



The American Revolution

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Sons of the American Revolution

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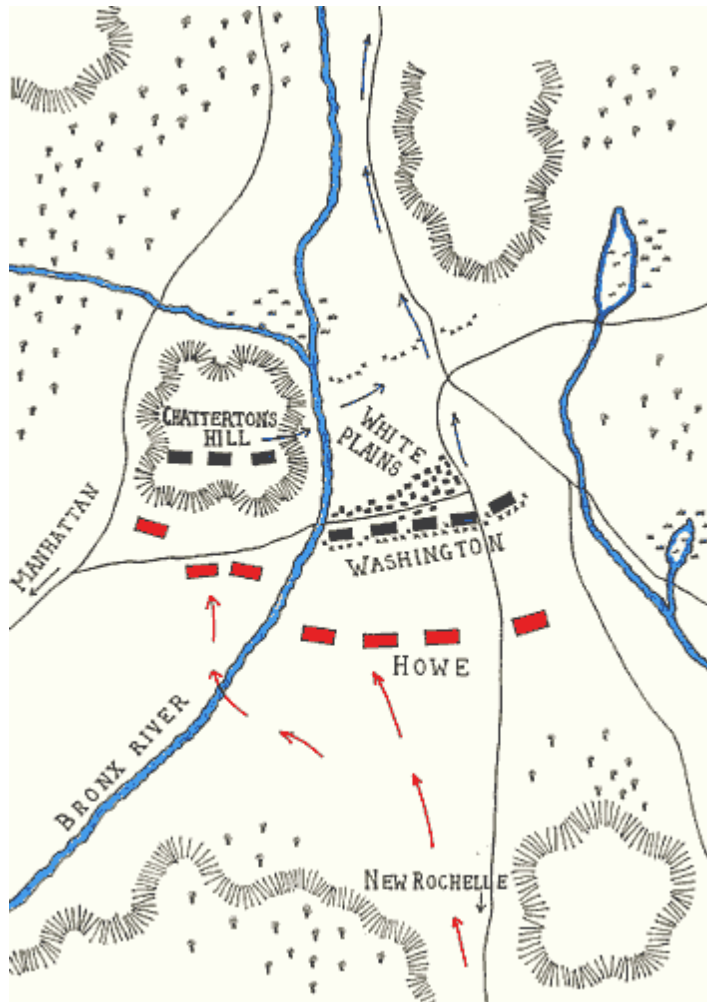
The Northern Campaign

III - Battle of White Plains :

From their redoubt at Fort Mifflin, the Colonial army observed British army movements, which threatened the Colonial army's supplies and supply lines. This prompted General Washington to move most of his army north on 21 October 1776, to the White Plains, New York area, while leaving a force of 1,200 men under command of General Nathanael Greene at Fort Mifflin on Manhattan Island.

As a consequence of these colonial movements, British General Howe moved his army south along the New Rochelle Road toward White Plains. His British regulars made up his center thrust and right flank, while a Tory Loyalist army made up his left flank. This Loyalist militia group occupied the town of Mamaroneck only to be attacked

by the Patriots and routed with loss of men and materials by the Loyalist. This prompted General Howe to move some of his right flank regulars into Mamaroneck to check the Patriot advance. On 23 October 1776, General Howe received an additional 8,000 Hessian troops under command of General Wilhelm von Knyphausen, who landed at New Rochelle.



Positions of British General Howe's Army and
General Washington's Colonial Army on
28 October 1776

The Patriot forces coming down from their bunkers on Chatterton Hill, crossed the Bronx River and took up positions behind a stone wall where they began an attack against the Hessian army now making up Howe's left flank. This exchange of fire was favored the Patriots, so much so that General Howe ordered General Clinton to move his men from the British center and attack the Patriots in support of the Hessians. This action caused the Patriots to retreat back across the Bronx River and join their countrymen on Chatterton Hill. Twice the Hessians unsuccessfully charged the hill and twice the Patriot militia held its position on the hill.

The Hessian artillery scattered the Patriot militia from the hill, but a reinforcing regiment bolstered their courage and a new line of defense was hastily erected with the Patriot militias on the Patriot extreme right and the Continental Army taking up the center and Patriot left flank on other hills. The Hessians under Colonel Rall charged the Patriot right flank and center, while British Alexander Leslie attacked the Patriot left. General Leslie's attack met stiff resistance from the Continentals and stalled, but Colonel Rall's attack on the American far right flank scored absolute success with a complete route of the militia and collapse of the American right flank. This left the American center and left flank of Colonial army completely exposed to attack by the advancing British and Hessian forces.

This British success caused the whole American line to begin an orderly retreat with a Delaware Colonial Army regiment firmly anchored on the extreme American left flank holding its ground, and providing covering fire for the retreating main American army. The American army made an orderly escape by retreating north.

The fighting had been intense and casualties mounted on both sides. General Howe's casualties numbered 214 for the British and 99 for the Hessians. More accurate assessments figure a total British loss of 267 British and Hessians killed. American losses ranged between 150 to 500 men killed, wounded or captured. The two armies remained in their positions for two days, while General Howe received reinforcement from General Percy and on 30 October 1776, Howe planned to renew his attack on Washington, but once again the weather was on the American side, and the attack was called off because of drenching rains. The next day 31 October 1776, General Howe awoke to find that during the night General Washington had withdrawn his army and established a new camp near New Castle. On 5 November 1776, General Howe turned his army south to finish evicting the Continental Army from Manhattan, and to take Fort Washington.

Between 5 November 1776 and 16 November 1776, Lieutenant General William Howe positioned his British and Hessian army further south in order to attack Fort Washington, capture its Colonial army defenders, and drive the Patriots off Manhattan Island. After the engagement at White Plains, General Washington and his Colonial army were retreating north, and making preparations for a further retreat across the Hudson River into the New Jersey colony.

Washington issued a discretionary order to General Nathanael Greene at Fort Washington, stating that General Greene had permission to abandon the fort, and withdraw the garrison of approximately 3,000 troops. Colonel Robert Magaw who was the principle commander for the fort refused to abandon his post.

On 16 November 1776, General Howe positioned his land army on three sides of Fort Washington and sealed the fourth side with naval vessels, so that he had the fort completely surrounded. He began action with an all-out simultaneous frontal assault on three sides of the fort. The southern and western American defenses were quickly compromised by British attack. The North side of the fortress offered stiff resistance to the Hessian attack, but soon fell along with the southern and western walls. Colonel Magaw had little choice, but to surrender the garrison along with its supplies and troops. This would go down as one of the Patriot's greatest losses. The American defenders lost 59 men killed and 2,837 taken prisoner.

Generals Washington and Greene removed their troops across the Hudson River into New Jersey and the Hackensack Township area. Here they made encampment at Fort Lee just opposite to Fort Washington across the Hudson River. With the British in complete control of the river and occupying the East bank, it was determined by Washington and his officer staff, that defense of Fort Lee was not practical and therefore the Continental army withdrew across New Jersey.

After his success on 16 November 1776, General Howe ordered General Charles Cornwallis and Colonel Karl von Donop to make speedy attack on the Americans in New Jersey before the weather changed and winter could set in. On 19 and 20 November 1776, those combined British and Hessian forces moved across the Hudson River and began the pursuit of Washington's army. It was during this dismal season of retreat that Thomas Paine composed another of his famous pamphlets which began, "These are the times that try men's souls."