

## MOSES HOUGH'S 12 MONTHS OF ACTIVE DUTY

Moses Hough was born 6/16/1759 in Somerset County, NJ, near Neshanic Station and the Raritan River. He died 3/4/1836 in Spencer Co., KY. Moses volunteered during June of 1777, at age 17, for service in the New Jersey militia. He served 12 months on active duty and was not mustered out of service for nearly two years after entering. Moses spent the second year of his service irregularly, sometimes on duty and sometimes at home, but always under command of his officers. He never received a written discharge.

Moses Hough served in a regiment under General Washington in one unit on the front near British lines in and about Brunswick, Morristown, Hackensack, South Amboy, Newark and Monmouth. While giving testimony in Taylorsville in 1832, he particularly remembered June 28, 1778, during the Battle of Monmouth, as being exceedingly hot and that he was marched (about 10 miles) to Hightstown the same evening after the battle, completing his 12 months of active duty.

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775, it was thought the militias could handle most defense needs of the colonies. The Colonies didn't like the idea of a large standing army. It was expected that the militias would fight like Continental regulars and be able to stand against the British forces. It turned out that the largely untrained militias couldn't begin to fulfill all the expectations. Nevertheless, the New Jersey militia activities were a vital part of the war effort.

Approximately 50,000 New Jersey males 16-50 years old were of military age in 1776. Of that number, 5,000 were pacifist Quakers and not liable for duty, and roughly 2,000 went to sea as privateers. About 25,000 able-bodied men were available to serve in the militia.

Early on, New Jersey formed 10 battalions of minutemen, each with 10 companies of 64 privates, totaling 6,400 privates plus an undetermined number of officers. These minutemen served alternately four months active duty and four months inactive. Somerset County formed 5 companies.

About mid-1776, New Jersey formed 26 regiments (each with 10 companies of 60-80 men) of regular militia totaling 15,600 to 20,800 men. Somerset County formed 2 of those regiments and Moses Hough was among them.

The British captured Staten Island, Long Island and Manhattan Island in the summer of 1776. Thereafter, New Jersey became the target of foraging expeditions, raids and invasions. All the British food and animal fodder had to be bought or taken locally, and it was the minutemen's duty (at that particular time of the war) to stop the "London Trade," the raids, and the pillaging.

Additionally, they and the militia had the duty of helping control the large Tory population still loyal to the crown by helping to enforce the "Treason Acts," keeping the roads safe and passable, guarding posts and positions, and hunting down brigands when a county sheriff needed help.

British troops and their hired soldiers, the Hessians, followed Washington in 1776 as he retreated westward across New Jersey. The British commander, General Howe, had ordered no looting (a standard of European warfare). He also issued "protection papers" to hundreds of New York and New Jersey men who swore loyalty to the crown. Looting, pillaging, destruction, and rape occurred anyway because the Hessians couldn't read English. The British troops, feeling

left out, soon joined in the looting and wasting. No Patriot, Tory, or neutral was safe in his/her home.

Many American colonists now turned permanently against the crown, the New Jersey militia (without uniforms) was formed about this time, and small groups of the militia employed guerilla tactics, attacking small British and Hessian parties, riders, and couriers. They were afraid to face the British regulars without the support of the Continental army, but were willing on occasion to attack at opportune moments.

British casualties began to mount. Finally, on December 12, 1776, General Howe issued the following order: *“Small straggling parties, not dressed like Soldiers and without Officers, not being admissible in War, who presume to Molest or fire upon Soldiers, or peaceable Inhabitants of the Country, will be immediately hanged without Tryal or Assasins.”*

Washington retreated across the Delaware River on December 8, 1776, and enlistments for most of his Continental soldiers were to expire at the end of December. Remaining was a cadre of Continental regulars, and thousands of New Jersey militia, to form Washington’s army. They fought a partisan war against the British during the 1777 winter until his army was reformed in the spring.

Following Washington’s surprise early morning December 26, 1776 victory at the Battle of Trenton, New Jersey, and his retreat back across the Delaware River, Washington expected a strong British counterattack. He decided to meet this attack in the vicinity of Trenton.

On December 30 he again crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey and, over the next few days, massed his troops on higher ground south of Trenton across Assunpink Creek, which ran through Trenton.

After a long march from Princeton to Trenton on January 2, British General Cornwallis and his army encountered the Americans. Although small groups of the New Jersey militia had successfully slowed Cornwallis’ march that day, his force arrived en masse late in the afternoon. The two armies were facing each other with only the creek and the bridge separating them.

Cornwallis ordered an assault. Cannon and rifle fire erupted from Washington’s side and, after fierce fighting left heavy British and Hessian casualties. The bridge held, darkness fell, and Cornwallis withdrew. Many British soldiers were captured from the bridge, ending the Second Battle of Trenton.

Washington’s army built up their campfires that night before sneaking his army away after midnight and marching around Cornwallis, planning to attack the British in Princeton. To help disguise the sounds of his march, Washington had left a token force to build fortifications as though they were planning to defend the creek. The British heard the building activity but Cornwallis believed the Americans were planning an early morning attack. He ordered the British troops into defensive positions, unknowingly allowing the Americans to successfully march around him.

Cornwallis had left 1,400 troops in Princeton under British Colonel Mawhood on January 2. Washington attacked and defeated these British troops in the January 3 Battle of Princeton, and had departed before Cornwallis had arrived from Trenton with reinforcements. After the battle Washington’s army marched north, paralleling the Millstone River, to Somerset Court House (known today as Millstone). The next day they marched to Morristown to spend the 1777 winter.

Meanwhile, on January 20 a British foraging party of a few hundred men marched from New Brunswick to Somerset Court House, reaching Van Nest’s Mill (present day Manville). After seizing flour and livestock the British set up defenses, including 3 cannons, along the

Millstone River. The New Jersey militia posted in the area waded the cold, waste deep, river and surprised the British party and took back the supplies.

General Dickinson, commander of the New Jersey militia, reported on January 23: *“I have the pleasure to inform you that on Monday last with about 450 men chiefly our militia I attacked a foraging party near V. Nest Mills consisting of 500 men with 2 field pieces, which we routed after an engagement of 20 minutes and brought off 107 horses, 49 wagons, 115 cattle, 70 sheep, 40 barrels of flour – 106 bags and many other things, 49 prisoners.”*

After that, instead of resting and repairing during the 1777 winter, the British sent out larger forces of 1000-1500 soldiers into the New Jersey countryside to set up outposts and forage food, fodder and firewood, make large patrols, and to man outposts. Small and large New Jersey militia units (some with Continental regular support, some without) haunted and exploited the enemy flanks and outposts by attacking, retreating, and attacking again. The militia companies needed only to gather on occasion to have the enemy constantly harassed.

These New Jersey militia actions occurred very frequently through the winter, leading British General Howe to abandon plans to try for Philadelphia by marching overland.

In June 1777 the British moved out of New Brunswick to Hillsborough, attempting to draw Washington into an open field battle. He remained in the Watchung Mountains north of Somerville and Bound Brook, but kept the New Jersey militia active harassing the enemy.

After the British had retreated to Staten Island, most of the New Jersey militia was left to defend the colony without the help of the Continental army. Pennsylvania and Delaware militias had been sent in August to assist the Continentals in the defense of Philadelphia. Some New Jersey militiamen, including Moses Hough, were sent north to help the New York militia defend the New York Highlands, not far from the New Jersey/New York line and Bergen County New Jersey.

Although war weariness was starting to set in, the entire New Jersey militia, including Moses, responded strongly when the British made a large raid in September into Hackensack and Bergen County.

Washington’s army arrived at Valley Forge in December 1777. Contrary to what many Americans today have been led to believe, *“the winter of 1778 was generally moderate. The log huts the soldiers built were nice and warm and supplies were available, although the food was often monotonous.”*

In May 1778, after having invaded Philadelphia by sea and the Delaware River, the new British commander, General Clinton, was facing a war with France. He decided it was prudent to protect New York City and Florida and sent 3,000 troops by sea to protect Florida. On June 18 the British began to evacuate Philadelphia, marching across New Jersey to New York City. There were 11,000 troops, 1,000 loyalists, and a baggage train 12 miles long.

The New Jersey militia began harassing the enemy – burning bridges, felling trees across roads, muddying water wells, attacking their flanks, and snapping at their heels. The weather was hot and wet, and traveling was hard, muddy work. They advanced only 40 miles the first week. The Hessians suffered most – they carried heavy backpacks and many fell from the heat, others deserted.

Although the Americans (after the 1778 winter at Valley Forge) were now much better trained and equipped (thanks to Von Steuben), and had almost the same number of troops as the enemy, they could not afford to lose a major engagement.

Washington held a war council. General Charles Lee advised to await developments – he didn’t want to commit the army against the famous ability of the British regulars. Lee had more

experience than Washington and had influence on all the officers, and Washington had a tendency to defer to Lee against his own judgment. A majority of the officers voted not to engage the retreating enemy in an all out assault.

In spite of General Lee and the council's vote, Washington determined the British were vulnerable to attack as they were spread out with their baggage train. Washington and his army departed Valley Forge with haste for New Jersey, moving quickly in pursuit of the British. On June 23 and 25 the army encamped at Hopewell, New Jersey, and Washington again called a council of war. Incredibly, most of the officers voted not to attack while the British were vulnerable.

Washington decided to compromise and have an advance corps engage the enemy. Being the senior officer, General Lee was offered the job. Lee refused and didn't want to attack, thinking the Americans couldn't stand against British regulars. Washington then offered the job to Lafayette and he accepted. Washington, having already ordered New Jersey militia and Colonel Morgan's rifle regiment onto General Clinton's flanks, ordered Lafayette (with Generals Scott and Maxwell) to move up near the British.

General Lee then changed his mind, believing he should command a mission of this size. Washington allowed Lee to take over command of the advance corps, adding to it the brigades of Generals Wayne and Poor. This made a total of 6,000 men for an attack on the British rear column. Washington would support him with the main army.

Lee and his advance corps were next to the British on June 27. Washington ordered Lee to attack the next day, stating that he would support Lee with the main army. General Lee did nothing to prepare for the attack, telling his generals that he would wait to make plans when he encountered the enemy and learned their situation. Lee did not issue orders to General Dickinson and his New Jersey militia, which included Moses Hough, or to Colonel Morgan and his rifle regiment. Neither did Lee gather information on the British or look at any maps.

On June 28, General Dickinson reported that his New Jersey militia was engaged with the British, and that the enemy seemed to be falling back. General Lee was moving forward slowly, having failed to gather data on the terrain or the enemy position. He then began receiving reports that conflicted – the British were moving out, the British were preparing to attack – and was annoyed with his lack of intelligence about the enemy, which he had failed to order gathered. The British indeed were falling back, moving their baggage, and preparing to attack with the rear guard, but General Lee couldn't get reports that clearly stated these moves.

Finally, Lee got a mental picture of the enemy placements and ordered units to move to the left and to the right to cut off the enemy's rear guard and capture them. The units marched out to the flanks, but received no further orders. General Wayne, in the center, was ordered by Lee to feint an attack. What General Lee wanted was for Wayne to hold the rear guard while he encircled them, but Lee never informed his generals about his plan.

British General Clinton figured Lee planned to capture and plunder his baggage train and in response to the American flanking units, Clinton attacked what he thought was Lee's main column, which actually was Lee's right flank. Clinton sent more men to reinforce the rear guard and make the attack.

The British moves disrupted Lee's plan to isolate and destroy the rear guard, threatening his right flank. General Lee ordered Lafayette to reinforce the right flank. As Lafayette was following Lee's order, the British opened on them with cannon. Lee began sending some of his men into the village of Monmouth to avoid the cannon fire.

Lee's left flank units saw what seemed to be a retreat in the center as General Wayne's men took cover, and at the same time General Oswald's artillery unit moved to the rear as they were running out of ammunition. The left flank units moved back since they had no orders, and failed to inform Lee of their movements or send word for orders, although they did ask some of Lee's aides if they had orders for them.

Seeing the left flank withdraw, Lee ordered the right flank to withdraw, and a very confused retreat began. The entire advance corps was now falling back. Lee made no orders and no one understood why they were retreating. Lee thought he was saving the advance corps by moving them out of harms way. Lafayette sent for Washington to come forward.

Washington sent an order to Lee for a report, and Lee responded that he was "doing well enough." Not in any way satisfied, Washington moved forward, finding the roads crowded with retreating troops. He dispatched aides to determine the cause, but they could see no reason for the retreat. The troops reported that Lee ordered the retreat.

Washington found Lee riding down the road and in an annoyed manner asked Lee for the meaning of the retreat. Lee, who believed he had saved the advanced corps by retreating, was confused by Washington's brusque manner and said, "Sir...Sir?" Washington repeated the question. Lee stammered some excuses about his orders not being followed, and again said that Americans were not able to stand against the British. Enraged, Washington said, "Sir, they are able, and by God they shall do it."

General Washington rode to the rear of the retreating troops, as the advance corps was filing across a bridge over a ravine, His aides reported the British were within a few minutes of reaching the retreating column. Seeing the corps endangered, he ordered some troops into blocking positions, then ordered them to hold the British advance while the rest of the corps crossed the bridge. The blocking units put up a stiff resistance until the troops were safely across and support troops were in position behind them, then under pressure made a fighting withdrawal to safety.

Washington began to order his troops into a strong defensive line, using some of the exhausted advance corps. Riding all over the battlefield, under fire, he was able to reverse the flow of events. He ordered units into action and they moved with precision, shifting like the trained troops Von Steuben had made them while encamped at Valley Forge. The best of the British attacked repeatedly as the Americans shuffled into line and as the Americans held, sometimes falling back but always under control.

Lee, finding Washington was issuing orders, failed to do anything, thinking himself relieved. As the advance corps was coming across the bridge, Washington ordered General Lee to position troops to defend the line. Lee did nothing, issued no orders. Some of the retreating men, full of fight yet exhausted from the heat and humidity, left the retreating column and formed with Washington. As the last of the retreating advance corps was brought safely across the bridge, Lee (the last man across) reported to Washington for orders. He told Lee to take his troops to Englishtown Creek, far to the rear, and setup.

Forces were brought forward and positioned by Washington. Through the rest of the day the Americans held the best of British forces. As dusk fell, Washington had fresh troops ready to attack around the British flanks, but they had to hold due to loss of daylight.

At 10:00 pm General Clinton ordered his troops to follow the baggage train. As the moon set about 11:00 pm, they sneaked quietly off to protect their baggage, abandoning personal goods and weapons, and leaving their dead and some of the worst wounded soldiers behind.

During battle, a woman known today as “Molly Pitcher,” was a camp follower who brought water from a nearby spring to the troops. Under fire and losing men, Oswald’s artillery unit was going to fall back until she volunteered to take over the place of her wounded husband (John Hayes) at a cannon. The unit soon thereafter indeed did have to retreat. Following Hayes’ death after the war she married John McCauley, moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and died January 22, 1833.

Though Washington failed to destroy the British column, he had inflicted damage to their troops and proved that Americans can stand against British regulars, without the advantage of surprise. The British defended their baggage but were unable to defeat the Americans in open battle. The Americans claimed victory, but in reality it was a draw because the British were only defending their baggage train, not looking for a battle.

The British averaged 9 miles a day before the battle. After the battle, they covered 24 miles in one day. Both sides lost about 350 men killed, wounded or captured. Also, both sides had heavy losses due to heat exhaustion.

In the aftermath, General Lee was court-martialed, found guilty of all charges, and removed from the army for a year. He never returned to bother Washington again with either his ego or his bad advice.

The Battle of Monmouth, on June 28, 1778, was the longest and last major battle fought between the two main armies in New Jersey. After this, the fighting involved large secondary forces as the war shifted to the southern colonies. The end of this battle also ended Moses Hough’s 12 months of active duty.

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