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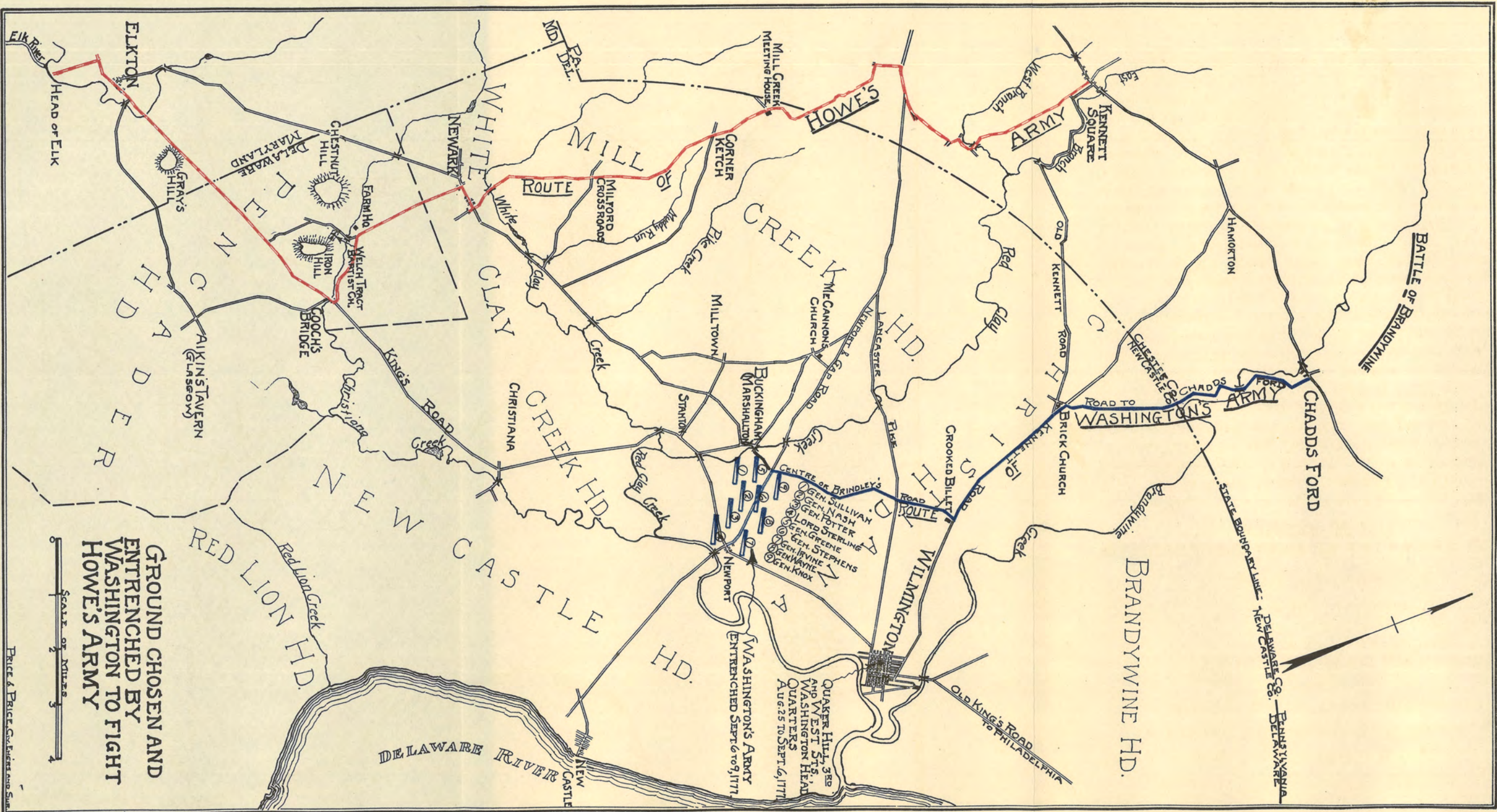
WASHINGTON'S ARMY IN DELAWARE
IN THE SUMMER OF 1777

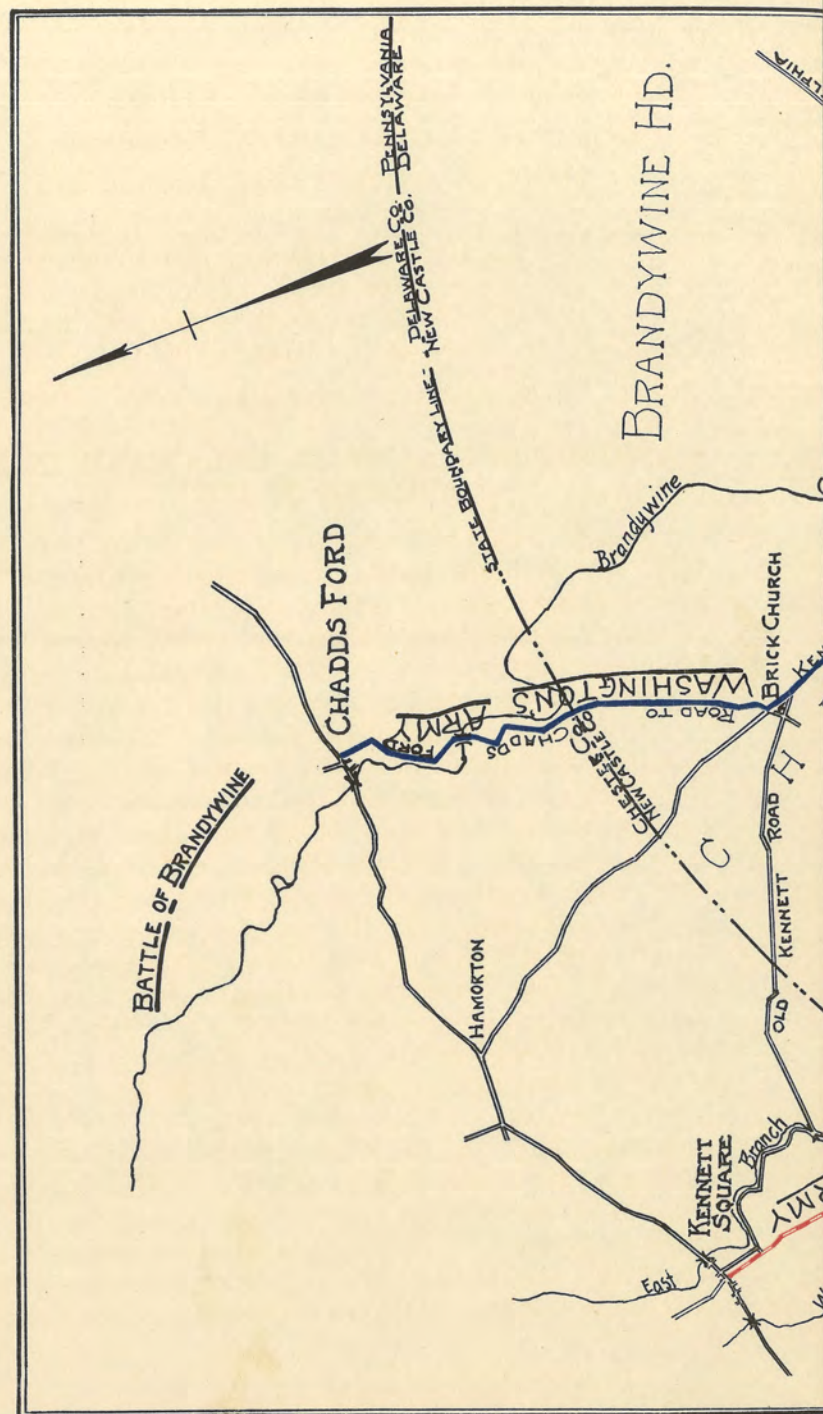
ADDRESS

by

JOHN P. NIELDS

At Cooch's Bridge, New Castle County, Delaware on
September 9, 1927, incident to the Celebration of the
150th Anniversary of the Battle of the Brandywine.





Your Excellency, GOVERNOR ROBERT P. ROBINSON,
 Your Honor, MAYOR GEORGE W. K. FORREST,
 MRS. EDWARD W. COOCH, Hostess at Cooch's
 Bridge,
 MR. GERRISH GASSOWAY and Members of the
 Committee having charge of the
 150th Anniversary of the Battle
 of the Brandywine,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

WASHINGTON'S ARMY IN DELAWARE IN THE SUMMER OF 1777

One Hundred and fifty years ago, in the summer of 1777, Sir William Howe, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, planned a third expedition against Philadelphia, called by the Tories the "rebel capital." By capturing the city, routing the Congress and defeating Washington, he hoped to suppress the Revolution.

July 23rd, a magnificent fleet of "266 sail" under Admiral, Sir Richard Howe, brother of Sir William, passed Sandy Hook with 17,000 of the best soldiers of Europe aboard—an army of 36 battalions of light infantry, grenadiers, Queen's Rangers, dragoons and artillery. Generals Howe, Cornwallis, Grey and Grant were English noblemen, and with Knyphausen were seasoned veterans of the Seven Years War, having learned the art of war from Frederick the Great. July 31st, Caesar Rodney, Brigadier-General of Delaware Militia, sent a dispatch to Congress that the enemy's fleet had appeared at the Delaware Capes about four miles from the lighthouse. Because of the report of the defenses on the Delaware above the Christiana, the fleet put to sea and on August 22d Hancock informed Washington that "near 200 sail of General Howe's fleet were anchored in the Chesapeake Bay." This month, with the enemy at sea, was a time of tense anxiety to the Congress and of mild interest to London. "Where the scourge of God and the

plague of mankind has gone," wrote Adams to his wife, "no one can guess." Horace Walpole wrote to the Countess of Ossary: "The Howes are gone the Lord knows whither, and have carried the American war with them, so there is nothing to say on that head; which is a great drawback on correspondence in the shooting season." August 25th the Royal army was put ashore at Elks ferry. Within two days, Sir William Howe advanced with one division to the Head of Elk, four days' march from Philadelphia, and issued a "Declaration" to the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, the lower counties on the Delaware and the counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, promising "a free and general pardon to all such officers and private men as shall voluntarily surrender themselves to any detachment of his majesty's forces."

March of Continental Army to Delaware

The day Washington learned the British fleet was in the Chesapeake, he set his troops in motion and encamped five miles north of Philadelphia. There he issued an order for a dress parade the following day:

"Head Quarters; at Stenton, near German Town August 23d, 1777

" . . . The army is to move precisely at four in the morning. . . . The army is to march in one column thro' the City of Philadelphia, going in at and marching down Front street to Chesnut street, and up Chesnut street to the Commons. The divisions march as follows—Greene's, Stephen's, Lincoln's (Wayne's), Lord Sterling's. . . . if any soldier shall dare to quit his ranks, he shall receive Thirty-nine lashes at the first halting place afterwards. . . .

"The drums and fifes of each brigade are to be collected in the center of it; and a tune for the quick step played, but with such moderation, that the men may step to it with ease; and without dancing along, or totally disregarding the music, as too often has been the case."

Lafayette, recently nominated a major-general by Congress, at the age of 19, describes in his memoirs the

Continental Army on this Sunday parade. The men, he wrote, had long ago walked through their boot-soles. Their clothes were in rags and tatters, the least badly dressed among them wearing the hunting shirt of brown linen; the shorter men of each company in the front rank, the taller behind them—some with their hats cocked, some without, but each man with a sprig of green in his hat. "The drums and fifes did their utmost; and the Stars and Stripes in the regimental flags," says Trevelyan, "were, to many of the spectators, a new and deeply interesting sight. The crowd cheered lustily as the long column passed down Front Street and up Chestnut Street . . . nobly headed by George Washington on his most stately charger."

This army of 11,000 men, at least, shouldered their fire-arms with confidence born of ample experience and training. It was divided into five divisions commanded by Major-Generals Greene, Sullivan, Stephen, Lord Stirling and Brigadier-General Wayne. Second only to Washington was Nathaniel Greene, the Rhode Island Quaker anchor-smith, yet born soldier, equal to every responsibility imposed upon him; John Sullivan the brave soldier from Maine with the impetuous Irish nature; William Alexander, the thrifty New York storekeeper whose claim to be the Sixth Earl of Stirling was sustained by an Edinburgh jury and upset by the House of Lords, and yet always known as Lord Stirling—a good field officer and burly figure in the front of battle; Adam Stephen of Virginia, who had served under Braddock in the French and Indian Wars; and Anthony Wayne, the fiery warrior from Pennsylvania, who in one battle was bruised by a cannon ball, grazed by a bullet and rolled on the ground under a dying horse, yet assured his wife he had had a glorious day. These were some of the loyal officers under General Washington who rode with their divisions to Darby for the night.

On Monday the army marched down the Kings Highway to Naaman's and on Tuesday, August 26, 1777, encamped at Wilmington.

Headquarters and Camp of Continental Army at Wilmington, August 26 to September 6, 1777

For the next ten days the Continental Army was encamped outside of the Borough of Wilmington, on ground now the center and northern part of the City, and on both sides of the Brandywine. Timothy Pickering, Adjutant-General of the army, entered in his journal: "August 25th—The army marched through Chester to Naaman's Creek, the General and family advancing to Wilmington (a pretty town and pleasantly situated)." Lieutenant James McMichael of the Pennsylvania Line wrote in his diary: "At 4 A. M. we marched from our encampment (Naaman's) to Brandywine Bridge, near Wilmington, then turning N.N.W. we proceeded a few miles and encamped near the east bank of the Creek." Sullivan's division with Smallwood's brigade and the Delaware regiment joined the army at Wilmington. Captain Robert Kirkwood wrote in his order book: "Tuesday, September 2nd. Struck tents and marched to Wilmington in the Delaware State & encamped about one mile west of the town." General Washington and his family, or staff, took headquarters on the top of Quaker Hill, now Third and West Streets, affording an open view of Iron Hill fifteen miles to the south. It was here the councils of war were held, general orders issued and many letters of importance written by Washington. An order of local color was:

"Head Quarters, Wilmington (Sunday) August 31st, 1777.

"A General Court Martial is to sit to morrow at 9 o'clock in the morning at Mr. Lawson's at the Cross Keys near the Academy"—the Cross Keys being on the east side of Market Street between Ninth and Tenth Streets.

Washington reconnoitering in Delaware

"A true Virginian, whether in war or in the chase," says Trevelyan, "Washington went fearlessly wherever a good horse could carry him, and on more than one

occasion Howe's skirmishers had a very near view indeed of a soberly dressed officer mounted on a powerful bay charger, who did not shirk his fences, and was closely attended everywhere by an aide-de-camp in a rich foreign uniform." On Tuesday, August 26th, the day after reaching Wilmington, General Washington had Jacob Broom, the town burgess and surveyor, draft him a road map of New Castle County, and with Greene and Lafayette rode through Christiana, White Clay Creek and Pencader Hundreds to reconnoiter the country between his own headquarters and Howe's outposts—at great risk to himself and his companions. They rode forward to two hills—Iron Hill and Gray's Hill—about fifteen miles south of Wilmington and six miles from Howe's camp. Night fell upon the little party as they turned their horses' heads homeward, together with a great tempest of wind and rain. Washington sought the shelter of a neighboring farmhouse at the foot of Chestnut Hill near the Welsh Tract Baptist Church in Pencader Hundred. The party with drenched clothes crowded the little rooms and feared that the enemy might capture Washington as they had General Charles Lee not twelve months before. There was in fact great peril, but the Delaware farmer was a patriot. Washington returned the next morning and wrote to the President of Congress:

"Wilmington, August 27th.

"I this morning returned from head of Elk which I left last night. The enemy remain where they debarked first; I cannot find out from inquiry what number is landed or form an estimate from the distant view I had of their encampment. But few tents were to be seen from Iron Hill and Gray's Hill, the only eminences about Elkton."

Having escaped capture, General Washington, a week later, suggested to General Maxwell the exploit of capturing a Hessian General, who may have been Knyphausen. In a letter from Wilmington he writes: "Several persons have mentioned that there is a Hessian General quartered at one Fishers, covered only by a small guard. This is well worth your attention and may

afford a glorious opportunity for a partisan exploit. Any of the country people can direct you, I suppose, where Fisher's is." And later on the same day General Washington writes: "Let me know by the bearer whether you have received such information, as to enable you to make the attempt to night (or rather in the morning)—if you have the parson will be an excellent hand to accompany you." The "parson" may refer to the Rev. Thomas Read, minister at Old Drawyers, who is known to have served at this time as a guide for Washington.

General Greene's Choice of Post for Washington's Army

General Washington ordered General Greene to examine the ground further and select a position upon which the army could be advantageously posted. Two days later, on August 28th, General Greene accompanied by Brigadier-General Weedon, after careful examination, selected the "cross roads near six miles distance from the Royal army" and close to Iron Hill. From an examination of old road maps, it is apparent that the only "cross roads near six miles distance from the Royal army" is the cross roads at Cooch's Bridge, and that the ground on which we are now standing is the post selected by a very great American general from which to battle with Howe. Greene's idea was to fight as close as possible to the landing place; so as to give Howe no room for developing his army. He thought the cross roads furnished an open country behind from which to draw assistance and good skirmishing ground in front to harass and annoy the enemy before they were organized and provided with horses, provisions, &c. General Greene wrote to the Commander-in-Chief acquainting him with the spot he had chosen, but the information was received too late. The same day, probably Thursday, August 28th, a Council of War held at Wilmington determined to take a position upon Red Clay Creek near Stanton, upon the Kings Highway, about half way between Wilmington and Christiana. Had Greene's report been accepted, one of the great battles of liberty would have been fought on Delaware soil.

Skirmish at Cooch's Bridge, September 3, 1777

Washington lacked scouts and a body of expert riflemen to harass the enemy. He regretted detaching Morgan's regiment to the northern army. Accordingly, he organized a corps of light infantry.

Orders

"Head Quarters, Wilmington, August 28th, 1777.

"A corps of Light Infantry is to be formed; to consist of one Field Officer, two Captains, six Subalterns, eight Serjeants and 100 Rank & File from each brigade" (there being eleven brigades).

"Head Quarters, Wilmington, August 30th, 1777.

"Brigadier Genl. Maxwell will take Command of the corps of light Infantry."

It is quite possible General Maxwell marched his corps to this spot where we stand, which had been selected by General Greene for the army. In a letter to General Maxwell, dated "Head Quarters, Wilmington, 2d Sept. 1777," 8.30 p. m., Washington wrote: "I do not know where the Sign of the Buck is, I therefore cannot say whether it will be proper for you to leave your present post to go and attack the party that is said to be thereabouts. If it is upon your left as I suppose it is, it will be by no means proper, because while you were gone down, the Enemy might advance from Grey's Hill to Christeen and cut you off from us."

Chief Justice John Marshall, then serving as a captain in the Eleventh Virginia Regiment of Woodford's brigade, describes the skirmish at Cooch's Bridge in his "Life of Washington" in these words: "On the morning of the 3d . . . two divisions under Lord Cornwallis and General Knyphausen moved forward, forming a junction about Pencader (Glasgow), their left extending across the Christiana towards Newark. On their way the column under Lord Cornwallis fell in with and attacked Maxwell, who made a short resistance and then

retreated over White Clay Creek with a loss of about forty killed and wounded."

Washington reported the skirmish to Congress as follows:

"Wilmington, 8 p. m. September 3.

"This morning the enemy came out with considerable force and three pieces of artillery against our light advanced corps; and after some pretty smart skirmishing, being far superior in numbers, obliged them to retreat. The loss on either side not yet ascertained; ours though not exactly known, is not very considerable. Theirs, we have reason to believe, was much greater, as some of our parties, composed of expert marksmen, had opportunity of giving them several close, well-directed fires, more particularly in one instance when a body of riflemen formed a kind of ambuscade.

"They advanced about two miles this side of Iron Hill, and then withdrew to that place, leaving a picket at Cooch's Mill about a mile in front."

Sir William Howe reported the skirmish to his government: "On the third the Hessian and Anspach chas-seurs and the Second battalion of light infantry who were at the head of Lord Cornwallis' column, fell in with a chosen corps of one thousand men (Maxwell's) advantageously posted, which they defeated with the loss of only two officers wounded, three men killed and nineteen men wounded."

Thus the respective commanders described the only "battle" ever fought on Delaware soil. We learn that in the skirmish Lord Harris, a British officer, was shot through the leg and was reduced to follow the Royal army in a chaise.

The Stars and Stripes at Cooch's Bridge

On yonder stone are inscribed the words, "The Stars and Stripes were first unfurled in battle at Cooch's Bridge, September 3, 1777." We are reasonably certain that the Stars and Stripes were carried by Maxwell's corps in the engagement here on September 3d. Certain facts are definitely known: (1) On June 14, 1777 the Con-

gress resolved, "that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars white in a blue field representing a new constellation." (2) On July 24th the Stars and Stripes were carried by Washington's army when it paraded through Philadelphia. (3) That Maxwell's corps was formed by Washington to replace Morgan's regiment of 500 riflemen. It consisted of 1100 men drawn from each brigade, equal in number to one-tenth of the entire army or to any one of its brigades, and was commanded by a brigadier-general. (4) That Maxwell's brigade was ordered to engage the enemy fifteen miles below the camp of the army. (5) That on September 3d Maxwell's corps had taken a definite post at this place. (6) That in such an engagement it was appropriate that a standard with colors be carried.

Montresor, Chief Engineer of Howe's army, notes in his journal that at daybreak on September 3d the whole British army was under march to Christiana by way of Aikin's Tavern (Glasgow). About nine o'clock the skirmish at Cooch's Bridge began.

Thereafter for five days, from September 3 to September 8, the British army was encamped with its right wing near Glasgow and the left wing extending towards Newark. Washington was certain that Philadelphia was Howe's objective and assumed he would take the King's road leading from Cooch's Bridge through Christiana, Stanton, Newport and Wilmington to Philadelphia. Accordingly, he chose the heights of the east bank of the Red Clay Creek to entrench his army and "to repel the invader." With the center of his army at Stanton, he extended his left wing at Newport and his right wing towards Marshallton. Apparently Washington was right about the road that Howe originally intended to take. Howe changed his plans and pursued his accustomed strategy and flanked his opponent. On September 8th he moved certain forces to Mill Town as though to attack, but in reality to cover the movement of his main army through Newark to Kennett Square.

Washington's Army at Newport, Delaware

The position of Washington's army, near Stanton, on the east bank of the Red Clay Creek, with the left wing at Newport and the right wing at Marshallton, is best described in the orders, diaries and letters of that day.

General Order

"Head Quarters, Wilmington (Tuesday) Sepr. 2nd, 1777.

" . . . A General Court Martial is to sit tomorrow morning at nine o'clock at Newport, at Conradt Gray's tavern, for the trial of all prisoners which shall be brought before them."

General Order

"Head Quarters, Wilmington (Thursday) Septemr 4th 1777

" . . . The tents of Genl. Sullivan's, Lord Sterling's and Wayne's divisions, and Nash's brigade, are to be struck and packed by five o'clock tomorrow morning; . . . these corps, together with Genl. Potter's brigade, are to hold themselves in readiness to march at a moment's warning afterwards upon receiving orders. For which purpose, each brigade should be paraded, their arms grounded, and the men ready to take them up at the first call. The Quarter Master General will shew the ground they are to encamp upon, in the following order—Genl. Sullivan's on the right, Lord Sterling's on the left, Genl. Nash's on the left of Genl. Sullivan's; and Genl. Potter's on the right of Lord Sterling's; but as General Potter's brigade is without tents, it will be quartered in Newport. Genl. Stephen's division and Genl. Irvine's brigade, when it leaves this place, are to form a second line—Stephen's on the right. The division commanded by Genl. Wayne is to form a third line—Genl. Greene's division remains where it is.

"General Knox will fix upon a proper spot for the park of artillery, in this encampment, and direct such spare ammunition as he shall think absolutely necessary,

to attend the park & respective divisions; the residue to be left together with all the baggage that can possibly be spared, on the east side of Brandywine, under a small guard from each brigade, &c.

"General Armstrong will recall the troops posted at the different fords on Brandewine, and order them to join their respective brigades.

"General Irvine's brigade is to remain in Wilmington 'till further Orders; and to expedite the works there carrying on, as much as possible."

(General Order)

"Head Quarters, Wilmington (Friday) Septemr, 5th, 1777

" . . . From every information of the enemy's designs, and from their movements, it is manifest their aim is, if possible, to possess themselves of Philadelphia. This is their capital object. 'Tis what they last year strove to effect, but were happily disappointed. . . . But the General trusts, they will be again disappointed in their views—should they push their design against Philadelphia, on this route. Their all is at stake—they will put the contest on the event of a single battle. If they are overthrown, they are utterly undone—the war is at an end. Now then is the time for our most strenuous exertions &c. . . . Ours is the main army; to us our Country looks for protection. The eyes of all America, and of Europe are turned upon us, as on those by whom the event of the war is to be determined. And the General assures his countrymen and fellow soldiers, that he believes the critical, the important moment is at hand, which demands their most spirited exertions in the field" &c.

(General Order)

"Head Quarters, Wilmington (Saturday) Sepr. 6th, 1777

" . . . The General officers are to meet at 5 o'clock this afternoon at the brick house by White Clay Creek,

and fix upon proper picquets for the security of the camp."

(Journal of Timothy Pickering)

"September 6th, marched to Newport, three or four miles beyond Wilmington."

(Regimental Orders)

"Camp near Newport Sepr 6th 1777

"The Commanding officers of Companies are Requested to have their men Clean & hair powder'd to morrow at 2 OClock with their Arms & Accoutrements in good order, fit to bear Inspection by the Commander in Chief, any person appearing Contrairy to this order it will be looked on to be the officers Neglect for which they will have to Acct, any Soldier absent from the parade at the above mentioned time, Shall assuredly Suffer Agreeable to the Articles of War, unless a Reasonable excuse be given for the Same.

CHAS POPE

Lt. Coll. D R" (Delaware Regiment)

(Letter, General Washington to General Heath)

"Head Quarters Wilmington (endorsed Newport)
(Sunday) 7th Sept 1777

"... Since General Howes debarkation in Elk River he has moved on about seven Miles, his main Body now lays at Iron Hill and ours near a Village called Newport. In this position the Armies are from eight to ten Miles apart. It is yet very uncertain what Genl. Howe's plan of operations will be. . . . A few days past he advanced two or three Miles forward, during which there was pretty sharp skirmishing between our light Troops and his Van. We had about forty killed and wounded, and I imagine the Enemy had considerably more as ours were thinly posted behind cover and they were in Column."

According to a statement of Caleb Byrnes to his son Daniel Byrnes: "A few days previous to the Battle of Brandywine, General Washington with all his American Army were camped on the rising ground before our door, round to White Clay Creek Bridge and farther westward; the cannon were placed on this rise of ground for half a mile as thick as they could stand. General Washington's headquarters were at Wm. Marshall's about the center of his army (near the present Meeting House in Stanton)."

(Letter of General Washington to Governor Trumball of Connecticut)

"Head Quarters Newport 8th Sept 1777

"... Genl. Howe's plans are yet very mysterious, a few days ago he sent all his Tents & Baggage on Board again and his ships have fallen some distance down Chesapeak Bay. . . . A little time must unfold his true designs, which I trust we shall be able to baffle, as the Troops are in good spirits and the people of the Country shew an universal good will to oppose the common Enemy."

(Diary of Lieutenant McMichael)

(Monday) "September 8—At 3 A. M. the General was beat and all tents struck. All the regiments were paraded, the men properly formed with an officer at the head of every platoon, and after wheeling to the right, we remained under arms until 9 o'clock. Then the alarm guns were fired and the whole army drawn up in line of battle, on the east side of Red Clay Creek, with Gen. Greene's division to the right. Here we remained for some time, when Gen. Weedon's brigade (of which my regiment was a part), was detached to the front to bring on the attack. We crossed the creek and marched about a league to an eminence near Mr. McCannon's meeting house, and there awaited the approach of the enemy, who were within half a mile of us. They however, encamped, which occasioned us to remain under arms all night, the sentries keeping up a constant fire."

(Letter of General Washington to Congress)

"6 Miles from Wilmington (Tuesday) 9th Sept 1777

"The Enemy advanced yesterday with a seeming intention of attacking us at our post near Newport. We waited for 'em the whole day, but in the eveng they halted at a place called Mill Town, about Two miles from us. Upon reconnoitring their situation it appeared probable, that they only meant to amuse us in Front, while their real intent was to march by our right and by suddenly passing the Brandywine and gaining the Heights on the North side of that River get between us & Philadelphia & cut us off from it. To prevent this it was judged expedient to change our position immediately, the army accordingly marched at 2 OClock this morning and will take post this Evening on the High grounds near Chads Ford. We have heard nothing circumstantial of the Enemy today, when I do I shall immediately transmit you an Account."

(General Order)

"Head Quarters, Burmingham, Septmr 9th 1777

"Intelligence having been received that the enemy, instead of advancing towards Newport, are turned another course, and appeared to have a design of marching northward—this rendered it expedient for the army to quit Newport and march northward also; which occasioned its sudden movement this morning.

"Such of the troops as have not been served with Rum today, are as soon as possible to be served with a gill a man."

(Journal of Timothy Pickering)

"September 9th. Left Newport in the morning before daylight, and marched to Chad's Ford; crossed it and encamped on the east side of the Brandywine, having information that the enemy had marched to the north of Newport."

(Diary of Lieutenant McMichael)

"September 9—At A. M. we received marching orders and proceeded E.N.E. to the Crooked Billet, on the great road from Wilmington to Lancaster; thence thro' Kennett township, Chester country, crossed the Brandywine and turning S.E. encamped in the township of Birmingham, being extremely fatigued for want of rest and severe marching."

(Order Book of Captain Robert Kirkwood of the Delaware Regiment)

"Monday Sepr 8th 1777 (Near Newport) Struck tents & went to work in the lines, lay there till 3 OClock Tuesday morning the 9th then March'd about 10 miles to Chadds ford & forded over & there encamped."

Route of Washinton's Army from Newport to Chadd's Ford.

"The Crooked Billet" mentioned by Lt. McMichael was a tavern (now the residence of Edward G. Bradford, Jr.) at the intersection of the Brindley Road with the old bed of the Kennett Road or Pike. Probably Green's division at the extreme right wing of the army at Newport moved first and was followed by the other divisions or brigades. An examination of the Jacob Broom map and of other early county maps has led to the conclusion that Washington led his army from Newport along the Center Road to the Lancaster Pike, thence along the Brindley Road to the Crooked Billet, thence up the Kennett Road to the foot of the hill beyond the Brick Church, and thence by the road leading to Chadd's Ford up the west bank of the Brandywine to the battle ground.

In Conclusion.

The documents giving the foregoing facts in detail are in the manuscript departments of the great libraries of the country. Many of the orders and letters quoted above are not in print but are still in manuscript and are to be found in the manuscript department of the Library of Congress. They show that before the Battle of the

Brandywine, Washington's army was encamped for ten days in Wilmington preparing for the great conflict and that for three or more days his army lay entrenched near Stanton, behind the east bank of the Red Clay Creek, offering battle which Howe declined, preferring a flank movement through Newark and Kennett Square to the Brandywine.

A great battlefield is an asset to any State. If it is the fate of the race to fight on until the end, as I believe, it is well to cherish ground hallowed by heroic action. Rob Massachusetts of Lexington and Bunker Hill, or New Jersey of Princeton and Trenton, or Pennsylvania of Brandywine and Gettysburg, and the loss would be irreparable. Delaware has no battlefield. It has, however, intimate associations with the Battle of the Brandywine precious to the people of Delaware.

(This pamphlet is circulated in the hope that it may inspire some real student of history to write a fully documented story of Washington's Army in Delaware in the Summer of 1777.)