

John Honeyman – A ‘Smoke and Mirrors’ spy case, Trenton and Princeton 1776-77 Campaign

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This story is offered for speech material(s) and any consideration for education to benefit any NSSAR Compatriot toward speaking publically and factually regarding an unproven, Patriot spy. *The American Heroes Channel* during the early evening of Thurs., Mar 12, 2015 televised a feature segment entitled: The Empire Fights Back –Profiles..., documented during 2014. Among popularly known Patriot hero profiles to be introduced were **Col. John Glover’s New England militia regt.** from **Marblehead, MA**. They were characterized as “rough and ready” fishermen and ship chandlers accustomed to hard work under the most arduous weather conditions. They were credited for saving Gen. Washington’s American army strategically retreating overnight Thurs., Aug 29th from the British invasion of Long Island.

John Glover’s New England (MA) militia and sailors capitalized the shifting wind and tides of the East River successfully returning eight or nine times via heavy boats to strategically withdraw an estimated 9,000 Patriot American soldiers from the banks of Brooklyn in a period of eleven hours that foggy night!¹

Aug. 29th 1775 is a most important date in American history for recalling a wartime combined night & weather event that included not only a favorable tidal basin flow with a lifesaving ‘fog’ that gave Gen. Washington and the entire American Patriot army a pass from defeat! The above, televised broadcast produced upon: *American Heroes Channel* placed a major emphasis that neither declaration signers, like those of the Massachusetts (MA) Suffolk Resolves on Sep 9, 1774, nor speech givers of Independence where popularly unsung heroes and

Patriots of the revolution were farmers, fishermen, mechanics and fearless volunteer state militiamen early in the War for Independence.

Surprisingly, for me the name **John Honeyman** was introduced as a Patriot spy and an operational *double agent* introduced during the ten (10) day campaign at Trenton and Princeton but, “hold on..., whose side first introduces Honeyman and offers payment for his services – the British, the American (Gen. Washington) or is this individual performing for *himself*?” The trouble observing the televised narrative is Honeyman’s initial characterization as tight lipped –unthreatening character while a pair of pistols is pointed at him by Patriot soldiers. They practically drag him to Gen. Washington’s winter camp headquarters on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River, eight miles from Hessian Col. Johann Rall’s snowed-in post at Trenton, NJ.

Although skeptical, I watched the televised script of a figure representing Gen. Washington alone with Honeyman at his general staff headquarters. This is counter intuitive for me personally, with my counterintelligence (CI) background; I can’t logically believe that this occurred. Yet, it is reported that during questioning **Honeyman** changes demeanor and shows a cooperative attitude. Now, **Honeyman** was favorably portrayed to the television viewer as a ‘volunteer’ but hardly a ‘walk-in’. The viewer is led to believe that **Honeyman** had been stopped and searched after making claims that he was carefully scouting the banks of the Delaware for livestock or cattle. Well, one might ask, for whom, himself or Hessian Col. Johann Rall. During his detention by Patriot militia as a latent British Tory and scout, Honeyman was characterized as withholding and uncooperative to his captures. Then, he was turned over to Washington’s staff & lifeguard troops for interrogation. He spoke more openly, until being tied-up and jailed. At some point, allegedly **Honeyman** appeared before the Commander – in – Chief of the American Army and he was first publically credited during 1873 in a New Jersey Journal of published histories that claimed he supplied Gen. Washington (?) the precise location and disposition at Trenton for Hessian Col. Rall’s (1) bttn. of Hessian *grenadiers*, (2 bttns) of *fusiliers*, a company of Hessian *Jägers* and the British 16th Light Dragoons (20 men). “Believe that as film screen propaganda, if you dare!”

There is an axiom in CI training for recognizing tradecraft devices that urges any serious professional to check original documented reports. Also to be prudent,

you must canvas trusted sources within a timely manner and substantiate a claim against debriefing captured enemy during conflicts. None of this occurred in the 'Smoke and Mirrors' case of **John Honeyman**.

Incredulously, who among former U.S. Foreign Counterintelligence personnel, would believe that Gen. Washington arranged this male's alleged escape from jail in order that he might return to Trenton to the Hessian barracks for the purpose of passage of a written note briefly detailing American troop numbers. The troop numbers were: Commander – in – Chief Gen. Geo. Washington's Life Guard (75 men) and 1st Troop of Philadelphia Light Horse (25 men); Brig. Gen. Adam Stephen Division (549); (Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Greene's Div. (673); Maj. Gen. John Sullivan's Div. (865). More importantly for Rall's information was a summary characterization for the American Army's demoralized state and weakly positioned troops across the icy and partially frozen, Delaware River from Trenton, New Jersey at a river crossing encampment near a sick house (Thompson-Neely-House) for American wounded, eight miles away.²

The televised *American Heroes Channel* profile portrayal and vision of **John Honeyman** as a trusted American spy over a four (4) year period who would mysteriously pop – up, during moments of peril for Gen. Washington's Army before *fading away* is simply, illogical. Nonetheless, the *American Heroes Channel* announced that **John Honeyman's double agent role** assumingly to deliver misinformation to Col. Rall's post before the battle of Trenton, is no less significant for the survival of Commander – in – Chief Gen. Washington and his American Army's on Dec. 25th, 1776 than overnight on Aug. 29th 1775 when the American Army successfully escaped from an overwhelming British force at Brooklyn and Long Island, NY, which in the end would enable the American Army's survival, re-staging to over winter in Pennsylvania and rebuilding in 1777-78 into an effective fighting command composed of Continental Army soldiers. That's one hick of a "historic" claim, if you buy it!

When, I further investigated the **Honeyman** -historical legend documented & posted: Jun 20, 2008 by the *Center for the Study of (American) Intelligence, Washington, DC's* online service, it characterized "The Strange Case of John Honeyman and Revolutionary War Espionage," as logically, no spy ... with key parts of his biographic legend that were historically, undocumented. However, turning to another knowledgeable source, I read excerpts from *Spies, Patriots,*

and Traitors written in 2014 by Kenneth A. Daigler and publ., by Georgetown Univ. Press.

Daigler was somewhat acquiescent in his work and viewed the spy **John Honeyman's** action, although undocumented to be quite detailed and fit well with the information known about the tactical situation at Trenton before the battle. Still in the opinion of many, including me -there hardly is enough proof of Honeyman's role before the battle of Trenton and any American intelligence contribution.³

Unfortunately, Col. Johann Rall's authoritative contribution could be neither recorded nor written as he was killed in action during the battle at Trenton and allegedly an informant's note was found in a pocket by Patriots!

In all foreign counterintelligence gathering matters involving a lack of substantive proof, speculation and innuendo, it is wise never to *gamble unless you were commanding the situation and present to make a judgement call*. Yet nagging at me, is a lack of determination for the record of payment to John Honeyman by Gen. Washington or a trusted American officer including Capt. Alexander Hamilton. Did Honeyman sell to the Hessians and British so many livestock & cattle to continue his welcome for several years to come in a theater of war, one also might ask. There are too many unanswered questions for Patriot historians, yet by common law of New Jersey, an argument exists that Honeyman was certainly a military fugitive.

¹ *1776* Copyright 2005 by David McCullough publ., by Simon & Schuster, New York, N.Y.

² *Trenton And Princeton 1776-77 –Washington crosses the Delaware* illustrated by Graham Turner 1st published in Great Britain in 2009 by Osprey Publ., Ltd., Midland House, Oxford, UK & 443 Park Ave., South, New York, NY; Orders of Battle of Trenton, Dec 22, 1776, pgs 19-20, 43, [45-6, British informer, report of the discussion of Washington's Dec 22 war council, message sent to (British) Col. Johann G. Rall].

³ *Spies, Patriots, And Traitors –American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War* published at Washington, DC, Georgetown Univ., Press, pgs.128-30 & 244