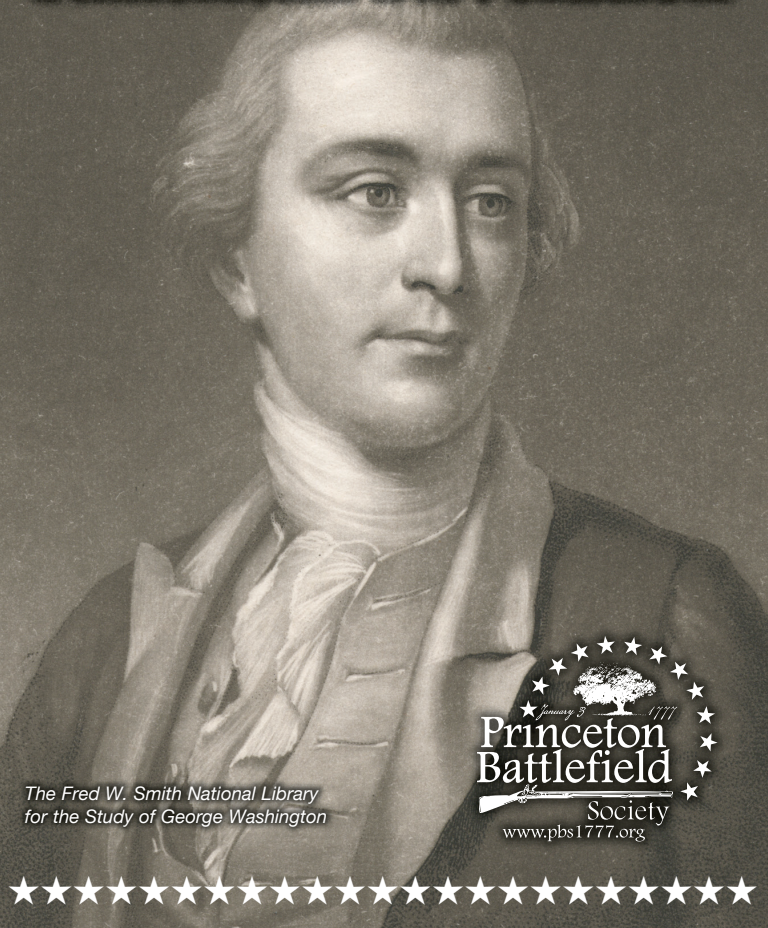


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Eyewitness of the American Revolution



*The Fred W. Smith National Library
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Dec 30 – Colonel Joseph Reed

Adjutant General

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Serving as General Washington's Adjutant General, I had joined him at Trenton along with the troops who had failed to cross the Delaware River south of Trenton the night of December 25/26. Knowing the British were assembling more troops at Princeton, I led six troopers of the Philadelphia First Troop of Light Horse on a patrol towards Princeton to gather intelligence about them. We were unable to learn much during our ride towards Princeton and failed in our attempts to convince any local person – even for pay - to go into Princeton to gather information for us, because the British had struck so much terror. I decided we would scout the outskirts of town and perhaps get behind the town where there would be fewer guard posts.

Near a farm, we observed an unarmed British soldier walking from a barn to the farm house. I sent two men to capture him, thinking he was plundering. But then we saw another man and then a third. I sent my whole party to surround the house. Amazingly, twelve well-armed British light dragoons and a commissary surrendered to seven horsemen, six of whom had never before seen an enemy. Only a sergeant escaped. I heard later that he reported at Princeton that he fought his way through fifty horsemen. We found that instead of being on guard, they were employed in the much pleasanter business of attacking and conquering a parcel of mince pies.

From our prisoners we learned there were 7000 enemy soldiers at Princeton intending to attack Washington at Trenton in a few days. We examined each prisoner separately and their information confirmed the enemy's numbers and intentions. This put General Washington in a critical situation because occupying Trenton put him in a position where retreat was almost impossible. And, even if he could retreat, it would renew the low morale that had existed before the Battle of Trenton. But, if Washington took on the British army in full battle again at Trenton, he risked the destruction of his army and a shattering blow to the Revolution. It appeared that defending Trenton put him in a trap where he was likely to fight and die, if he could not defeat the more numerous British soldiers or find an honorable way out of the apparent trap. *Text by Larry Kidder.*