

## STORIES of New Jersey



*Gen. Hugh Mercer*

From Shabakunk Creek to Trenton American snipers attacked and retreated, attacked and retreated until they had crossed Assunpink Creek and ranged along the fortified hillside that Washington had prepared. Three times the Englishmen charged the bridge over the Assunpink, and three times they were repulsed. At nightfall the tired British decided to rest in Trenton for the night and finish off the entire American army in the morning.

But Washington had learned from the disaster of Long Island to avoid pitched battles with the superior British army. After conferring with his officers at the Alexander Douglass house on Greene Street, he determined to elude Cornwallis by moving secretly on the British garrison at Princeton by a back road. Perhaps he would even go on to strike at New Brunswick where the enemy held Charles Lee captive and kept their stores and a military chest of \$350,000. It was a very risky enterprise. The "Old Fox" was beginning to earn his nickname.

Before dawn of January 3 the American troops started on the march. To speed the movement, baggage, stores and heavy guns were dispatched south to Burlington. Some regiments even stored away their overcoats so that they might walk faster. Leaving 400 men to throw up earthworks noisily and keep the campfires flaming high to deceive enemy eyes and ears, Washington led his men along the narrow, icy road to Princeton. The thawing snow and mire had hardened again with the night cold, and the wheels of the wagons carrying the cannon were muffled with rags and rope.

Daylight brought the weary and sleepless American army to the Quaker meeting house near Stony Brook, about two miles south of Princeton. Here Washington divided his troops, sending General Mercer to cut the bridge over the stream so that Cornwallis could not attack from the rear. But Mercer was surprised by two British regiments under Colonel Mawhood which were leaving Princeton to join Cornwallis at Trenton. Superior British cannon and bayonets routed the Americans, and General Mercer, resisting surrender, was stabbed to death.

Meanwhile, hearing of Mercer's plight, Washington struggled to bring up



*Reconstructed Continental Hospital--Morristown*