first major defeat suffered by the Americans, and Washington was fearful of the affect it was having on his troops. Writing to Congress the 2nd of September, 1776, he confessed:



Our situation is truly distressing. The check our detachment sustained . . . has dispirited too great a proportion of our troops and filled their minds with apprehension and despair. The militia, instead of calling forth their utmost efforts to a brave and manly opposition in order to repair our losses, are dismayed, intractable,<sup>1</sup> and impatient to return [to their homes]. Great numbers of them have gone off, in some instances almost by whole regiments. . . .

Our condition is still more alarming, and with the deepest concern I am obliged to confess my want<sup>2</sup> of confidence in the generality of the troops. . . .

Our number of men at present fit for duty are under 20,000. . . .

It is painful and extremely grating to me to give such unfavorable accounts, but it would be still more criminal to conceal the truth at so critical a juncture. Every power I possess shall be exerted to serve the Cause.

*For another two weeks the American army maintained control of New York City. Howe declined attacking the defenses erected by Washington and his men, and instead determined to attempt to surround the Continental forces, thus cutting off their means of communication and supply. Washington, writing to Congress the 16th of September, informed them of the results of one of Howe's military moves:*



About eleven o'clock those [British men-of-war] in the East River began a most severe and heavy cannonade to scour the grounds and cover the landing of their troops between Turtle Bay and the city, where breastworks had been thrown up to oppose them.

As soon as I heard the firing I rode with all possible dispatch<sup>3</sup> towards the place of landing, when to my great surprise and mortification I found the troops that had been posted in the lines retreating with the

<sup>1</sup> **intractable** – unyielding, stubborn

<sup>2</sup> **want** – lack

<sup>3</sup> **dispatch** – haste, speed

utmost precipitation,<sup>4</sup> and those ordered to support them . . . flying in every direction and in the greatest confusion, notwithstanding the exertions of their generals to form them. I used every means in my power to rally and get them into some order, but my attempts were fruitless and ineffectual. And, on the appearance of a small party of the enemy (not more than sixty or seventy in number), their disorder increased, and they ran away in the greatest confusion without firing a shot.



*Washington, appalled by the cowardly conduct of a portion of his men and realizing that his troops lacked the courage to stand before the British, ordered a retreat from New York as the only means of preserving the Continental Army. This retreat was effected with the loss of only a few men, though the commander-in-chief noted that “a considerable part of our baggage [was lost because of] this disgraceful and dastardly conduct” of his men.*

*Howe’s forces quickly pursued the retreating Continental Army, but a brief battle at Harlem Heights (north of New York City) temporarily halted the British advance. In this engagement the Americans strove to make amends for their cowardly conduct of the previous day. Washington did not overlook this extra exertion on the part of his troops, and publicly noted in the General Orders of September 17th:*

The General most heartily thanks the troops commanded yesterday by Major Leitch, who first advanced upon the enemy, and the others who so resolutely supported them. The behavior

<sup>4</sup> **precipitation** – hurry, tumultuous haste

of yesterday was such a contrast to that of some troops the day before as must show what may be done where officers and soldiers will exert themselves. Once more therefore, the General calls upon officers and men to act up to the noble cause in which they are engaged, and to support the honor and liberties of their country.

*Despite the newly-displayed gallantry of his men, Washington and the army under his command were no match for the overwhelming numbers of soldiers and sailors under Sir William Howe. By the middle of October Howe was again on the move, and the Continental Army was forced to again retreat before him.*

*As winter dawned and the weather in New York worsened, it was clear to both armies that the campaign of 1776 was quickly drawing to a close. Though the campaign had been slow, Howe had managed to drive the Americans from New York City.*

*In November Howe's men surrounded Fort Mifflin, a fortress located on the banks of the Delaware River. Colonel Mifflin, the commanding officer of the fort, was forced to capitulate on November 20, surrendering nearly ten thousand men. After this victory, Howe sent the British commander Lord Cornwallis to pursue the remains of the retreating American army.*

*By the end of November Washington and the forces under his command had retreated through the entirety of New Jersey with the British at their heels. The American army, ill-clad, weary, and dispirited, painfully made their way southwest toward Pennsylvania. Of his pitiable men Washington recorded: "Hitherto we have lain without any [covering or shelter]. Many of our poor soldiers [are] quite barefoot, and ill-clad in other respects."*







Reaching the city of Trenton in December, the Continental Army managed to slip across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania before the approach of the British army, as one of their number recounted:

December 12

Since last Sunday we have all been at the laboring oar, from the generals to the privates. Early in that day we heard that Cornwallis was coming in three different ways. Knowing our weak situation, he made a forced march to come up with us, and was within two miles of Princeton when Lord Stirling began his retreat with two brigades. Boats from every quarter were collected, and our stores, together with the troops remaining at Trenton, were immediately conveyed over the Delaware. On Sunday morning, having everything over, we crossed the Delaware and took our quarters about half a mile from the river. About eleven o'clock the enemy came marching down with all the pomp of war, in great expectation of getting boats and immediately pursuing; but of this we took proper care by destroying every boat, shallop,<sup>5</sup> etc., we could lay our hands on. They made forced marches up

Princeton when Lord Stirling began his retreat with two brigades. Boats from every quarter were collected, and our stores, together with the troops remaining at Trenton, were immediately conveyed over the Delaware. On Sunday morning, having everything over, we crossed the Delaware and took our quarters about half a mile from the river. About eleven o'clock the enemy came marching down with all the pomp of war, in great expectation of getting boats and immediately pursuing; but of this we took proper care by destroying every boat, shallop,<sup>5</sup> etc., we could lay our hands on. They made forced marches up

<sup>5</sup> shallop – large boat



and down the river in pursuit of boats, but in vain.

*The campaign of 1776 was nearing its conclusion. Throughout its weary months the American army had lost many thousands killed, wounded, or captured (not to mention the numbers who deserted along their retreat), and many of those that remained were scheduled to forsake the camp within a few weeks when their enlistments ran out. As Benjamin Tallmadge recorded:*



This was a period of great dismay. The campaign of 1776 was now drawing to a close, and the periods for which the American troops had been enlisted were daily expiring. The enemy had been victorious and, flushed with success, were insolent and cruel both to the inhabitants and to their prisoners. In fact, all was confusion and dismay, and it seemed as if we were on the eve of despair and ruin.

*Matters looked bleak indeed for the newly-formed States of America. Contemporary David Ramsay recalls:*



As the retreating Americans marched through the country, scarcely one of the inhabitants joined them, while numbers were daily flocking to the royal army to make their peace and obtain protection. They saw on the one side a numerous, well-appointed, and full-clad army, dazzling their eyes with the elegance of uniformity. On the other [they beheld] a few poor fellows—who from their shabby clothing were called ragamuffins—fleeing for their safety.

Not only the common people changed sides in this gloomy state of public affairs, but some of the leading men in New Jersey and Pennsylvania adopted the same expedient. . . . [A few of them] had been members of Congress. In this hour of adversity they came within the British lines and surrendered themselves to the conquerors.

*James Thacher, the young American doctor, records:*



The Congress resolved . . . that it be recommended to all the United States as soon as possible to appoint a day of fasting and humiliation.<sup>6</sup> This is according to the custom of our pious ancestors in times of imminent dangers and difficulties. . . .

Such is now the gloomy aspect of our affairs that the whole country has taken the alarm; strong apprehensions are entertained that the British will soon have it in their power to vanquish the whole of the remains of the Continental Army. The term of service of a considerable part of our troops has nearly expired, and new

<sup>6</sup> **humiliation** – humbling of oneself (before God)

recruits do not arrive in sufficient numbers to supply their places.

His Excellency General Washington is continually making every possible effort to produce a change of circumstances more auspicious<sup>7</sup> to our country. The critical and distressing situation in which he is placed is sufficient to overwhelm the powers of any man of less wisdom and magnanimity<sup>8</sup> than our Commander-in-Chief. He has the confidence and the affection of the officers and soldiers of the whole army; and there is not perhaps another man to be found so well calculated to discharge the duties of his important and responsible station. It is generally agreed by our officers that in his retreat through the Jerseys and over the Delaware, under the most pressing difficulties, he displayed the talents and wisdom characteristic of a great military commander, possessing unfailing resources of mind.

*Though numbers of Americans daily flocked to the British, even amidst the overwhelming dismay of the moment and the likely prospect of a dark and dreary future, some refused to give way to despair, but rather rose to the occasion and joined the dwindling forces under Washington to fight for their life, their families, and their freedoms. A Pennsylvania newspaper recorded the formation of a new regiment known as 'The Married Regiment':*

When Governor Trumbull recommended to the householders in Connecticut (who were not obliged to do military duty) to form themselves into companies, . . . a number of aged gentlemen in the town of Waterbury embodied themselves, and nominated their own officers, . . .

[This regiment] consists of twenty-four men. Their ages added together are a thousand years. They are all married men, and when they came from home left behind them their wives, with an hundred and forty-nine children. One of them is fifty-nine years of age, and is the father of nineteen children and twelve grandchildren. Fourteen of his own children are now living. A worthy example of patriotism! Let others go and do likewise.



<sup>7</sup> **auspicious** – favorable

<sup>8</sup> **magnanimity** – noble generosity, kindness, benevolence

# A HISTORY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, AS TOLD BY THOSE WHO LIVED IT

*What event did Washington view as the single greatest act of Providence in the entire War for American Independence?*

*After what American victory did the patriots give each of their 800 British prisoners a rifle to carry while being escorted to their place of captivity?*

*What British officer attempted to drive Daniel Boone from Kentucky, and why?*

Find the answers to these and countless other questions while watching the pages of history spring to life in the final volume of *Driven to Resistance*, a first-hand account of the American War for Independence.

*Driven to Resistance* includes the letters, journals, and writings of the following (and many more):



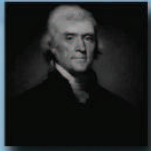
George Washington



John Hancock



George Rogers Clark



Thomas Jefferson



Paul Revere



Benjamin Tallmadge



Elias Boudinot



Abigail Adams



John Adams



Benedict Arnold



Henry Knox



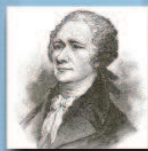
James Thacher



Daniel Boone



Patrick Henry



Alexander Hamilton



King George III



William Pitt



John André



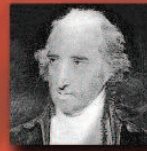
Baron Riedesel



Frederika Riedesel



Barry St. Leger



Henry Hamilton



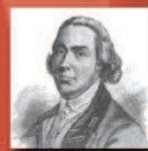
Lord Dunmore



John Burgoyne



Sir Guy Carleton



Thomas Gage



Lord North



Marquis of Rockingham



Sir Henry Clinton



William Howe



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