

Captain William Shippin

Pennsylvania Marine



On the morning of January 3, 1777, I was serving in Colonel John Cadwalader's brigade with the 2nd Battalion of Philadelphia Associators. I had joined with Washington's army at Bristol on December 12, 1776 as a marine after being detached from my duties as captain of a company of Marines aboard the Pennsylvania privateer Hancock. Sailing in June, we returned December 1 after capturing nine ships. I was 27 years old and had served in the British army about 1769 before becoming a merchant in Philadelphia and then commissioned as a privateer captain in March 1776.

Shortly after joining Colonel Cadwalader troops, I threatened to shoot the young son of a Quaker woman, Margaret Morris, when I saw him looking through a glass at our gondolas on the Delaware River. But, finding he was just a curious boy, I set him free, much to his mother's joy. Now, on January 3, we had marched all night from Trenton, and our brigade followed General Mercer's across a farm towards the road to Trenton to intercept what was thought to be a morning British patrol. Mercer ran into British soldiers near a farmhouse and orchard, and the red coats repulsed his troops with a bayonet charge. Our brigade marched against the British soldiers to support Mercer. Advancing with Cadwalader, we marines took a position on the right flank when they deployed from column into line of battle. We only fired one volley before Mercer's panicked men ran among us, followed closely by British soldiers wielding bayonets. The left side of Cadwalader's line broke, while some of us on the right, including several companies of green coated marines and two cannon, tried to hold the line together.

When the battle finally ended victoriously, my body, shot through the head, was found on the field. I left a wife and three young children. Someone buried me hurriedly in the Quaker cemetery close by and twelve days later my body was taken to Philadelphia for burial. When the woman whose son I had threatened heard of my death, she wrote in her diary that she had long ago forgiven me and "felt sorry when I heard he was dead."

For additional information go to www.pbs1777.org