The Trenton-Princeton Campaign, 1776-77
AGENDA

- Part I: Flexibility—Trenton
- Escape from New York
- Enemy Forces
- “Times that Try Men’s Souls
- Course of Action Analysis
- Concept of Operation: Crossings
- Concept of Operation: Attack

- Planning Discussion
- Execution Phase: The Attack
- Situation: 2 Jan 1777
- Part II: Initiative
- Night March
- Engagement
- Pressure
- Strategic Impact
PART I-- FLEXIBILITY:

TRENTON
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

- 3 July: British occupy Staten Island
- 22 Aug: British land on Long Island
- 27 Aug: Battle of Brooklyn
- 29 Aug: Evacuation
- 15 Sep: Kip’s Bay
- 28 Oct: White Plains
- 15 Nov: Fort Washington
- 20 Nov: Fort Lee falls

Legend:
- British Occupied Territory
ENEMY FORCES

--AOR Commander: MG Grant
--BDE in Princeton: BG Leslie
--BDE in Trenton: COL Rall
--BDE in Bordentown: COL von Donop
--2x BNs in Burlington: LTC Stirling
--Under the command of COL von Donop

Philadelphia

New Brunswick (4,000)
New Brunswick

Princeton (3,000)
Princeton

Bordentown (1,500—includes Burlington)
Bordentown

Newtown

Trenton (1,350)
Trenton

Mount Holly

Delaware River
“TIMES THAT TRY MEN’S SOULS”

• Morale
• Enlistments
• Logistics
• Command Problems
• Threat Identification
## COURSE OF ACTION ANALYSIS

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<th>OPTIONS</th>
<th>RISKS</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
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<td><strong>OFFENSE</strong></td>
<td>-- Capture of Army</td>
<td>-- Regain the initiative</td>
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<td>-- End of Revolution</td>
<td>-- Increase morale</td>
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<td>-- Impose losses on attackers</td>
<td>-- Build confidence of troops</td>
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<td>-- Lose the initiative</td>
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<td>-- Expiration of enlistments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-- British tactical superiority</td>
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<td><strong>DEFENSE</strong></td>
<td>-- Lose the initiative</td>
<td>-- Evasion of British threat</td>
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<td>-- Expiration of enlistments</td>
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<td>-- End of Revolution</td>
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<td><strong>RETROGRADE</strong></td>
<td>-- Lose the initiative</td>
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<td>-- Expiration of enlistments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-- End of Revolution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-- Set terms for battle</td>
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CONOP: THE CROSSINGS

Timeline:*  
--1630 hours: forces move from AA to river  
--1700-2400: units conduct river crossings  
--2400-0500: units advance toward objectives  
--NLT 0500: units attack objectives  

*Horseback couriers are main means of real time communication
CONOP: THE ATTACK

- Terrain Walk
- Road Network
- Assupink Creek
- Avenues of Approach

- Operational Objectives
  - Intersection of King and Queen Streets
  - Queen Street Bridge
PLANNING DISCUSSION

• As an officer/NCO on General Washington’s staff, do you think the plan that we reviewed is too audacious? Do the risks outweigh the benefits?

• What problems do you foresee in the execution phase of the operation? Can these problems be averted? How?
25-26 December 1776:

- Units move to assembly areas
- Units begin crossings
- Main force (Washington)
  - Planned Completion: 2400 hrs
  - Actual: o/a 0200 hrs, 26 Dec
- Ewing: Fails to cross
- Cadwalader: Fails to cross
- Putnam: Fails to cross
EXECUTION PHASE: THE ATTACK

- Hessian Defenses
- 0800: Greene’s and Sullivan’s Divisions attack
- Call to Arms and Queen Street Bridge
- Greene’s division seizes the high ground
- Fatal decision
- Egress Attempt
- Surrender
SITUATION: 2 JAN 1777

- Von Donop and Mission Creep
- 27 Dec 1776- 1 Jan 1777
- Maintaining the Initiative
- Cornwallis’ Advance
- Decision Point
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• What concerned General Washington the most during this campaign? Did the events of 25 Dec 1776 through 1 Jan 1777 resolve these problems?

• What factors/events had the greatest impact on the outcome of the events discussed? Why?

• What role did personal leadership play in the outcome of events?
PART II—INITIATIVE:

PRINCETON AND THE AFTERMATH
• Escape from New York
• “Times that try Men’s Souls”
• “Victory or Death”
• Stalemate at the Bridge
# NIGHT MARCH

## Concept of Operation

### Terrain
- Princeton
- Trenton

### Advance on Princeton
- Visual Contact
- Slipping Away

### Risks
- **Attack**
  - Terrain
  - Enemy Strength
  - Heavy Casualties
- **Defend**
  - Enemy Capabilities
  - Extraction Options
  - Capture of Army
- **Withdraw**
  - Crossing Timeframe
  - OPSEC
  - Surrender Initiative

### Benefits
- **Attack**
  - Initiative
  - Impose Casualties
- **Defend**
  - Maintain Initiative
  - Confidence Builder
- **Withdraw**
  - Reconsolidation
  - Threat Evasion
  - Prep for New Campaign

### Other
- XXX
- XXX
- XX
- XX
- Princeton
- Trenton
ENGAGEMENT

- Terrain
- Initial Deployments
- Attack
- Counterattack
- Victory?
PRESSURE

• Retrograde

• Means utilization

• Offensive Operations

• End Result
“The unfortunate and untimely defeat at Trenton has thrown us further back than was at first apprehended, from the great encouragement it has given to the rebels. I do not now see a prospect for terminating the war, but by a general action and I am aware of the difficulties in our way to obtain it as the enemy moves with so much more celerity than we possibly can.”

Lieutenant General Sir William Howe
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• Initiative—Discuss the importance of gaining and maintaining the initiative in the battles/campaigns discussed in this lesson.

• How do the commanders attempt to gain it and maintain it? What costs are associated with it?

• Which lessons can be learned from this campaign and how can they be applied to current operations?