

John Glover, the Man Who Saved the Revolution

John Glover is most often remembered in connection with the Battle of Brooklyn and the Crossing of the Delaware. But none of his actions were quite so brave or daring as those he undertook at Pell's Point.

Congress had ordered George Washington to hold New York City: easier said than done. After the forced retreat that followed the Battle of Brooklyn, Washington did his best to strengthen his position in the city, though he wisely kept his escape routes open. Then, on September 15, 1776, British General Howe landed with 12,000 men in lower Manhattan. The Continental troops, outnumbered two to one, retreated to Harlem, joining the rest of their army. Howe took the city unopposed.

Harlem Heights provided a brief respite for the Continentals. When the British attacked, the Yankees fended them off—their first victory in a long while. As he had done at Brooklyn, Howe decided to flank the American position rather than break through their fortifications. Here Howe made a blunder, landing on an island he mistook for a peninsula. This bought the Americans some time. Washington caught wind of the upcoming attack and decided to move his army to White Plains. As that retreat was getting underway, the British moved in, landing at nearby Pell's Point.

Watching from a hilltop on Pell's Point, John Glover saw enemy ships clogging the East River. He later wrote: "Oh! the anxiety of mind I was then in. . . . [M]y country . . . appeared to be at stake." His brigade numbered 843 against the enemy's 4,000. "I would have given a thousand worlds," Glover lamented, "to have had some experienced general . . . tell me what to do."

Glover was resourceful, making use of what was at hand: a short stone wall lining the road. He spaced four regiments behind the wall, masterfully maximizing whatever slight advantage in position there was to gain. He then took a small skirmishing force to meet the British. After exchanging shots, Glover fell back. The enemy, reinforced and overconfident, pushed forward, falling directly into Glover's trap. With

their foes in range, the first regiment popped up from behind the wall and poured a terrible raking of fire into the British forces from the right. The surprised British fell back, but soon returned with additional reinforcements. This time, however, they were stopped by a fierce volley on their left from the second regiment. After an hour of heavy fighting, the British overcame their lines and rushed forward. Again they were halted, this time by the guns of the third regiment reinforced by the first.

The fighting was severe. Again and again the Americans were slowly driven back, only to find a new spot along the wall to begin their onslaught afresh. At nightfall, the British finally fell back. Howe, surprised by the fierce persistence of Glover and his men, and noting the stone wall lining the road for miles, dared not continue, and would not attempt to move forward for another eight days.

Had it not been for John Glover, the British would easily have caught up to the slow-moving, downtrodden Continental Army, which would have spelled the end of the Revolution. Glover was brave in the face of terrible odds, resourceful in the most barren of circumstances, and dutiful to his country in the hardest of times, exemplifying what it is to be American.

(500 words)

Works Cited

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