



Eyewitness of the American Revolution

General Hugh Mercer's bayonetting in John Trumbull's *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton* – Yale University Art Gallery

January 3 1777
**Princeton
Battlefield**

Society
www.pbs1777.org

Brigadier General Hugh Mercer

Brigade Commander in Greene's Division



After marching all night from Trenton by back roads to avoid notice by the British preparing to attack us at Trenton in the morning, Washington split up his forces, and I was part of a group that marched toward Princeton up an old, little-used road leading to the back of Princeton. Our group was the main force under Washington himself and my brigade was part of the division of Major General Nathanael Greene. When Washington became aware that British soldiers had been spotted about a mile away on a hilltop on the road to Trenton, he believed it was probably just a British morning patrol sent out from Princeton and ordered me to take my men and cut them off while the main force continued to Princeton.

I led my men across a farm toward an orchard near the house and barn of the farmer. Unknown to us, the British had a large force and had spotted us also. The British commander sent troops to intercept us, and we met them unexpectedly on the farm. In the heavy fighting that developed, my men fought bravely but became terrified when the British troops charged them with bayonets, which most of my men did not have, and they began to retreat. I tried to rally them but fell from my horse when he was severely wounded in a leg and fell. I continued to fight on foot and refused to surrender to the British soldiers. As a consequence, I received about seven severe bayonet wounds and was beaten on the side of my head by a British soldier using his musket as a club.

It appeared to the soldiers of both armies that I was dead, but I still breathed. After the battle, a soldier carried me to the farmhouse we had passed just before marching off to engage the British "patrol." The farmer and his sister, along with their slave woman Susannah, cared for me along with army doctors from both armies. Most of them thought I would survive, but, as a doctor myself, I knew that my wounds were mortal. Nine days after the battle, I died in the farmhouse.

For additional information go to www.pbs1777.org