

## Part I: Flexibility-- Trenton

### Slide 6: (Escape from New York)

Introduction: Before understanding events at the operational/tactical level, the student should have a basic understanding of the strategic situation to better understand the context in which the situational leaders and commanders faced.

In March of 1776, following the costly operations at Lexington and Concord and Breed's Hill in the spring and summer of 1775, the British commander, Lieutenant-General Sir William Howe evacuated Boston and moved his army to Halifax, Nova Scotia for refit and campaign preparation.

After leaving Boston, General Washington and the leaders of the newly created Continental Army planned for an eventual British return and correctly determined it would be New York City. Its location near the center of the Eastern Seaboard, allowed for the rapid movement troops along the coast and its deep harbors provided an area for the ships and vessels of the Royal Navy to dock. As the second largest population in the Colonies, it provided shelter for the Crown Forces troops. The lines of supply and communication that stretched across the Atlantic between America, England and Ireland were critical to Howe's operations.

Washington was faced with a serious problem in planning the defense of a series of islands in and around New York City without a professional navy. His commanders devised a plan, consisting of a series of forts at key operational points. These included Fort Greene on in Brooklyn and Fort Washington in Manhattan with Fort Lee in New Jersey on the opposite shore, with the mission of preventing the Royal Navy with access to the Hudson River.

(Click 1): On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the dreaded Royal Navy fleet landed Sir William Howe's soldiers on Staten Island and began the campaign to reclaim New York City from the Rebels. Unsure of Howe's objectives, Washington kept his forces divided between Manhattan and Brooklyn, separated by the East River.

(Click 2): Patiently waiting and preparing to attack, Howe finally made his move and landed troops in Brooklyn near present day Fort Hamilton at the end of August and prepared to engage Washington's force outside of Brooklyn.

(Click 3): Less than a week later Howe launched a brilliant flanking movement against the American line, driving Washington's force back into Fort Greene located on the bluffs overlooking the East River and Manhattan.

(Click 4): With his back to the river and Crown Forces to the front, Washington conducted a high-risk, night time, amphibious evacuation across the East River to Manhattan.

(Click 5): The American forces regrouped on southern Manhattan, awaiting the next British move. On 15 September, under the cover of a Royal Navy shore bombardment, Howe landed his force at Kip's Bay in central Manhattan (near the site of the present day UN building). He moved his force to the center of the island, allowing Washington's nearly trapped force to evacuate the island on the western side.

(Click 6): The Continental Army and their pursuers began a cat and mouse game as the British chased them from New York. The British caught up with and engaged Washington's Army near White Plains. Following the battle, Washington was forced to withdraw into New Jersey.

(Click 7): Howe next set to capturing the forts on Manhattan and on opposite shore in New Jersey. Using a combination of overland and amphibious landings, Howe captured Fort Mifflin on the Manhattan shore.

(Click 8): Less than a week later, Fort Mifflin was attacked and captured. Washington now began a brisk retreat through New Jersey to escape Howe's pursuing army.

(Click 9): Following the capture of Fort Mifflin, Washington began a headlong retreat through New Jersey, crossing into Pennsylvania in December of 1776. Next we'll look at the British Plan for the defense of New Jersey.

### **Slide 7: (Enemy Forces)**

Introduction: Before understanding the Continental Army's options, the class will look at the forces that were opposing Washington, which was one of the factors that influenced his decision making.

Lieutenant-General Sir William Howe spent a very brief time in Trenton before returning to New York City with the bulk of his army. He left behind a series of garrisons in eastern and central New Jersey to secure his gains and quarter his troops. Howe offered pardons to all rebels, who would take an oath of allegiance to the King. To command these outposts, he selected officers who proved their value and heroism during the New York campaign.

(Click 1): By mid-December 1776, General Washington established his headquarters in Newtown, PA with his units in the surrounding area.

(Click 2): Commanding the garrisons in southern and eastern NJ was Major-General James Grant, located in the town of New Brunswick. The blustery Scot commanded

the British left wing during the battle of Brooklyn and despised and underestimated the rebels that opposed him.

(Click 3): Please note that in the British Army of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, there was no standardization for the size of a brigade. The only similarity was that brigades were composed of multiple regiments and varied in size. They were created to meet operational and tactical requirements. This modularity allowed commanders a great deal of flexibility in organizing their units for campaigns or battle.

Southwest of New Brunswick, General Alexander Leslie and his garrison of 3,000 guarded the line of communication that ran from New Brunswick to the garrisons in Trenton, Bordentown and Burlington.

(Click 4): Billeted in Trenton, a mill town on the Delaware, the Hessian garrison under the popular and brave Colonel Johann Rall was the most vulnerable to an attack by the rebels due to its close proximity to Washington's force.

(Click 5): Further south and a couple of miles from the river was another Hessian garrison under the command of the aristocratic and arrogant Colonel Carl von Donop.

(Click 6): Following the river southwards, two battalions of the famed Scottish, 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot, known unofficially as "the Black Watch" occupied the town of Burlington.

(Click 7): The garrisons in Trenton, Princeton and Burlington were placed directly under the command of Colonel von Donop.

Howe's intent in billeting the garrisons was to place them within relatively close proximity to each other in case of an enemy attack in addition to quartering the troops for the winter.

(Click 8): Circle fades

(Click 9): The furthest distance between the garrisons was from New Brunswick to Princeton, a total of 18 miles.

(Click 10): Twelve miles separated the garrisons in Princeton and Trenton.

(Click 11): Based in Bordentown, von Donop's force was eight miles from Trenton.

(Click 12): Ten miles southwest of Bordentown were LTC Stirling's two battalions of Scottish troops.

(Click 13): Arrow between Bordentown and Burlington disappears.

## Slide 8: (“Times that try Men’s Souls”)

(Click 1): The summer’s New York campaign was a series of stinging and costly defeats with the Continental Army narrowly staying in front of the pursuing Crown Forces. For many of the men of the Continental Army, the fire and spirit that inspired them to join the cause, was rapidly dwindling as a result of the British onslaught. Many fully expected the Army to fold or their enlistments to expire so that they could return home to their families and communities.

(Click 2): After the actions in Boston, the Continental Congress realized that they rapidly needed manpower for the creation of an army, but they unsure of how long the conflict would last. They decided that the best course of action would be to authorize one year enlistments. This option would allow the Soldiers to return home if the war ended within their enlistment or if it went longer, then they could reenlist. The problem facing Washington was that the enlistments for the bulk of his troops would expire on 1 Jan 1777. If he didn’t do something, then the Continental Army could potentially evaporate within a couple of weeks.

(Click 3): The inexperience of the Continental Congress was apparent in supplying the Army as well. There was no existing system for food and materiel acquisition or for getting those supplies out to the troops. When they could, the States provided a variety of supplies, although they may not have met Army requirements or be in sufficient quantity to supply the entire Army. Washington’s men were hungry, tired and clothed in material that they wore during the summer campaign, which was rapidly deteriorating. The only class of supply that the Army did have in adequate supply was ammunition. The lack of adequate food and clothing helped deteriorate the Army’s morale further.

(Click 4): There were also problems at the senior command levels too. In early December of 1776, Washington’s second in command, Major-General Charles Lee (shown left) was captured three miles behind his own army at a tavern in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. Lee was a former British Army officer who relocated to North America and was responsible for designing the defense of New York City the previous summer. He was jealous of Washington when he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, since he had served as an officer of regular troops and Washington had been a Colonel in the Virginia militia.

Washington’s next senior officer, Major-General Horatio Gates (shown right), also served previously as a “regulars” officer in the British Army and like Lee, thought he should have been senior to Washington as well. Gates arrived in Pennsylvania in mid-December with his force, but feigned illness and declined a command in the upcoming campaign. Instead he rode to Baltimore, where Congress relocated to in the face of the British threat, to address Congress on his plan to win the war. He did this without Washington’s knowledge, completely undermining the Commander-in-Chief.

Washington would now have to plan and execute operations without his two senior officers.

He instead relied upon two men without any previous military experience.

(Click 5): Major-General Nathaniel Greene (shown bottom left), a former blacksmith from Rhode Island, was originally in command of the Continental Army in Brooklyn, but fell ill just prior to the British attack. He also persuaded Washington to defend Fort Mifflin on upper Manhattan and both men narrowly escaped capture when the British launched surprise attack on the fort in November. In spite of Greene's counsel, Washington still retained him and had confidence in his abilities.

Major-General John Sullivan (shown bottom right) a lawyer from New Hampshire, replaced Greene in command of the force in Brooklyn and was captured in the British attack. Recently exchanged for British prisoners of war, Sullivan proved to be a hard-charging, aggressive leader, even though he didn't have any previous military experience.

These two officers would hold key roles in the upcoming campaign.

(Click 6): Question for the class:

***“Based on what we’ve discussed thus far, what do you consider to be the greatest threat to the Continental Army in late December of 1776?”***

Responses can include:

- Crown Forces units in New Jersey
- Political infighting (i.e. Lee and Gates) within the Continental Army
- Morale and expiration of enlistments
- Lack of supplies to feed and equip the Army

### **Slide 9: (Course of Action Analysis)**

Now that the potential threats have been identified, we'll take a look at the courses of action available to Washington in the planning of the upcoming campaign.

So in this block, we'll look at the options available to the Continental Army.

(Click 1): The risks associated with each option.

(Click 2): And the corresponding benefits of each COA.

(Click 3): Washington had three options available to him:

- 1) Take the offensive and attack the British in New Jersey
- 2) Entrench his Army in Pennsylvania and wait for the British to attack in the spring

3) Withdraw his Army from its current positions and move to more defensible ones to oppose the British

(Click 4): The obvious risk to attacking the British garrisons in New Jersey would be the potential capture of the Continental Army, which would could end the Revolution.

(Click 5): Conversely, a successful attack by the Continental Army could help regain the initiative and simultaneously increase the morale of the Soldiers.

(Click 6): A victory would also provide the Soldiers with an incentive to reenlist, ensuring that the Army remained intact after 1 January 1777.

(Click 7): Another COA available to Washington would be to defend his current position in eastern PA and await the British attack in the spring. This would ensure that the British maintained the operational initiative.

(Click 8): Another problem directly connected with this COA is that it would not improve morale as the Army struggled to survive the winter, potentially leading to large numbers of men leaving the Army as their enlistments expired.

(Click 9): A defensive stand by the Continental Army could provide General William Howe the opportunity to exercise the tactical superiority of the Crown Forces as they had done throughout the New York campaign the previous summer and fall, placing Washington's Army at a high risk for defeat and/or capture.

(Click 10): Thinking optimistically, well-prepared and defended positions would impose heavy losses on British attacks similar to what happened at Breed's (Bunker) Hill in June of 1775.

(Click 11): A Continental Army victory combined with imposing heavy casualties on the British would help build the confidence of Washington's troops and hopefully provide incentives for his current force to reenlist and draw new recruits into the Army.

(Click 12): The other option available to Washington was to withdraw his Army to more defensible terrain located between Newtown and Philadelphia to encourage a British attack.

Like the defensive COA, a withdrawal would allow the British to take the initiative through offensive operations, which could intern cause large numbers of troops with expiring enlistments to return home.

(Click 13): This severe loss of manpower would debilitate the Army and could spell the end of the Revolution itself.

(Click 14): A retrograde or withdrawal would allow Washington to place time and space between the Continental Army and the Crown Forces, temporarily evading them.

(Click 15): This COA would also permit Washington to select more defensible terrain between Newtown and Philadelphia, allowing him to set the terms for battle.

***“Based on the COA analysis, which one do you think would be the most beneficial to the Continental Army and the ‘Cause’? Which one would potentially jeopardize the Army and possibly the Revolution?”***

**Slide 10: (Concept of Operation: The Crossings)**

Washington’s intelligence networks revealed the dispositions of the Crown Force in central/eastern New Jersey.

(Click 1): The largest garrison of 3,000 men was located in and around Princeton under BG Alexander Leslie.

(Click 2): Southwest of Princeton, a Hessian force (1,350) under the command of Colonel Johann Rall was quartered in Trenton on the Delaware.

(Click 3): Eight miles south of Trenton, a force of 1,500 under Carl von Donop was billeted in Bordentown.

(Click 4): Two battalions of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot under LTC Stirling were quartered in the river town of Burlington.

(Click 5): To attack these garrisons simultaneously, Washington devised an audacious plan that required instantaneous crossings of the Delaware.

Washington would lead the main effort comprised of 2,400 troops divided into two divisions: one under Greene and the other under Sullivan. This force would cross nine miles north of Trenton and then would advance on the city in two columns.

(Click 6): Force crosses the river and illustrates the attack on Trenton.

(Click 7): Directly opposing Trenton, a force of militia (826) under BG James Ewing would attack Trenton in conjunction with Washington’s attack.

(Click 8): From the town of Bristol, BG John Cadwalader and his force of 1,500 infantry, cavalry and militia would launch their attack against Burlington.

(Click 9): A force under BG Israel Putnam would cross from Philadelphia into New Jersey to complete the assault on British occupied New Jersey.

(Click 10): To coordinate the events, Washington developed an aggressive timeline.

In the late afternoon, troops would move from their camps to designated crossing points along the river. After assembling there, units would conduct the river crossings.

He allocated seven hours to allow for the crossings due to allow for ice flows in worsening weather conditions, which would be used to mask the operation.

Five hours later assembled in New Jersey, Washington’s force would begin their advance towards Trenton. He allocated another five hours to get into position to attack

the garrison in Trenton. The timelines for the other units would vary on how quickly they could cross and attack. .

It is important to note that the main means for real time communication were couriers on horseback, which would make operational coordination once the crossings started nearly impossible.

### **Slide 11: (Concept of Operation: The Attack)**

(Click 1): Now, we will look at Washington's concept of attack on the town of Trenton through terrain analysis and identification of the operational objectives.

(Click 2): Trenton, a small, milling town located on the Delaware was connected the other towns through a series of unimproved roads. From the north, the Pennington Road ran onto the high ground on the eastern end of the town. Also running from north was the River Road, which ran into the western end of the town closer to the river.

Running parallel to each other, from the high ground at the eastern end of town towards the Assunpink Creek were King and Queen Streets. This area was important since most of the homes and buildings in town were located along these two streets.

(Click 3): Washington knew from intelligence reports that the bulk of Rall's troops were quartered in this area, control of which would play a prominent role in the upcoming battle.

(Click 4): On the western edge of the town, ran the powerful Assunpink Creek, which powered the Trenton mill industry and the bridge over which connected Trenton with Bordentown and Burlington further to the south.

(Click 5): Washington's plan directed Greene and his division to move south down Pennington Road to seize the high ground at the intersection of King and Queen Streets.

(Click 6): At the opposite end of the town, General Sullivan's column would approach down the River Road.

(Click 7): The area between King and Queen Streets was where the majority of the homes and buildings were located and where the garrison was quartered.

(Click 8): Greene's objective, the high ground at the intersection of King and Queen Streets was key to controlling both streets through employment of artillery and small arms, which could reign fire on troops trying to assemble on them.

At the opposite end of town, Sullivan's force would advance down the River Road to close the Hessians in a pincer along with Greene's force at the eastern end of the town.

(Click 9): But more importantly, his force would secure the Queen Street bridge and prevent any Hessian troops from fleeing to the south to alert or link up with the other garrisons.

**Slide 12: (Planning Discussion)**