



The Commemoration for the Fallen, St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley. *Photo by Anthony Morris VII.*

The Last Days of William Wolfe

Sean Moir

As William Wolfe set sail from Cork, Ireland, in the spring of 1775, he must have hoped that one day he would return to live out the remainder of his life peacefully in the land of his birth, eventually being laid to rest with a ceremony befitting an officer of His Majesty's army. Instead, he died a continent away on enemy soil in a midnight raid, and was buried in a shallow grave at the nearest Anglican church without so much as a functioning clergy to oversee his interment.

Wolfe had been a Lieutenant in the 40th Regiment of Foot since 1771, and had just been promoted to Captain at the age of 25, when his regiment was called to Boston to assist in putting down a local rebellion against the Crown.¹ It must have been quite a surprise when he arrived that June to find General Sir William Howe and his entire army of 8,000 men in the pro-

cess of being besieged by 14,000 Continental soldiers from all over the 13 colonies, led by General George Washington of Virginia.

South from Boston

By the spring of 1776, Howe found it necessary to evacuate Boston. He sailed for New York, landing on Staten Island on July 3. During the waning days of summer, Captain Wolfe's company battled through Brooklyn and Harlem Heights and up to White Plains. They fought alongside the notably killed 42nd Royal Highland Regiment, who upheld their reputation for ferocity throughout the successful three month campaign. Howe then proceeded to set up winter garrisons in New Jersey.

In Perth Amboy during the winter of 1776-77, Captain Wolfe was busy selecting and training the men who would be serving under him that coming sum-

mer in the 40th Light Company. This company, taken from the 40th Regiment of Foot, consisted of about 40 men and was built for speed and stealth. The 40th was one of thirteen light companies that made up the 2nd Light Infantry Battalion of about 500 men. Wolfe had been captain of the 40th Light Company since its inception the previous fall, and was the sixth most senior captain in the 2nd Light Infantry.² The practice of fielding a light infantry had recently gained popularity with the British in North America after traditional military formations proved too difficult to maneuver in wilderness battles against French settlers and native inhabitants.

Camp life was not easy in Perth Amboy that winter, and not everyone was coping well with the level of austerity that was required of a light infantryman. A detailed glimpse into the camp life of Captain Wolfe and his men can be gleaned from the British Army Orderly Book of the 40th Light Company that was captured by Americans in August of 1777. It appears that some men of the 40th found it difficult to strictly adhere to the military standards of neatness. Numerous entries in the Orderly Book report how the troops needed repeated reminding to “have their necessaries constantly packed in their wallets ready to sling in their blankets which they are to parade with every morning.”³

On June 24, 1777, Captain Wolfe and his light company received orders “to hold themselves in readiness to embark and be brigaded.” The next day they were told “the Army . . . will March in two Columns from the right by half companies . . . None but the Light Infantry and Flankers to be loaded on this march. . . All the Women and Children are to remain with the Baggage.”⁴ So the light infantry led the British forces on the morning of June 26, in what is now referred to



A light infantryman, as depicted in the painting "British Light" by Pamela Patrick. Used with permission. ©2000 Pamela Patrick.

as the Battle of Short Hills. But instead of finding the entire Continental army, they discovered only about 2,000 men from the 5th Continental Division within striking distance. These Continentals were ready to fight and they inflicted disproportionate damage on the British, killing seventy, while themselves losing only around a dozen men.

By now, Howe had grown tired of New Jersey, so he decided to depart from Perth Amboy. The Continental army had managed to successfully block the British from advancing by land to either Philadelphia or Albany. Howe's next move would have to be by sea.⁵ Fortunately for Howe, the sea wasn't such a bad place; his brother, Admiral Richard Howe, had a fleet of over 200 ships at his disposal.

The Start of the Philadelphia Campaign

Early on August 25, Howe's weary crew landed on the west side of the River Elk at Turkey Point in Maryland, just south of today's Elk Neck State Park. Captain Wolfe's company was among the first to disembark that day, along with other elite forces from the light infantry, the grenadiers, and the Hessian Jägers. The troops quickly chased off local militia, se-

cured the area, set up camp, and tended to the cattle they had brought with them to the Head of the Elk.

On the 28th, Captain Wolfe began organizing his company to march along with the other elite forces under Cornwallis to occupy Elkton. Howe and Cornwallis' men rested for a few days while they commandeered provisions for the long march to Philadelphia. This was about the time that Americans captured the British Orderly Book for the 40th Light Company that dated back to camp at Perth Amboy.

Washington's army of 11,000 was also on the move that day, establishing camp upon a farm along White Clay Creek between Newark and Newport, Delaware. It was there that Washington organized his own light infantry brigade under General William Maxwell.⁶

On August 30, British Major General Charles Grey, the 3rd Brigade, and the Royal Highlanders crossed over to Cecil Court House on the Eastern Shore where they set out on foraging missions which produced hundreds of cows and sheep, and some badly needed horses. A few days later, General von Knyphausen left Turkey Point and joined Grey to take command of Howe's Right Division. They headed north through storms and swampy roads toward Glasgow, Delaware, where they joined Cornwallis' Left Division coming east from Elkton.

Washington's main force, including General Anthony Wayne's Pennsylvania Division, moved back to a stronger position along Red Clay Creek near Newport, leaving Maxwell and his recently formed light infantry to harass the British advances.

On the morning of September 3, as Captain Wolfe and the vanguard of Cornwallis' division marched toward Newport, they were ambushed, Indian-style, just south of Cooch's Bridge by Maxwell. After losing the element of surprise and spending most of their ammunition, Maxwell's men fell back to the bridge. The British light infantry attempted to encircle the Americans in a flanking maneuver, but became bogged down in the rain-soaked mire south of the Christina Creek. The battle ended in the mid-afternoon as the Hessians organized a bayonet charge and chased the Americans back to Newport.⁷

After the Battle of Cooch's Bridge, General Howe joined the army on the field along with the last of the

brigades from Elkton. Admiral Howe was ordered to take the British fleet toward the Delaware River where they were to await the main army's arrival.

Howe's men began to move once more on September 8. They marched due north through Newark to Kennett Square in Pennsylvania. Washington, having been outflanked, was forced to change his position, so he hurried to Chadds Ford along the Brandywine Creek to block Howe's route to Philadelphia.

The Battles of Brandywine and the Clouds

At sunrise on the morning of September 11, 1777, only three miles separated the two rival armies in Pennsylvania. The forces were numerically matched: Howe commanding 15,000 men and Washington 14,000. The first British force to make contact with the Americans that morning was Knyphausen's division, which took the main road leading directly to the bulk of Washington's army. Maxwell's light infantry met them near Kennett Meeting House, but were driven back to Chadds Ford by the British advance forces. It was during this engagement that the Americans used the uncivilized tactic of faking surrender and then firing upon the enemy when they got within close range.

For the first time since White Plains, almost a year earlier, Washington's entire army was battling head to head with the British. What Washington didn't realize was that he was only seeing half of Howe's army, for only six miles upstream, on today's Route 842 just outside of West Chester, Cornwallis' men were about to turn south on Birmingham Road toward Chadds Ford.

By early afternoon, Washington became aware of the British flanking movement and he sent two divisions to face the British near the meetinghouse. The two sides fought, sometimes in hand-to-hand combat, until almost sunset, when the Americans had no choice but to flee the scene. Down in Chadds Ford, Wayne's division fared little better against Knyphausen, who commenced his assault across the creek around 4 pm when he heard the fighting start in Birmingham. By nightfall, Wayne's men joined the rest of the Americans fleeing toward Chester.

The Battle of Brandywine turned out to be the largest battle of the American Revolution, resulting in the highest number of single-day casualties. Although

Howe's tactics were masterfully implemented, and the British clearly won the battle, he was widely criticized for not pursuing Washington vigorously enough after the battle.⁸

The bulk of Howe's army spent the next few days recuperating at Dilworthtown, while Cornwallis and a few brigades, including the light infantry, camped upon the heights of Aston toward Chester, near present-day Neumann College. It was here that Wolfe's company witnessed, for the first time under Howe's orders, the hanging of a fellow light infantryman and a grenadier for plundering nearby civilians.⁹

The day after the battle, the Americans found themselves in the safety of Philadelphia, knowing, however, that they would soon be required to mobilize once again to defend the capital city against the invading army. So, on the 15th, with darkening clouds on the horizon, Washington moved his army west along the Lancaster Road through Lower Merion and Tredyffrin to an area between the Paoli Tavern, located on the current site of the Paoli Post office, and the White Horse Tavern, which still stands today across from the Home Depot.

This was a strategic site, because it covered the intersection of many important roads. Just to the south was the British camp at Dilworthtown; to the east was Swedes Ford, one of the best fords across the Schuylkill; to the west were important food depots; and to the north was the main supply depot of Reading, as well as a number of iron furnaces, which manufactured much of the artillery and ammunition for the Continental Army. Upon learning of Washington's new position, Howe called upon his army to move north and re-converge near the Goshen Meeting House.

On the 16th, Washington moved his troops up the South Valley Hill to a position along King Road between Ship and Chester Roads, in front of present-day Immaculata University. Wayne's men were ordered to move to advanced positions along the left, toward the Goshen Meeting House on Chester Road where Cornwallis was headquartered, and on the right near the Boot Tavern at Ship Road. The British light infantry quickly repelled Wayne's advance troops on Chester Road, while Hessian Jägers, arriving from Dilworthtown with Knyphausen, engaged Wayne's men near the Boot Tavern. Recognizing the weakness

of his position, Washington ordered his men back down to the White Horse Tavern as the British prepared to enter the valley from both sides: near today's Church Farm School on the west and the Chester Valley Golf Course on the east.

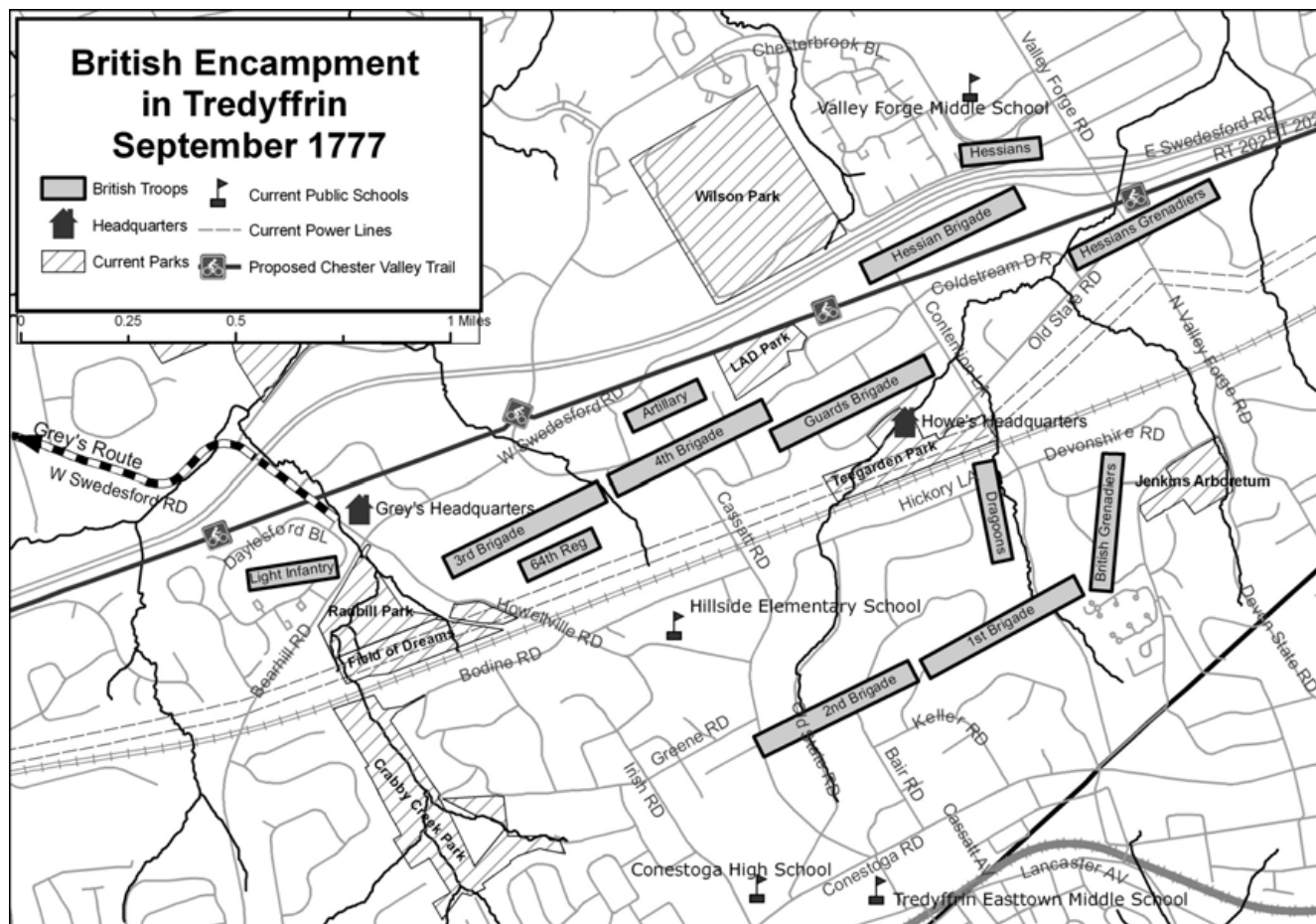
With his back against the North Valley Ridge, in the vicinity of East Whiteland's Battle of the Clouds Park, Washington desperately tried to re-form his lines as he prepared for the second meeting of the two competing armies in less than a week. Then the skies, which had been threatening rain all day, burst open in a deluge. This was at least the third major storm in the three weeks since the British arrived in the region, and it was by far the worst. The roads quickly became impassable and the ammunition unusable, bringing an end to the Battle of the Clouds before it even started.

For Washington, the storm was somewhat of a blessing, because it gave him the opportunity to escape to the safety of Yellow Springs, about six miles distant. However, it turned out to be a grueling eight hours away over hilly, muddy, bottomless roads.

Tredyffrin Encampment

On the morning of September 18, Howe's route to Philadelphia was no longer blocked by Washington's army, but now by a more formidable obstacle, the swollen Schuylkill River. In need of a more comfortable place to camp while he waited for the waters to subside, Howe marched his army east toward the township of Tredyffrin where scouts reported fertile fields and plentiful drinking water. Captain Friedrich von Muenchhausen, a Hessian member of Howe's staff, later commented that, "the Valley Creek, part of which flows through our camp, has the best water I have tasted here in America."¹⁰

Cornwallis' smaller division of 5,000 men climbed back up the south ridge along the Lancaster Road, passing first the Paoli Tavern and then the Blue Ball Tavern. They set up camp along the crest of the ridge beside the headwaters of Trout Creek. Knyphausen's division of 10,000 marched in the valley along the muddy and rutted Swedesford Road. The Hessian brigade encamped just north of the Great Valley Baptist Church. General Howe set up his headquarters in the house of Samuel Jones along Trout Creek near present-day Contention Lane. The bulk of the Division made their camps between Howellville Road and



The Chester Valley Trail may include segments of the Patriots Path trail, a County project intended to link Valley Forge National Historical Park to the site of the Paoli Massacre. *Map Courtesy of the Chester County GIS Department, 2008.*

Contention Lane, tucked safely between Swedesford Road and the base of the South Valley ridge.

Captain Wolfe’s company and the rest of the 2nd Light Infantry bivouacked along the west side of Crabby Creek, across from Howell’s Tavern where General Grey had set up his headquarters. Just upstream, on the east side of Howellville Road, was Grey’s Third Brigade and the 42nd Royal Highlanders. Along Bear Hill Road, between the Highlanders and the Light Infantry, were corralled numerous cattle and sheep, recently seized from the neighboring countryside.

The British occupied almost one thousand acres of land in central Tredyffrin for three nights between September 18 and 21st. In 2008 terms we would say that the Light Infantry camped at Daylesford Lakes; the cattle and sheep grazed in the area of Radbill Park and the Field of Dreams; General Grey’s headquar-

ters was diagonally across from Howellville Headquarters at the corner of Route 252 and West Swedesford Road; the Royal Highlanders were in the vicinity of the Refuge Pentecostal Church; while the bulk of the encampment continued east from PECO’s Berwyn Service Building, following the power lines to Teegarden Park where General Howe made his headquarters. The Hessians, meanwhile, occupied an area roughly between Barnes and Noble and Valley Forge Middle School, near the southeast corner of Wilson Farm Park. Higher on the ridge, Cornwallis’ men were spread out along what today is Bair Road, Keller Road, and Margo Lane following the ridge almost as far east as Jenkins Arboretum.

Since the British chose to travel light, most of their tents were back at the Elk River, which meant they needed to build their own shelters, which they referred to as “wigwams”, from whatever they could find in the area, including leaves, cornstalks, and

fence rails. One British Grenadier later wrote that "the fatigues of the march from the Head of the Elk River to Philadelphia... were really great, our best habitations being wigwams, through which the heavy rains of this climate... easily penetrated."¹¹

The British had been cut off from their supply base and were compelled to forage for food. Certainly, these were not the best days for Tredyffrin residents who watched helplessly as their household property, their crops, their livestock and the fence rails that contained them were confiscated by the invading army. Franklin Burns of the Tredyffrin Easttown History Club described in 1940 how the British "army behaved as if in a conquered country, sweeping the land bare of provisions", and how "the Hessians would sneak out of camp without their muskets and visit nearby Quaker farmhouses in search of plunder."¹²

Intelligence Intercepts in the Great Valley

Early on the 19th, General Wayne and his 2,000 men moved from their camp at Yellow Springs, on Washington's orders to get behind Howe. They were instructed to "harass and distress" the British when they started to march, and if possible accomplish "the cutting of the enemy's baggage", while being especially careful to "take care of ambuscades."¹³

That evening the British received intelligence that Wayne had been dispatched and was setting up camp near the Paoli Tavern. Captain Wolfe's company was called upon once again to perform some stealth maneuvering and surprise Wayne. According to von Munchhausen, the 2nd Light Infantry "had almost surrounded him when fate intervened. Two drunken Englishmen fired at a picket, which touched off an alarm, and permitted their escape."¹⁴ This may have been a lucky turn of events for Wayne, but more ominously, it reminded Howe that loaded muskets can eliminate the element of surprise on a nighttime raid.

Wayne's understanding was that General Smallwood and his 2,000 militiamen from Maryland would be arriving soon, at which point they would combine forces and attack Howe's right flank under Cornwallis on top of the ridge just off Conestoga Road. Meanwhile, General Maxwell's light infantry was to attack Knyphausen's men on the left flank in the valley along Swedesford Road. Wayne also understood that Washington's main force would be there to back them up as they attempted to pin Howe's army

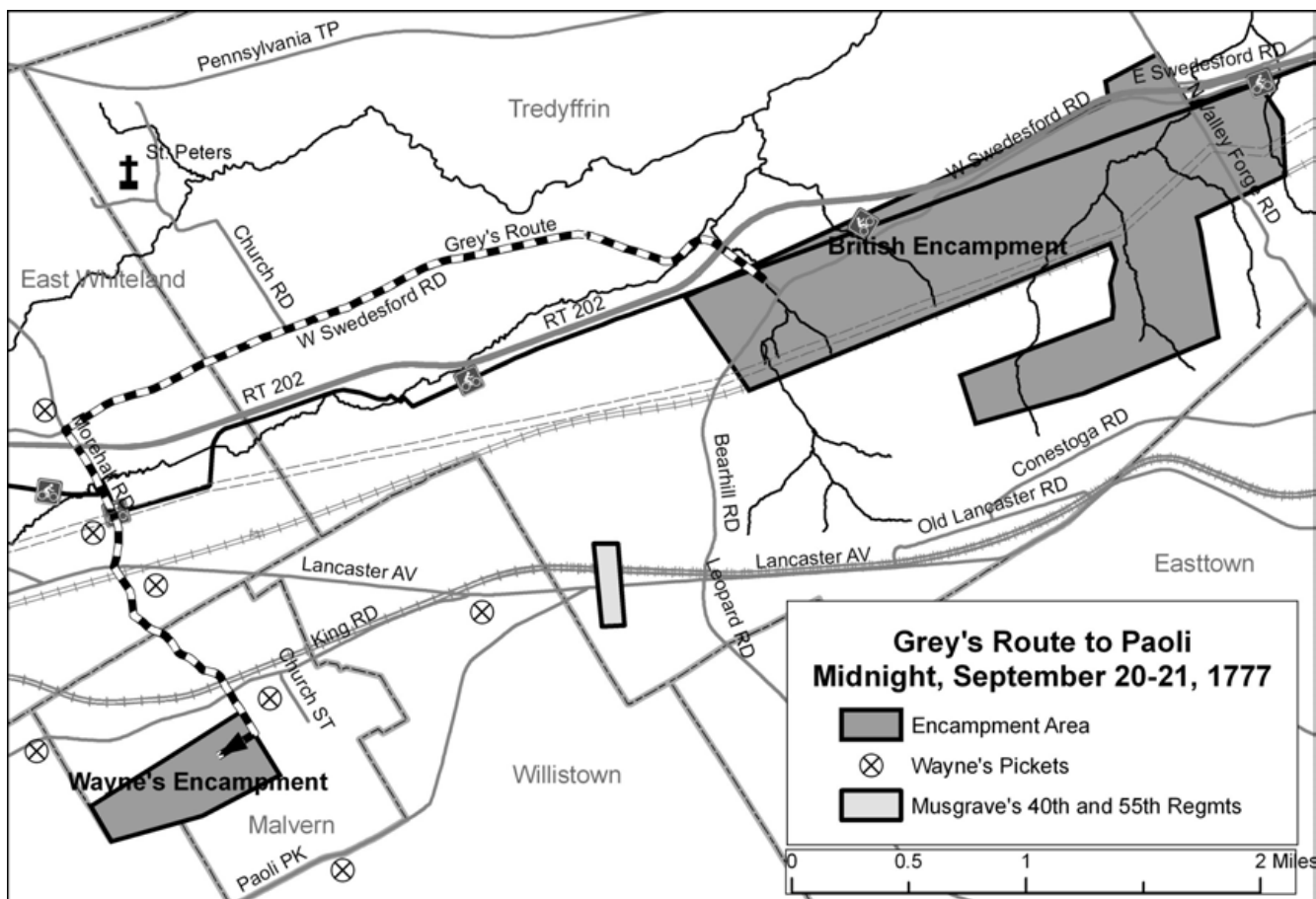
against the swollen Schuylkill River. Had this come to pass, it may have led to a considerable battle on Tredyffrin soil, but Wayne's letters to Washington, urging him to arrive quickly so they could commence the battle, went unanswered.

Wayne was unaware that his plans for a concerted attack upon Howe had already been made impossible by the fact that Washington had opted to maneuver around the British, to their front, by crossing the Schuylkill River near Pottstown and heading downstream toward Trappe. Strategically, this could have worked to the American advantage because it put the British in the middle of a pincer. It was risky, however, because it left Wayne's men isolated. Even worse, Wayne was completely unaware of Washington's recent movements because Howe had intercepted the message that was meant to notify him of the change in plans. So as Wayne sat in Paoli planning his attack upon the British in Tredyffrin, he may have perceived his location as concealed and substantially reinforced by his compatriots, while in actuality it was quite well known and highly vulnerable.

General Howe recognized Wayne's position as a threat to his "hundreds of supply wagons and herds of livestock"¹⁵ located along Bear Hill Road. Now with full knowledge of Wayne's whereabouts in Paoli, and further knowing of Wayne's plan to attack him as soon as Smallwood arrived, Howe needed to act quickly to avert trouble in his rear. General Grey's aide, Captain John Andre, wrote in his journal on the 20th "Intelligence having been received of the situation of General Wayne and his design of attacking our rear, a plan was concerted for surprising him and the execution entrusted to Major-General Grey."¹⁶

Death in Paoli

On September 20, Captain William Wolfe was called to organize his 40th Light Company for a second consecutive nighttime raid. As the sun slipped from his view, unknowingly for the very last time, Wolfe reported to General Grey's headquarters at Howell's Tavern, along with 1,200 other British troops, including the rest of the 2nd Light Infantry, the 44th Regiment, the 42nd Royal Highlander Regiment, and about a dozen light horsemen of the 16th Dragoons.¹⁷ In order to not repeat the mistakes of the previous night, Howe ordered complete quiet, "under the threat of the death penalty."¹⁸ To achieve this, Grey planned to rely on the bayonet, so he ordered his men not to load



Map Courtesy of the Chester County GIS Department, 2008.

their weapons and to remove their flints, earning him the sobriquet “No Flint Grey”. Recalling from the previous week the American ambushes, their practice of fake surrenders, and the targeting of officers, Grey must have felt somewhat justified in using his own ruthless and grizzly tactics that night.

Meanwhile, along Conestoga Road, Musgrave was taking command of the 40th and 55th Regiments of Foot as they prepared to head west toward the Paoli Tavern, where they planned to lay waiting for any of Wayne’s men who might consider trying to escape to the east. While in the area they also planned to take the opportunity to search Waynesborough, Wayne’s home in Easttown, where eyewitnesses later reported that they “behaved with the utmost politeness to the Women and said they only wanted the General. They did not disturb the least article.”¹⁹

Grey’s forces left camp around 10 p.m. heading west on Swedesford Road, making sure to detain any Tredyffrin resident, sometimes a little roughly, who

might have been tempted to sound the alarm. As they approached Moore Hall Road, present-day Route 29, they were spotted by a couple of Wayne’s mounted pickets, who fired their weapons and sped away to alert Wayne of the coming British advance.

Grey’s men didn’t flinch as they turned south toward the Warren Tavern, knowing Wayne was camped somewhere on the ridge behind it. Upon reaching the tavern, they abducted a blacksmith who led them up Longford (Warren) Road toward the east side of Wayne’s camp where they were fired upon by Lieutenant Randolph’s pickets without effect. The pickets started to run, but were quickly bayoneted by British Dragoons, as were the next set of pickets at the top of the hill near the present-day Malvern train station. Had they come up the old Sugartown Road, the British would have been approaching from the west side of Wayne’s encampment, increasing the likelihood of driving the Americans into the hands of Musgrave and possibly a mass surrender.

Up to this point, no shots had been fired by British

troops and no British had been killed, but many American pickets were lying dead, some mistakenly shot by their own comrades. Now, with pickets out of the way, the British light infantry force charged into Wayne's camp, bayonets first, scattering the 1st Pennsylvania who had been stationed in the woods between Warren Road and the encampment. This left the 7th Pennsylvania exposed, and illuminated in front of their "wigwams" by their own fires, as they desperately tried to organize themselves to evacuate the camp.

It had been only four months since Wayne's men had spied the British light infantry as they paraded on the plains of New Jersey. On this night they were face-to-face with those same light infantrymen as they came roaring into camp with bloodthirsty bellows and bayonets flashing. But before the panicked Continentals were driven from their camp, the 7th Pennsylvania managed to fire enough shots to kill three British light infantry troops, one of whom was Captain William Wolfe as he led the 40th Light Company onto the field of victory.

As Wolfe lie dying in the darkness, subsequent waves of British troops, including saber wielding dragoons and kilted Royal Highlanders, came rushing in, trumpets blasting, to complete the mission. This moment is depicted famously in the Xavier Della Gatta painting entitled *The Paoli Massacre*, which is the work that Thomas McGuire uses as the cover for his book, *Battle of Paoli*. Captain Wolfe, remembered by his countrymen as "a most brave and attentive officer"²⁰, is shown lying dead in the foreground of the painting, putting him on the bottom of the book's spine as it faces out from bookshelves.

After the battle, Grey's forces united with Musgrave outside the Paoli Tavern, while Wolfe's body, the other two dead British soldiers, and a number of wounded, both British and American, were placed on wagons and taken back to the Tredyffrin encampment before the break of day on the 21st.

For General Wayne, Smallwood's arrival just outside of camp at midnight was too little, too late. The Americans had no choice but to retreat westward, leaving the British with a clear route to Philadelphia.

Before leaving Tredyffrin and the Great Valley, Howell's Tavern was converted from a headquarters for General Grey into a hospital for Americans whose

injuries he had orchestrated. For years it was unclear exactly what had happened to the bodies of Wolfe and his British compatriots, but recent investigation has helped to support the local belief that all three British fallen were buried on the grounds of St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley.

Beyond Paoli

In the moments before his death, the 27-year-old Captain Wolfe was at the vanguard of a British army that defended an empire upon which the sun never set; an empire that continued to flourish around the world. In September, 1777, the British were winning the war against their wayward American brethren. The King's forces occupied New York City, Burgoyne was making progress towards Albany, and Howe was about to take Philadelphia – the seat of the rebellion. There was much for a British army Captain in the late 18th century to be proud of.

What William Wolfe would never know, however, was that the conquest of Philadelphia was a Pyrrhic victory with little strategic significance, especially after the escape of the Continental Congress to York. And neither Wolfe, nor anybody at the time, could have known that this was the fall before the winter of Washington's Valley Forge encampment, where the Continental Army transformed itself into a disciplined fighting force with confidence and strength enough to put the British Lion on the run; chasing it completely from the thirteen colonies when the Treaty of Paris was signed six Septembers after Paoli. Wolfe's bones no longer lay within the British realm, but beneath foreign soil, destined it seemed to lie in a remote churchyard, quietly forsaken, with never a proper Christian burial.

Commemoration for the Fallen at St. Peter's Church

Over the years, there have been quite a few ceremonies to honor the fallen American soldiers at the Battle of Paoli, but never to pay tribute to the British men who died. That is, until 2007, two hundred and thirty Septembers after the Battle of Paoli, when a Commemoration ceremony was held at St. Peter's Church, where all three British light infantrymen who sacrificed their lives for their country that night were finally honored.

This chapter of the story began in 2002, when Roger



The graveside ceremony at St. Peter's in the Great Valley. *Anthony Morris, VII.*

Thorne, Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society President and Saint Peter's historian, attempted to generate some interest among reenactment groups to commemorate the 225th anniversary of the burials which are believed to have taken place in St. Peter's churchyard. For various reasons, however, the initiative didn't work out. Then in the spring of 2007, the church was contacted by Bruce Knapp, president of the Paoli Battlefield Preservation Fund (PBPF), to see if the church would like to participate in a burial reenactment. After reviewing the facts and legends surrounding the burial of 1777, the church and PBPF decided to collaborate in holding a commemoration that honored the fallen from both sides.

The ceremony which came to be known as the *Commemoration for the Fallen*, took place at St. Peter's Church on the seasonably warm evening of Friday, September 7, 2007. In attendance were nearly 100 onlookers, including church parishioners, historical society members, and other interested people from the region.

The program included over a dozen re-enactors. A few were Color Guard from the Sons of the American Revolution, but most represented the 42nd Royal Highland Regiment of Foot, the Black Watch. Private Bill Risko wore the uniform of the 40th Regiment of Light Infantry.

The service was conducted by Father Roy Almquist

of St. Peter's, along with Father Mark Scheneman, Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Carlisle, PA. Dennis Kane, Vice-President of the PBPF, was the Master of Ceremonies. The speakers were Bruce Knapp, President of the PBPF, and Roger Thorne, President of the Historical Society. Colonel Michael Vernon-Powell, retired, of Her Majesty's 49th Regiment of Foot, Royal Berkshire Regiment, was a special guest, who came bearing soil from regimental headquarters to sprinkle upon the graves of the fallen British, thus uniting earth from the two now reconciled countries.

Although the commemoration ceremony included a number of re-enactors, it was indeed an authentic Anglican Church service. After everyone was seated in the pews of the Old Church, British re-enactors entered the room. Most notable were the kilted members of the Royal Highland Regiment. On the other side of the sanctuary they faced the Continental Color Guard from the Sons of the American Revolution.

Father Almquist began the service with a Welcome and Invocation. After Master of Ceremonies Dennis Kane shared some opening remarks and made introductions, Bruce Knapp provided an informative historical context describing the Battle of Paoli and the subsequent preservation of the battlefield.

Roger Thorne then shared some church history, including how the original log chapel was built in 1705 atop "the highest hill within the center of the valley"

within an existing burying ground. He told how William Currie arrived in 1737 from Scotland to take charge of the congregation and built a permanent stone church on the site which survives to this day. As the Anglican congregation became more wealthy and independent, he explained, a Whig sentiment began to grow, leading to tension with the loyalist congregants and with Parson Currie himself. When the war broke out, Currie resigned, and the pews remained empty throughout the war, which is how the British would have found them in September, 1777, as they sought a place to bury their dead after the Battle of Paoli.

“Though the exact location of the graves is unknown,” explains Thorne, “an oft-quoted Revolutionary legend states that soldiers killed in combat, including British troops, were buried near the west wall of the churchyard.” The facts as they are currently understood, “strongly suggest the validity of the St. Peter’s legend ... that this abandoned Church of England in the Great Valley was not only known to the British Army, but would have been considered its logical burial spot for its soldiers killed less than 3 miles distant.”

Taking this a step further, Thorne described his “best conjecture of this interment”:

“Perhaps the burial happened this way: At first light, about 5:15 am, a designated burial detail departed the 2nd Battalion camp for the isolated location that was (and still is) St. Peter’s Church.”

“Perhaps Light Dragoons rode point for the detail’s 3½ mile journey to the churchyard. In the autumn, the Valley is often shrouded by mist at first light, an aid to snipers or ambush. Marching warily in route step, with flankers out, Light infantryman wearing short red jackets and broad brimmed campaign hats followed the dragoons, in turn followed by a team and wagon. Upon the wagon’s plank bed lay the three British corpses, and the bodies of several Continentals who had not survived their wounds from the night’s fight. Passing through the gates along St. Peter’s west wall into the quiet churchyard, there were shallow graves to be dug, and a short burial service to be read. No priest or military chaplain attended the proceedings. Per Army regulations, the familiar yet haunting words from the Order for the Burial of the Dead from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer was read by the officer in command. A brief salute, and the interment of Captain William Wolfe, 40th Foot; Private Daniel Robertson, 49th Foot; and a sergeant unknown to us from the 71st Foot, as well as the unknown Ameri-

cans, was concluded. Quickly returning to rejoin their battalion, they would leave the Great Valley for the last time.”

With this interpretation of the burial fresh in everyone’s minds, a procession from the sanctuary to the grave site was led by the American Color Guard and the British re-enactors as the audience gathered along the iron fence. Some in attendance were visibly moved as haunting strains of bagpipes droned across the graveyard, courtesy of William Gable from the Black Watch. At the grave site, Patrick MacNamee played the Dead March upon a muffled drum.

The Order for the Burial of the Dead, from the Church of England’s 1662 Book of Common Prayer, was read by Father Mark Scheneman. This was followed by the placing of a wreath upon the graves by Colonel Michael Vernon-Powell. Colonel Vernon-Powell then sprinkled British soil upon the graves of his fallen countrymen, as a symbol both of respect to the memory of the men who died, and of the important friendship which now exists between our two independent nations.

Following a moment of silence, a salute was led by Colonel Vernon-Powell, and Roger Thorne read a sonnet from the British war poet Rupert Brooke entitled *The Soldier*.

The ceremony ended with trumpeter Leighton Johnson playing Taps, and Father Scheneman providing the benediction. The procession then retired from the grave site and the audience was given the opportunity to photograph the re-enactors, preserving images from this emotionally complex day which combined belated respect for the dead with historical reconciliation.



A wreath lies at the gravesites of the fallen British soldiers.

Joyce Post.

Thus, after two centuries, the late Captain William Wolfe of

Great Britain, along with his two countrymen, could finally rest in peace with dignity.

*If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.*

From Rupert Brooke's 1914 Sonnet *The Soldier*, read by Roger Thorne at the Commemoration.



Colonel Vernon-Powell sprinkles British soil on the graves of Captain Wolfe and his fellow countrymen. *Photo courtesy The Suburban and Wayne Times.*

Additional content relating to this article may be found on line at: www.tehistory.org/pubs.html

NOTES

1. Smythies, *Historical Records of the 40th Regiment*.
2. British War Office Records.
3. *George Washington Papers*.
4. *George Washington Papers*.

5. Mitnick, 51-53.
6. Martin, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, 47.
7. Nelson, *The Battle of Cooch's Bridge*.
8. McGuire, *Brandywine Battlefield Park*, 23-39.
9. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 29-30.
10. von Munchhausen, *At General Howe's Side*, 34.
11. Rees, *British Soldiers and Brush Shelters, 1777-1781*, 2-9.
12. Burns, *The Invasion of Tredyffrin*, 58-70.
13. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 65-66.
14. von Munchhausen, *At General Howe's Side*, 34.
15. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 51.
16. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 92.
17. Nelson, *The Battle of Cooch's Bridge*, 43.
18. von Munchhausen, *At General Howe's Side*, 34.
19. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 135.
20. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 132.

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About the Author

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