

 **DELAWARE
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COOCH'S BRIDGE
September 3rd
1777

DELAWARE CONSERVATIONIST

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Dedicated to the Wise Use of Our Natural Resources

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Address all correspondence to ELIZABETH T. CAULK, Chief I. & E.

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AN
ANNOYANCE AT COOCH'S BRIDGE
By E. Paul Catts

Delaware's lone land battle of the American Revolution was a delaying harassment to the advancing British army under Lord Cornwallis in prelude to the battle at Brandywine. Washington's order was to give the enemy "every possible annoyance."

The American force was a mixed, handpicked corps of light infantry. Shown here are two privates of Pennsylvania and Delaware regiments standing at Cooch's Bridge. A wounded private of Connecticut infantry is seated nearby. In the background the man in the hunting shirt is probably a private of a Virginia regiment.

Across the Christina River on the lower slopes the Anspach jaegers in green announce the approach of the scarlet van of British infantry-of-foot along the road from Glasgow.

CREDITS

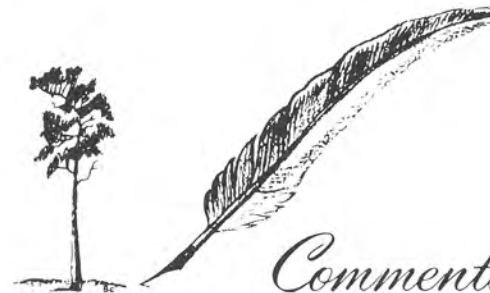
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STAFF

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Comments

Over the past 25 years the preceeding governors and legislatures of the State of Delaware have become increasingly aware of the rapidly dwindling lands available for public use within its bounds. Beginning with the acquisition of 927 acres at Trap Pond near Laurel, the Department has been able to acquire over 8,000 acres of open space for its park system. Today, Delaware has ten state parks with such outstanding natural resources as rolling meadows, coastal plains, salt and fresh water ponds and miles of ocean beaches.

With the acquisition of new lands, visitor attendance increased within a ten-year period from less than one-half million to nearly three and one-half million.

The Department, throughout the years, has utilized various means to acquire lands for state parks—direct purchase at fair market value through negotiations with private landowners, special legislation in the Congress of the United States for lands at Cape Henlopen and gifts from private organizations.

Through their support, organizations such as the Fort Delaware Society, Delaware Nature Education Society, Delaware Wildlands, Woodlawn Trustees, du Pont Company, Advisory Council on Parks and former members of the Park Commission and many camping groups have been instrumental in the acquisition and development of the state's park system.

The system began with 20 campsites in 1952. During the 1977 season visitors had the use of 658 improved campsites at Delaware Seashore, Cape Henlopen, Trap Pond and Lums Pond State Parks. In addition, they enjoyed such recreational activities as indoor tennis courts, marinas, nature centers and trails, picnicking and swimming at the inland ponds and ocean beaches.

Substantial impetus was added to our program in 1965 when the U.S. Congress passed the Land & Water Conservation Aid Act which provides federal funds on a matching basis to the states for the acquisition and/or development of outdoor recreation facilities. Since 1965, Delaware has matched \$12,613,328 of these funds primarily to acquire the majority of our present parks.

The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which administers the Land & Water Conservation Fund, cannot provide matching funds for the perpetual operation and maintenance of facilities. The burden on the individual taxpayers of the state has been increasing as have the operation and maintenance costs of the park areas. Revenues derived from park user fees and existing concession contracts supply approximately 65 percent of the funds necessary to meet these costs. It is becoming increasingly evident that revenue funds will be needed to provide additional capital to further develop the parks and construct new facilities such as game courts, swimming pools, campgrounds, bathhouses and their support systems to meet the recreational needs of a growing population in Delaware and the surrounding area.

A current trend in park development presently is directed toward a partnership between private enterprise and state government. This procedure has been illustrated in West Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona and North Carolina. Here, the revenues created by lodges, hotels, restaurants and sport concessions are funneled back into the park system to provide additional recreational services, rangers, trails, etc. The private concessionaires, as a fee for operating on public parks, pay an annual percentage of their gross receipts to the governmental unit over the period of the contract. This revenue is dedicated to the operations and maintenance of the park areas, which enables the visitor to receive additional recreational services such as public safety and nature interpretation. Also, at the end of the contract period, the concessionaire transfers ownership of the facility and/or improvements to the park system for self-operation or other management plans.

Delaware has reached this stage in her park development. In the next few years private enterprise, both large and small, will be invited to participate in the development of services within the park system. This will be directed to public service areas which include marinas, hotels and golf courses. We have already initiated this concept on a small scale. Private concessionaires have been contracted to improve, renovate and operate two existing facilities: a Tennis Center at Bellevue State Park and an Equestrian Center at Walter S. Carpenter, Jr. State Park.

The overall results of this direction of park development should provide additional recreational facilities to the general public, and equally important, a slowly reducing demand on the general funds of the state.


John E. Wilson, III,
Director
Division of Parks and Recreation

public access facilities. These include boat ramps with adequate parking, fishing piers and shore access points. Since 1971, the man-days spent fishing in Delaware Bay by way of public and private access facilities increased from 226,000 to 767,000 in 1976. A man-day is figured as a day during which one person spent some time fishing. The actual number of different people fishing in Delaware Bay from private boats, charter boats, headboats, piers and the shoreline in 1976 exceeded 330,000.



Congestion at Cedar Creek boat launching ramp.

Most of these fishermen enjoy fishing in Delaware Bay but others become irritated when they have to wait in long lines to launch or retrieve their boat from overcrowded access facilities. The Lewes public access area is continuously overcrowded with anxious fishermen waiting to launch their boats. Parking is at a premium and many times no space is available. Cedar Creek and Bowers Beach access areas have to have parking lot attendants and Marine Police direct boat traffic in and out of the water. Our newest facilities at Port Mahon are continuously overflowing with parked vehicles and trailers and the ramps at Woodland Beach and Augustine Beach need replacement.

Many private and public agencies have instituted the user fee concept to help support the construction and maintenance of recreational facilities. They do so by charging a daily or seasonal fee for a vehicle or person to gain entrance into a park, a campground, or fishing pier. In return, the user is able to utilize the facilities which his fee helps develop and maintain.

Freshwater fishermen have been supporting the development and maintenance of freshwater access facilities, stocking programs, and habitat

restoration for years. In fact, some of these license funds have been used to match federal funds to develop and maintain marine access facilities. The question arises, should saltwater recreational fishermen in Delaware be required to purchase a license to help pay for the public facilities provided to them?

Many have a fear that fishermen will go elsewhere to avoid paying for a license. I believe the people will continue to fish where the fish are most plentiful. There is apprehension that a license to fish in tidal waters will not be enforceable. Spot checks and routine patrols by our present Marine Police force would provide adequate enforcement just as the State Police patrol and spot check our highways for motor vehicle violations. The most popular concern is that the license revenues would not be available to benefit the fishermen. This would not be the case unless the existing law is changed which states, "All funds derived by the state from the issuances of yearly licenses issued by the Department for fishing shall be deposited by the Department with the State Treasurer and shall be specifically set aside and earmarked for the purpose of matching and receiving money allotted to Delaware under the Dingell-Johnson Act (16 U.S.C.A. §777 et seq.) and any balance remaining in such earmarked funds after full provision is effected to issue coverage for Dingell-Johnson grants shall be expended at the discretion of the Department to coordinate fish management projects." The Dingell-Johnson Act is the federal act which provides states with matching money for fishery restoration and management programs through an 11 percent excise tax on fishing rods, reels, creels and artificial lures, baits and flies. Of course, marine recreational fishermen purchase large quantities of these items but their purchases are not reflected in the monies made available to Delaware because Delaware does not have a marine recreational license. If Delaware licenses marine anglers, more federal aid would be available to support recreational fisheries programs in Delaware.

The marine recreational fishing license was recognized at the National Conference for the Eastland Fisheries Survey which made a study of fishery needs supported by Congress and conducted by the Marine Fisheries Commission on the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts. In the final draft report to Congress, there was included this recommendation for increased funding for marine recreational fisheries:

"Federal funding for marine recreational fishery programs is inadequate, and state funds are actually shrinking. In the fact of increased needs of the fishing public and other resource users and demands on the resource, current programs are inadequate. Not only are additional federal funds essential for national and regional programs, but additionally supplemental funding of state programs through increases in Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act appropriations should be

(Contd. on page 19)

The Battle Of Cooch's Bridge



By John A. Munroe
Professor of History
University of Delaware



On September 3, 1777, the biggest battle ever fought in Delaware took place in and around Cooch's Bridge on the road from Glasgow to Newark. It was not the most crucial battle, for its result was never in doubt; the capture of Dutch New Castle by the English in 1664 or the seizure of Swedish Fort Christina by the Dutch in 1655 were more important in their consequences. But these affairs involved very little fighting; the Swedes surrendered peacefully in 1655, and the Dutch had only a handful of men defending New Castle in 1664.

In 1777, on the other hand, about 13,000 British and German troops marched up the old road from Aiken's Tavern (at what is now Glasgow) to Cooch's Bridge and beyond. Only a small portion of these men (perhaps a thousand) got into the fight against approximately 750 Americans who were stationed along the road, but the engagement was a hot one, leaving several dozen soldiers killed or wounded.

The Americans who fought at Cooch's Bridge were picked men, chosen from each brigade of an American army of about 10,000 that was near at hand. Their mission was not to defeat the enemy (they were too few for this purpose), but to harass the advance of the British, to make General Howe's invasion of America difficult, just as other bands of Americans at this very moment were harassing the advance of British General John Burgoyne from Montreal toward Albany.

General Sir William Howe, the British commander, was on his way to Philadelphia. He wanted to capture this city for the sake of

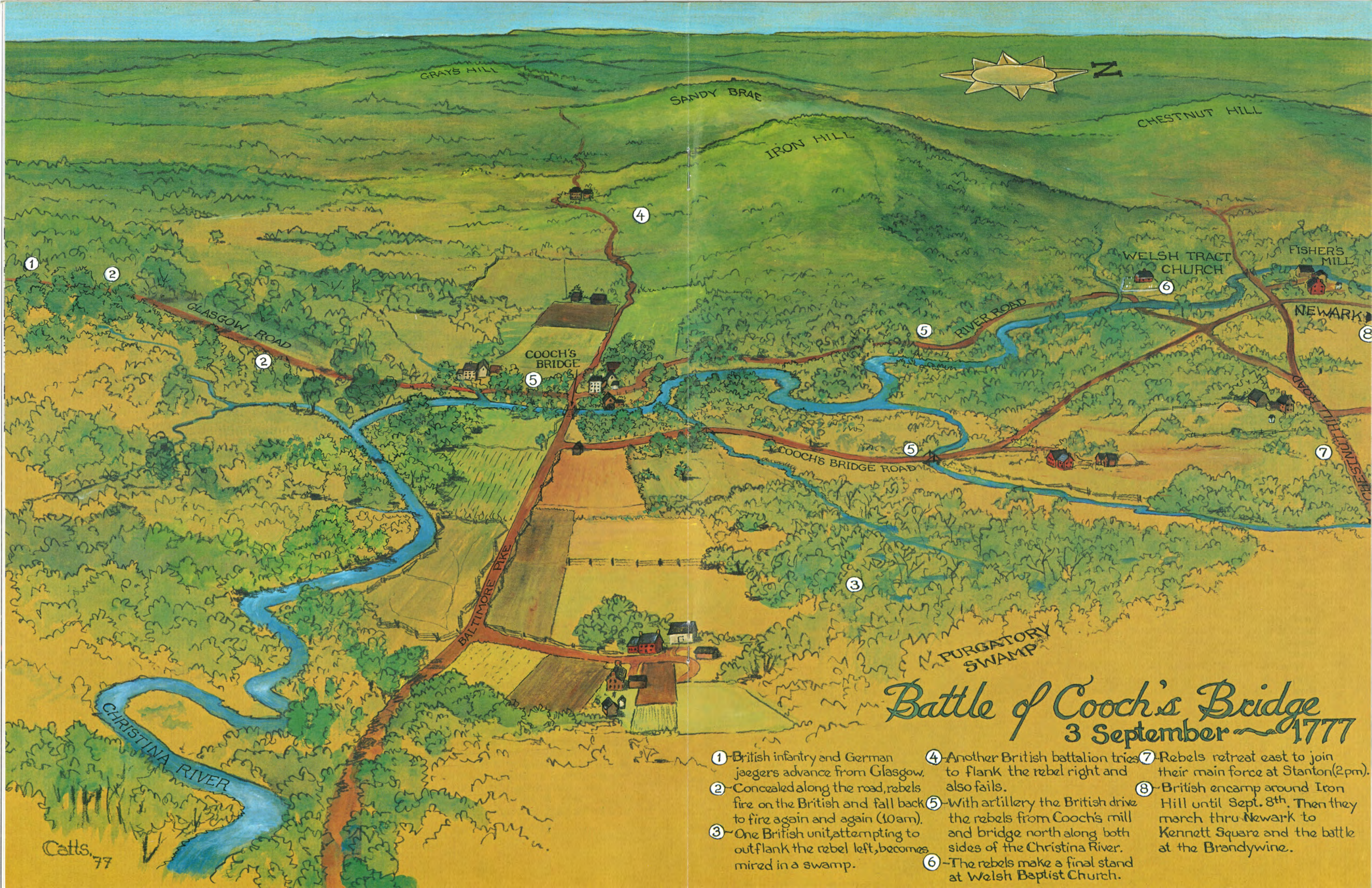
prestige; it was the colonial capital, where Congress met and executive departments like the treasury and foreign offices were located. In July 1776 the British had taken New York and crossed New Jersey in an effort to take Philadelphia, but they turned back after being defeated by Washington at Trenton on the morning after Christmas, 1776.

Now in 1777 the British were again advancing on Philadelphia, this time across northern Delaware. They had transported an army by sea from New York to the Elk River, at the head of Chesapeake Bay, landing on the peninsula called Elk Neck on August 25.

The trip by sea had been far longer than expected. A storm on the ocean that separated the fleet of over two hundred vessels, a calm on the Chesapeake, and the necessity of delaying the entire fleet to wait for the slowest vessels had caused the British to spend almost five weeks on a voyage that normally would have taken only one.

Had General Howe chosen to come up the Delaware, he would have cut his time by more than half. But he feared the lower Delaware offered few good landing places, while higher on the river were strong defenses and any landing he attempted might have been met by force. By using the Chesapeake, on the other hand, Howe assured his army of an uncontested landing. If an American army advanced to any one of the peninsulas, or necks, extending into the Chesapeake, Howe could sail on past it to another peninsula.

George Washington, as American commander,



Battle of Cooch's Bridge 3 September ~ 1777

- ① British infantry and German jaegers advance from Glasgow.
- ② Concealed along the road, rebels fire on the British and fall back to fire again and again (10am).
- ③ One British unit, attempting to outflank the rebel left, becomes mired in a swamp.
- ④ Another British battalion tries to flank the rebel right and also fails.
- ⑤ With artillery the British drive the rebels from Cooch's mill and bridge north along both sides of the Christina River.
- ⑥ The rebels make a final stand at Welsh Baptist Church.
- ⑦ Rebels retreat east to join their main force at Stanton (2pm).
- ⑧ British encamp around Iron Hill until Sept. 8th. Then they march thru Newark to Kennett Square and the battle at the Brandywine.



could hardly believe the stories his scouts, like Henry Fisher, at Lewes, told him of the movements of the British. It seemed unbelievable that Howe was taking his army so far from New York at a time when Burgoyne was cutting his way with difficulty through the wilderness east of Lake George and might need the help of a relief force sent up the Hudson to meet him.

Once Howe's purpose became clear, Washington set his army (then outside New York City) into motion across New Jersey and through Philadelphia to Delaware. Washington, himself, reached Wilmington on Monday, August 25, a day ahead of the bulk of his troops. On the next day, along with the young (20-year-old) Marquis de Lafayette and General Nathanael Greene, he was at Iron Hill and at Elkton, examining the lay of the land and trying to see what the British were up to.

A rainstorm forced Washington to take refuge for the night in a farmhouse, but when he returned to his army, he ordered it to take a defensive position beside Red Clay Creek from the Marshallton area to near Newport. Lacking the advance force, Daniel Morgan's riflemen (who had been sent to fight Burgoyne), that he would otherwise have stationed ahead of the army, Washington formed a corps of light infantry (that is, men lightly equipped so they could move fast) under the command of an experienced soldier, William Maxwell, called "Scotch Willie," a New Jerseyman born in Ulster, who had served under Braddock and other commanders in the French and Indian War.

Maxwell's men were placed near Cooch's Bridge in the woods along the road from Glasgow and took their position at the end of August. Meanwhile the British army was split in two for a short time. One part of the troops under Charles, the second Earl Cornwallis, accompanied by General Howe, marched through Elkton into Delaware. Another part, commanded by the German veteran, the 61-year-old Baron Wilhelm von Knyphausen, who had once fought under Frederick the Great, crossed the Elk from the original landing place and marched into Delaware just north of Middletown, sweeping the country as they came and gathering over 500 sheep, over 200 cattle, and about 100 horses. After spending the night of September 2 at Lum's Pond, these troops started north toward Aiken's, where they were to rejoin Howe and Cornwallis.

When the first British army reached Glasgow at nine in the morning of Wednesday, September 3, they turned north on the road where Maxwell's men were posted. Woods bordered the road then as now (though not necessarily the same woods or the same road) at various points, and the invaders had moved only one-half mile from Aiken's when the first shot rang out.

In the van of the British army was a very fine corps of men, the Hessian and Anspach jaegers, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig Johann Adolph von Wurmb. Jaeger means huntsman and that is just the sort of man

recruited into this corps; they were expert riflemen (like Morgan's missing American riflemen) accustomed to scouting and patrolling. When the Americans began shooting, the jaegers also took to the woods. Soon they were supported by British light infantry and a small cannon or two.

The Americans began giving ground, as they were supposed to do; after all, Maxwell's force could not take on the whole of Howe's army. On one side, the west, rugged Iron Hill, afforded the Americans' protection. The east was the critical flank for the Americans, and the British sent troops to this side in an attempt to surround Maxwell's men. Not knowing the ground, however, the British blundered into a morass called Purgatory Swamp that stopped their flanking threat long enough to allow Maxwell's men to escape. Gradually the Americans were forced back for over two miles, past Cooch's Bridge and Cooch's mill, where the firing was heavy, and to the neighborhood of the Welsh Tract Baptist Church, which still survives in its quiet churchyard off Route 896.

Confronted by overwhelming numbers and threatened by a bayonet charge in their front and a flanking movement on their side, the Americans finally broke off contact with the enemy and retreated toward Christiana. The British followed for a short distance and then returned to the scene of the battle where they encamped for the next five days. Lord Cornwallis took the Cooch house for his headquarters, General Howe established himself at Aiken's Tavern, and Knyphausen, whose troops had arrived while the battle was in progress, also made his headquarters in the vicinity.

The Americans had carried their wounded off as they retreated. The British sent their wounded to the Elk River, where the fleet was about to sail away, out of the Chesapeake and into the Delaware, hoping eventually to meet the army there. When all his supplies were at hand, Howe left the Iron Hill area on September 8, marching north through Newark to Kennett Square, so as to avoid the defensive position Washington had prepared on Red Clay Creek. The two armies finally clashed on September 11 on the Brandywine, where a British victory opened the way for the capture of Philadelphia—and, for a month, the occupation of Wilmington.

Despite the fact that it was the American troops who retreated from Cooch's Bridge, the battle there should not be viewed as an American defeat. Maxwell's men had no intention of challenging the entire British army; their mission was only to harass the British, to delay the invasion, to sting the enemy and then run away.

This is what they did. The American tactics at Cooch's Bridge resemble those used in upstate New York at the same time. The object was to impede the enemy's advance, to make invasion difficult. Unfortunately for the American defenders, the country, itself, was not difficult to cross, and the British succeeded in winning the great

battle of this campaign (the Battle of the Brandywine on September 11) and taking Philadelphia.

But every moment of delay was of value to the Americans. The British encamped five days on the Glasgow-Newark road were in no position to be of service to General John Burgoyne, whose army had struggled through the mountains of upstate New York at a rate of only 24 miles in 23 days, to reach the upper Hudson River valley in a state so exhausted and forlorn that their onetime threat to American independence was turned into a major British catastrophe. They surrendered at Saratoga on October 17.

So however successful the British seemed on the day they crossed Cooch's Bridge, their campaign was itself an error, and their army was far from where it might have been most useful. For the

Americans the important task was to keep up their opposition, to maintain an army in the field, to render British successes difficult. By such tactics the Americans, even though losing a battle or a campaign, would win the war.

Did the American flag fly at Cooch's Bridge? It is possible that here in Delaware the newly-adopted Stars and Stripes may have flown in battle for the first time. It is entirely possible, but, alas, we do not know. No contemporary report survives to authenticate a supposition about what may have been. But with or without flying Old Glory, Scotch Willie Maxwell's men gave a good account of themselves on September 3, 1777. Their persistence in opposing the British and German invaders was the quality needed to wear down the enemy and win the war.



AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

September 3, [1777]. We marched off at five o'clock in the morning on the main road to Philadelphia. Our advance was without enemy contact until we arrived in the hilly region that they call Iron Hill. Here skirmishing began with the jaegers, who were our vanguard, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel von Wurmb. The fire was weak at first, but it steadily increased.

General Howe concluded from this increased fire that the rebels were strong at this position, and he ordered that a battalion of English light infantry support our jaegers on each flank. They were to attack simultaneously the flanks of the enemy who were hidden in the woods.

At the same time my General sent me to the jaegers to see how they were doing, and to learn where the enemy was stationed and how strong they were. I was to tell Colonel Wurmb not to advance too fast so as to give the light infantry time to support him. A handsome 18-year-old English engineer officer, Haldane by name, who was normally in our suite of aides and who was a good friend of mine, rode with me. We saw several rebels behind trees, firing at our advancing jaegers, then retreating about 20 yards behind the next tree, then firing again.

It would be unfair not to mention that Colonel von Wurmb was continuously in front of the jaegers, encouraging them in every way, both by actions and by words. I talked to him for a moment; then rode back. The fire was very strong at this time, and to my great sorrow, my accompanying engineer officer received a shot that splintered his right arm, which was amputated in the evening.

While I was returning to the rear, I met my General, who in the meantime, because he had heard nothing of the light infantry that he had sent out and because the fire was increasing, had formed two English grenadier battalions, and advanced with them. He had also sent ahead two 2-pounders to support our jaegers.

About this time we heard firing from somewhere on our left, but directed forward. This was from one of the dispatched light infantry battalions, which had gone too far to the left and encountered a small party of rebels instead of coming to the aid of our Hessian jaegers. The other dispatched light infantry battalion also was prevented from supporting the jaegers because they ran into a deep morass, which forced them to retrace their steps.

Before General Howe arrived at the front with the two grenadier battalions, the jaegers had already finished the whole affair themselves, chasing the rebels through the thick woods, then across the barren hill and the Christiana Creek bridge, which led them across a second creek and a deep ravine. The rebels stopped at this second creek and made music with half-moons and other (wind) instruments.

My General had, in the meantime, sent me back to the front to tell Lieutenant Colonel von Wurmb the reason why he was not supported in the action, and to extend to him his compliments and thanks on the excellent behavior of his men. A short time later, my General followed me to the front, and when he arrived, he dismounted and thanked and praised Lieutenant Colonel von Wurmb and all the other jaeger officers.

From *At General Howe's Side: The diary of General William Howe's aide de camp, Captain Frederick von Muenchhausen*. Translated by Ernst Kipping and annotated by Samuel Smith. Monmouth Beach, N.J., Philip Freneau Press, 1974.

