

Recollections of the Battle of Red Bank

from the diary of

Captain Johann Ewald Hessian Soldier

October 21, 1777 and October 22, 1777

Experience the Real War for Independence

Excerpt from "The Diary of the American War - a Hessian Journal" by Captain Johann Ewald

October 21st 1777

About three o'clock in the morning the Jager Corps marched to Cooper's Ferry on the Delaware. The Corps crossed the Delaware in flatboats with the three Hessian grenadier battalions and landed about eight o'clock in the Province of Jersey.

I had the advanced guard with sixty jagers, followed by the Corps, the Minnigerode battalion, the Mirbach Regiment, two 6-pounders, two howitzers, the Lengerke and Linsing battalions, and Captain Lorey with twenty mounted jagers. This corps, under Colonel Donop, was ordered to seize by force Fort Red Bank through which the garrison on Mud Island maintained its communication with the main land. Colonel Donop had volunteered for this expedition.



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This corps was still less than a half an hour away from the Delaware when it ran into an enemy party in the vicinity of Newton Township, which withdrew over Cooper's Bridge toward Burlington.

I pursued it up to the end of a wood, where I discovered several hundred men on both sides of Cooper's Creek, with whom I skirmished until about four o'clock in the afternoon, after which time they withdrew. The colonel, who continued his march with the corps, had ordered me to occupy myself with the enemy until nightfall, and then to follow the corps to Haddonfield. He wanted to mislead the enemy and conceal his march. At eight o'clock in the evening I arrived at Haddonfield, where I found the corps encamped in a quadrangle on the heights.



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October 22nd 1777

On the morning of the 22d about four o'clock, the corps marched toward Red Bank in the same formation as yesterday with the slight difference that I formed the rear guard with my company.

About nine o'clock we crossed the pass over Timber Creek which has very marshy banks. A dam of several hundred paces extends across the creek on which there are two wooden bridges. Two small plantations are situated on this and the other side. I was surprised that we did not leave here at least one jager company to retain the mastery of this pass since, after all, the success of our expedition was not yet assured. To be sure, there were the two battalions of light infantry ready for the Jersey post at Cooper's Ferry, but they could not help much if Washington had gotten wind of this expedition, passed a strong corps across the Delaware, and stationed it at Timber Creek.



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About one o'clock in the afternoon the corps arrived in a wood which encircled the left side of the fort at rifle-shot distance to the left bank of the Delaware. In this wood a captain and six men from the garrison of the fort fell into the hands of Captain Wreden, who had the advanced guard. They had been ordered to get fresh meat at a plantation and knew nothing of our approach.

The entire corps remained in column on the road in the wood. The men were permitted to sit down and told to eat, but since this day was not bread or provisions day, very few had any bread to break or bite. The officers, especially, were not provided with anything. I had to march with the rear guard to the head of the corps.



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During this time Colonel Donop, along with Colonel Stuart (who accompanied this expedition as a volunteer), Major Pauli and Captain Krug of the Hessian artillery had already reconnoitered the fort when I reached the corps. As soon as I arrived, the colonel ordered me to inspect the fort and to give him my opinion. I approached the fort up to rifle-shot range and found that it was provided with a breastwork twelve feet high palisaded and dressed with assault stakes.

After a lapse of a half an hour, Colonel Stuart returned with the following reply: "Colonel Greene, who commands the fort, sends his compliments and he shall await Colonel Donop



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After this news, which the colonel did not expect, a hundred fascines were made at once by the battalions, and a battery of six regimental piece [3-pounders], two 6-pounders and the howitzers were mounted in the wood at rifle-shot distance from the fort.

The Linsing Battalion was to make the attack against the left, the Regiment von Mirbach against the center, and the Minnigerode Battalion on the bastion to the left at the Delaware. The Lengerke Battalion was stationed at the Delaware to cover the rear against an enemy landing. One hundred men from each battalion were to carry the fascines and march in a line at a distance of two hundred paces in front of the battalion. With these the ditch was to be filled, crossed, and the fort scaled with sword in hand.

I placed sixteen good marksmen at the edge of the wood in the vicinity of the battery, who were to shoot at those men who showed themselves on the parapet.



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The battery began to play, and the three battalions advanced against the fort with indescribable courage. But they were received so hotly by the garrison, and by the vessels which had moved into position during the summons to rake the fort's flank, that they were repelled with great loss, although several officers and a number of grenadiers scaled the breastwork.

Colonel Donop himself and his adjutant, Captain Wagner, were mortally wounded at the edge of the ditch. Captain Stanford, who commanded the Linsing Battalion, was shot through the chest; Minnigerode through both legs; and the gallant Colonel Schieck, who commanded the Regiment von Mirbach, was shot dead at the barred gate. Night ended the battle, and the attacking corps reassembled at the spot from which it had departed for the attack.



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Colonel Wurmb immediately ordered the Jager Corps to move up to the edge of the wood to cover the retreat. He personally took the Grenadier Battalion Lengerke, which had protected the rear in case an enemy party had landed from the ships, and hurried with the battalion to the pass of the Timber Creek bridge to occupy it.

Since we had flattered ourselves in advance with a successful surrender, no retreat then was thought of, and no wagons brought to transport the wounded. The seriously wounded officers were carried on the guns and horses, and all the privates who could not drag themselves away on their wounded limbs fell into enemy hands. But since the enemy took the retreat for a trap, and had expected a new attack during the night, the men had to remain on the battlefield a whole night in the most deplorable condition without the slightest care, whereby the majority died of their wounds.



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About midnight the entire corps arrived on the other side of Timber Creek, where arrangements were made at once to obtain wagons for transporting the wounded officers to Philadelphia. At eight o'clock in the morning the corps set out again, and crossed the Delaware during the night. The three grenadier battalions moved into cantonment quarters on the outskirts of Philadelphia; the Mirbach Regiment joined the line of the army; and the Jager Corps returned to its post at the Morris house, where it arrived after midnight.

The loss in dead consisted of:

Regiment von Mirbach: Colonel Schieck, Captain Bogatsky,
Lieutenant Riemann, Lieutenant Wurmb

Grenadier Battalion Linsing: Lieutenant du Puy, Lieutenant Groening

Grenadier Battalion Minnigerode: Lieutenant Hille, Lieutenant

Offenbach and 143 noncommissioned officers and privates



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The wounded consisted of: Colonel Donop, right leg shot apart; Captain Wagner, both legs shot to pieces; Colonel Minnigerode, shot through both legs; Captain Stamford, shot through the chest and right leg. Captain Wachs, through the right leg,; Captain Hendorff, in the arm; Captain Schotten, right arm shot off; Lieutenant Rodemann, through the left leg; Lieutenant Waitz, through the neck and in the head; Lieutenant Rieffer, left foot smashed; Lieutenant Berner, right leg shot to pieces; Lieutenant Gottschall, right knee smashed; Lieutenant Heymel, in the left knee; and 253 noncommissioned officers and privates, of whom not thirty men are convalescing.

This day was especially sad for me. I lost five of my oldest friends, among whom was a relative, and four of my best friends were severely wounded. As long as I have served, I have not yet left a battlefield in such deep sorrow.



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