

STORIES of New Jersey

flight by New Jersey and Pennsylvania militiamen. On April 13 the Americans ran when Cornwallis attempted to trap the small force stationed at Bound Brook. Guerilla warfare kept British foraging parties on edge throughout the winter. Even General Howe and his escort, returning to Perth Amboy from a visit at New Brunswick, were surprised by an attack, which, however, they turned back. Washington encouraged the guerilla attacks, even suggesting on occasion that companies dress in Indian style to frighten the enemy. To rouse public opinion against the redcoats he shrewdly condemned them for hiring Hessians and savages who "lay waste your Country...adding murder to desolation." On the other hand, Washington used Indians whenever possible.

June and July were months of waiting and watching for a decisive British move. While the commander expected a plunge across New Jersey to Philadelphia or an attack on the Hudson River forts, Howe decided to move against Philadelphia by sea. First however, the British tried to lure Washington down from the protecting Watchung hills to the vulnerable open valley. On the morning of June 14 Howe began stretching out his 10,000 men on a nine-mile front which offered Washington apparently excellent opportunity for a full attack. Five days later, realizing that his ruse had failed, Howe marched his troops back through New Brunswick, harried constantly by American guerilla attacks.

As the British withdrew to Perth Amboy and Staten Island, Washington, still suspecting a trick, came down from the Watchungs. Cautiously he kept his main force at New Market, just south of Dunellen, though his staff officers recommended an all-out attack. Stirling was sent with a detachment closer to the British.

General Howe, learning that Washington had at last come down to the lowlands, prepared at once to launch a lightning attack. After midnight on June 28, he hurried from Perth Amboy through Bonhamton and Metuchen, striking north to join the column under Cornwallis which had proceeded through Woodbridge. Stirling's outposts, surprised for the moment, sent out a warning and retreated, slowing up the British with relentless fire from the woods. Near Scotch Plains, Stirling's main force held up the enemy until supplies had been removed and then hastily returned up the Watchung slopes, where Washington, warned, had already regained his strategic position at Middlebrook. Once more, Howe had failed to catch the cautious "Old Fox." During the last four days of June, the British moved back from Westfield, northernmost point of their drive, to Perth Amboy and there boarded transports which carried them away from New Jersey. General Howe never returned here.

As Washington marched the Continental Army northward out of New Jersey to the Hudson Highlands of New York State to head off a possible British assault in that region, the English fleet put out to sea, destination unknown. Then a British spy was captured. He was carrying a message to Burgoyne stating that Howe was moving on Boston to aid in the northern campaign. Washington realized that the spy had permitted himself to be captured purposely so as to throw the Americans off the trail. In reality Howe was bound for Philadelphia. Washington hastened his army back across New Jersey. On July 30, he was in Lambertville. The following day he was informed that the British armada was rounding Cape May, and that night he was riding swiftly into Philadelphia, his army not far behind. New Jersey was not to see him again until the summer of the next year, 1778.

The intervening months were marked by defeats for Washington and his army in Pennsylvania and by a great victory for the American forces under General Gates at Saratoga in New York State. During the winter, the commander and his men experienced the terrible ordeal of Valley Forge. With the spring came General Lee's release from captivity and the treaty of alliance with France.