



# Eyewitness of the American Revolution



*From the Permanent Collection of the  
Delaware Historical Society - "Drumbeat  
of a Nation" by Stanley Arthurs*

January 3 1777  
  
Princeton  
Battlefield  
Society  
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# Colonel John Haslet

## 1st Delaware Regiment



About 7:30 on the morning of January 3, 1777, I was with Washington's army south of Princeton after marching all night from Trenton. Washington gave out orders for the attack on the town of Princeton. I, with the few men left in my regiment, was to march with General Mercer's brigade and follow the main army up a little used road called the Sawmill Road. A little after 8:00 am we passed the house of Quaker farmer Thomas Clarke and learned that a group of British light cavalry had been seen on a hill top about a mile away on the main road to Trenton. Believing this was a morning patrol from the village, Mercer was ordered to take some troops and cross the farm fields to cut off the patrol before it could alert the British troops in Princeton to our approach. As we proceeded to cross the fields, I was concerned that Mercer did not send scouts ahead. However, I marched on foot at the side of Mercer on his horse. Marching was not easy for me because I had fallen into the icy Delaware River the night after the Battle of Trenton on December 26 when we returned to Pennsylvania. This had caused my legs to swell and I was still in great discomfort. Nothing, however, was going to stop my leading the mere handful of troops left in my regiment in this battle.

What we did not know was that the "patrol" was actually more than two regiments of British and that they had also seen us. Their commander turned his column around to intercept us before we got to Princeton and he sent a regiment plus some dragoons to cross the same fields that we were crossing. As we advanced, we approached an apple orchard near a farmhouse and barn and then were surprised to see a British force over a rise in the ground. We exchanged a volley of fire with the British and they followed up with a bayonet charge that threatened to overpower our men, most of whom did not have bayonets. In the action, General Mercer's horse was wounded and the General fell to the ground. He got up and tried to rally his men but was surrounded and repeatedly bayoneted. Our brigade was now in retreat and I attempted to rally our men and hopefully be able to go to Mercer's assistance. However, a British musket ball hit me in the head and ended my life.

- Text by *Larry Kidder*