

STORIES of New Jersey



Continental Soldier

the fall of Fort Washington on November 16. If Washington had disregarded Congress' insistence that he defend the post, and if he had listened to General Charles Lee instead of General Greene, the fort would have been abandoned, 2,600 men would not have been captured and invaluable ammunition and equipment would have been saved. With the surrender of Fort Washington, the American army retreated across the Hudson River to Fort Lee on the New Jersey Palisades. But this post, named by Washington to honor Charles Lee, had become dangerous, for the British fleet was entirely free to move northward from the bay, and the superior British land force could easily cross the river and attack the fort from the north or south. By this time Howe had been reinforced by thousands of Hessian as well as British troops. Sir Henry Clinton and 2,000 men, unable to pierce Lee's defense of Charleston, had also joined Howe. All told, the strongest military nation in the world had 32,000 soldiers in America and great quantities of guns and equipment.

Anticipating that Howe would invade the Jerseys to strike at Philadelphia, Washington set up headquarters at Hackensack, and on November 17, hampered by lack of boats and too few wagons, he started the removal of precious military stores from Fort Lee to the west side of the Passaic River. Winter was beginning and the army was disintegrating. Officers thought only of their personal ambitions; men were continually deserting; enlistments expired, and breakdown of civilian morale deprived Washington of fresh recruits promised by the newly created states. There was a great lack of hospital equipment and no medicines: the sick rarely got well. Many half-hearted rebels were becoming traitorous Tories. It was no wonder that Washington wrote to his brother: "I am wearied almost to death with the retrograde motion of things..."

At dawn on November 20, the British, having crossed the Hudson, were on the march, and Washington ordered an instant retreat. Leaving their kettles burning on the campfires and abandoning tents, baggage and cannon, the Americans

degree of self-government. Not until early in 1776 did he come to believe that only independence from England could ease the oppression. Two things convinced him: George III's attitude of "vengeance and indignation" and Tom Paine's revolutionary pamphlet, *Common Sense*.

Through the winter of 1775-76, Washington kept Sir William Howe's British troops locked in Boston and struggled to train an army out of hardheaded, undisciplined farmers and militiamen. At last in March, Howe, accompanied by hundreds of Tories, was driven from Boston, and at the beginning of April, the American commander left for New York, where he expected Howe would eventually come. On July 2, the day the British transports arrived off Staten Island, the Continental Congress voted for independence from England; and Washington informed his men: "We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die..."

They died--at the disastrous Battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776; on Manhattan Island; in Westchester; and at