

Dr. Benjamin Rush

Continental Army Medical Officer



Not long after I voted for and then signed the Declaration of Independence, I left Congress and joined George Washington's army to provide my services as a surgeon for his troops. I arrived shortly before the battle at Trenton. After the day-long action at Trenton on January 2, 1777, I worked with several other doctors to care for the men wounded in the battle. We set up a local house as a temporary hospital and worked well into the night before falling asleep beside the men we were caring for. We discovered about 4:00 am that Washington had removed his army from Trenton. No one had told us this was happening and we did not know where they were going. We thought it might be to Bordentown so we put our patients on wagons and drove to Bordentown. On the morning of January 3, we heard the sounds of battle in the direction of Princeton, and soon after learned that Washington had gone there overnight. I was not happy that we had been left behind and that Washington did not make sure to have doctors with him for the battle.

We took our patients to Princeton several days after the battle. I knew Princeton well because I had married the daughter of Richard Stockton, who lived there. My father-in-law was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence but he had been captured by British troops about a month earlier and there were reports that he was being mistreated by the British. Fortunately, he was released by the British under controversial circumstances, and I was able to visit with him while I stayed in Princeton to take care of wounded from that battle.

We began to set up a hospital in the college building, Nassau Hall, but some wounded remained in private homes where we and the local people cared for them. One severely injured man was General Hugh Mercer who had been badly bayoneted several times and hit on the head with the butt of a British musket stock. Even so, I believed he would recover. He lay in a bed in the Thomas Clarke house on the battlefield. This Quaker family and their enslaved woman, Susannah, cared for him and several other men. I was devastated to discover that my dear friend, British Captain William Leslie, had been killed in the battle, and I found myself shedding tears in spite of our victory. - *Text by Larry Kidder*