

A profile portrait of General Edward Hand, facing left. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing a yellow military coat with a white cravat. The background is dark and textured.

Eyewitness of the American Revolution

*Portrait of General Edward Hand,
by Cornelia Cassidy Davis, circa 1920,
courtesy of the Rock Ford Foundation*

January 3, 1777
**Princeton
Battlefield**
Society
www.pbs1777.org

Jan 2 - Colonel Edward Hand

1st Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment



27

Expecting General Cornwallis to march an overwhelming number of troops from Princeton to Trenton today, General Washington had sent my brigade of Maryland and Pennsylvania riflemen, along with several Virginia regiments and a two cannon Pennsylvania artillery company, up the primary road toward Princeton to set up delaying ambushes at several locations where the road crossed a creek.

After the British column passed through the village of Maidenhead and approached our troops waiting for them at Five Mile Run, my commander, General Roche de Fermoy, inexplicably mounted his horse and rode off rapidly towards Trenton without saying a word to any of us. This left me, only a colonel, the senior officer present. I took charge and placed Captain Henry Miller of my riflemen in command of my advanced guard of skirmishers. The troops I now commanded would have to harass the British all the way to Trenton. We needed to delay Cornwallis all day if possible.

About 1:00pm, I deployed my men within mile-deep woods on the right side of the road at the Shabakunk Creek, posting myself on the right and Miller on the left and we quietly awaited the British. When the advance British guard came within point blank range, we fired an unexpected, deadly volley that broke the British ranks and forced them to retreat back to their main force in some confusion. Then, preparing for full battle, Cornwallis formed his column into a line of battle on the soft, muddy earth, and also ordered up artillery that fired into the woods for about thirty minutes before he advanced his troops.

Using tactics like this, I successfully delayed the British arrival at Trenton until very late afternoon. My men joined Washington's forces defending Mill Hill at the Assunpink Creek. Although the British made several attempts to cross the creek's stone bridge and both armies exchanged artillery fire, Cornwallis called off the action for the day due to darkness, expecting to finish off the battle the next morning. However, after meeting with his officers, Washington sent out orders to all regiments to leave our campfires burning and form up to march to Princeton overnight using a route that would go around the British and prevent them from knowing of our departure. *Text by Larry Kidder.*