

# The Battle of Princeton

## Three letters by George Washington

### 1. Letter from George Washington to John Hancock

Trenton January the 1<sup>st</sup> 1777

Sir

(...)

On Monday morning I passed the Delaware myself; the whole of our Troops & Artillery not till yesterday owing to the ice which rendered their passage extremely difficult and fatiguing. Since their arrival we have been parading the Regiments whose time of service is now expired, in order to know what force we should have to depend on, & how to regulate our views accordingly. After much persuasion and the exertions of their Officers, half or a greater proportion of those from the Eastward, have consented to stay Six Weeks, on a bounty of Ten Dollars. I feel the inconvenience of this advance, and I know the consequences which will result from it; But what could be done? Pennsylvania had allowed the same to her Militia, The Troops felt their importance, and would have their price. (...) Genl Mifflin is at Borden Town with about Eighteen hundred Men & Genl Cadwalader at Crosix with about the same number. We are now making our Arrangements and concerting a Plan of Operations, which I shall attempt to execute as soon as possible & which I hope will be attended with some success. As to the number and situation of the Enemy, I cannot obtain certain intelligence, but from the accounts most to be relied on, they have collected the Principal part of their force from Brunswic & the neighbouring Posts at Princeton, where they are throwing up some Works. The number there, is reported to be from Five to Six Thousand, (...). It is added, that Genl Howe landed at Amboy a day or two ago with a thousand light Troops, and is on his march from thence.

(...)I have the Honor to be with sentiments of great esteem & regard Sir yr Most Obedt Servt  
Go: Washington

P.S: I have not been able to procure returns of our force owing to our situation; I suppose that about Two or three and Twenty hundred passed with me, which number is now reduced to Fifteen or Sixteen hundred. No Estimate of our force can be formed from the number of Regiments; many of 'em by reason of Sickness cannot turn out more than a hundred men.

SOURCE : "From George Washington to John Hancock, 1 January 1777", *Founders Online, National Archives*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0398>.

[Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, pp. 503–505.]

### 2. Letter from George Washington to John Hancock

Pluckamin [N.J.] January 5th 1777

Sir

I have the honor to inform you, that since the date of my last from Trenton, I have removed with the Army under my command to this place. The difficulty of crossing the Delaware on account of the ice made our passage over it tedious, and gave the Enemy an opportunity of drawing in their several cantonments and assembling their whole Force at Princeton. (...)

Our situation was most critical and our force small. (...)

On the 2d according to my expectation the Enemy began to advance upon us, and after some skirmishing the Head of their Column reached Trenton about 4 O'Clock, whilst their rear was as far back as Maidenhead. (...)

Having by this time discovered that the Enemy were greatly superior in number and that their design was to surround us, I ordered all our Baggage to be removed silently to Burlington soon after dark, and at twelve OClock after renewing our fires & leaving Guards at the Bridge in Trenton and other passes on the same stream above, marched by a roundabout Road to Princeton, where I knew they could not have much force left and might have Stores. (...) Happily, we succeeded. We found Princeton about Sunrise with only three Regiments and three Troops of light Horse in it, two of which were on their march to Trenton—These three Regiments, especially the Two first, made a gallant resistance and in killed

wounded and Prisoners must have lost 500 Men, upwards of One hundred of them were left dead in the Feild, and with what I have with me & what were taken in the pursuit & carried across the Delaware, there are near 300 prisoners 14 of which are Officers—all British.

This peice of good fortune is counterballanced by the loss of the brave and worthy Genl Mercer, Cols. Hazlet and Potter, Captn Neal of the Artillery, Captn Fleming who commanded the first Virginia Regiment and four or five other valuable Officers who with about twenty five or thirty privates were slain in the feild—Our whole loss cannot be ascertained, as many who were in pursuit of the Enemy, who were chased three or four Miles, are not yet come in.

SOURCE : "From George Washington to John Hancock, 5 January 1777," *Founders Online, National Archives*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0411>.

[Original source: The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, 21 October 1776–5 January 1777, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, pp. 519–530.]

### 3. Letter from George Washington to John Hancock

Morristown January the 7th 1777

Sir

I am happy to inform you, that the account of Genl Mercer's death, transmitted in my last, was premature, though it was mentioned as certain by many who saw him after he was wounded; By intelligence from princeton yesterday evening, he was alive, and seemed as if he would do well; Unhappily he is a prisoner. (...)

The Enemy have totally evacuated Trent & Prince towns & are now at Brunswick & the several posts on the communication between that & Hudson's river, but cheifly at Brunswick. Their numbers and movements are variously reported, but all agree, their force to be great. There have been Two or three little skirmishes between their parties & some detachments of Militia, in which the latter have been successfull and made a few prisoners. (...)

The Severity of the Season has made our Troops, especially the Militia, extremely impatient, and has reduced the number very considerably. Every day more or less leave us. Their complaints and the great fatigues they had undergone, induced me to come to this place, as the best calculated of any in this quarter, to accomodate and refresh them. The situation is by no means favourable to our views, and as soon as the purposes are answered for which we came, I think to remove, though I confess, I do not know how we shall procure covering for our Men elsewhere. I have the Honor to be with much esteem  
Sir Yr Most Obedt Servt

Go: Washington

SOURCE: "From George Washington to John Hancock, 7 January 1777", *Founders Online, National Archives*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0008>.

[Original source: The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 8, 6 January 1777–27 March 1777, ed. Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, pp. 9–10.]

**Assignment:** Carefully read the letters sent by George Washington to John Hancock (president of the second Continental Congress) and pick up the information to fill the chart below:

	Date	Weather conditions	The American troops: the Militia's characteristics	The British troops: how many soldiers?	The American troops: How many men?	The Battle: where and how?	The victory: casualties and losses.
Letter 1							
Letter 2							
Letter 3							