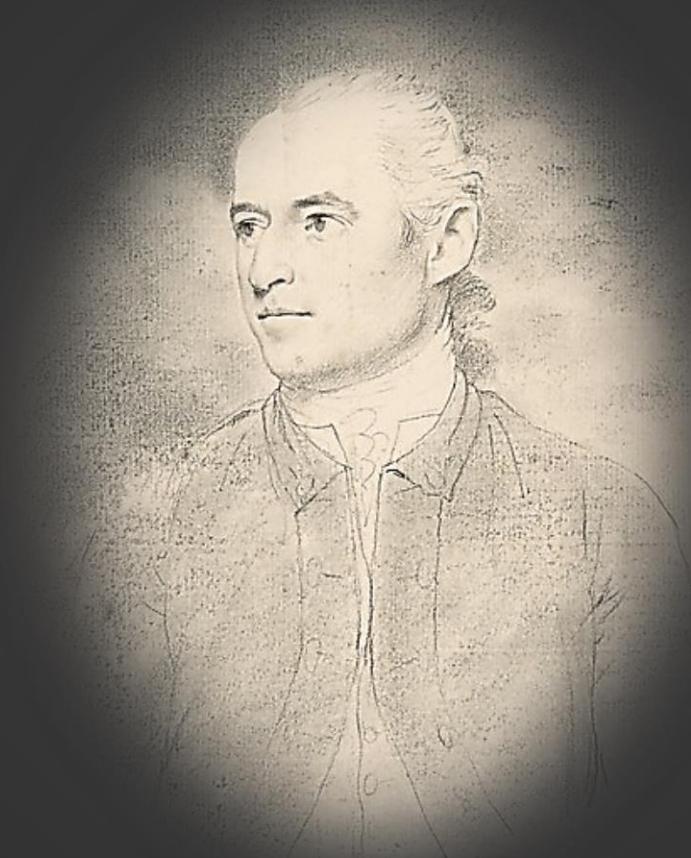


# **Recollections of the Battle of Red Bank**

**Excerpts from the diary of**



**Captain Frances Downman  
British Officer - Royal Artillery**



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**October 20<sup>th</sup>** – This morning about 4 o'clock a firing of cannon and musketry was heard near Gloucester Point. We roused all hands up and went to our batteries in town along the shore. We heard a number of boats rowing. We thought the galley's were coming to fire on the Town, and just before daylight they came within hail of our sentry.

This morning Major Farrington came to me from Brigadier General Cleaveland to request that I would take command of two 5 1/2 inch howitzers ordered for immediate service. I was not ordered, he said, but the general hoped I would go as the service required a good officer. Ha! Ha! Ha! They were to be ready to embark at 4 o'clock in the morning. I had everything ready by 3 o'clock. The morning rainy and very cold at first, but cleared up as the day advanced.

**October 21<sup>st</sup>** – Three battalions of Hessian grenadiers, one ditto Minigerode, one ditto Mirbach, with 3 pounder guns, and myself with the two howitzers, began to embark in the flat-bottomed boats and other craft from the wharf at the upper end of the town, and crossed over to the Jersey side, landing without the least opposition. The whole were commanded by Colonel Donop. We began our march as soon as the last artillery were over, and about 8 o'clock at night we came to Haddonfield, where we remained till 4 o'clock the next morning.

**October 22<sup>nd</sup>** – We again set forward and only had a few popping shots between this place and Red Bank where the rebels have raised a strong fort with cannon. It is absolutely necessary that we be in possession of this fort for it not only protects their vessels, but also would annoy our shipping very much in passing whenever we are lucky enough to get over their chevaux-de-fries, and it likewise commands Mud Island, so that should we take Mud Island, unless we had this fort, also we should be very much disturbed by it. For these reasons General Howe ordered a detachment to storm it.



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Colonel Donop asked to be employed for this service, which was granted him, and myself and men were the only English on this duty. We arrived before the place about 1 o'clock; at noon we examined it, and saw the rebels at work which showed that the fort was not finished, or they were adding something to it on hearing we were near them. I think, therefore, we should have stormed it directly without the least loss of time as it was to be done in daylight, but instead of an immediate attack, we did not begin until 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

The advancing of the troops was preceded by a brisk and close fire of all our artillery which continued some little time. Colonel Donop then ordered the whole to cease, and called to his troops to advance. They did so with a quantity of facines to fill up the ditch in front of the fort. Then began a very hot and close fire from the rebels, both of cannon and musketry which was kept up without intermission from the time our troops advanced till they retreated again.

It is hard to say what was the cause of this attempt failing, but so it did, and whether from inability of the troops to fill up the ditch and mount the breastwork, from the loss of Colonel Donop and the number of officers at the first onset, or from being flanked by the row galleys with grape shot, whether from being tired from the march, or from want of spirit and activity to push forward over those who were killed and wounded in the front, is what I shall not presume to determine. It is enough to say that we were obliged to retire, and that in much confusion for by this time it was quite dark.

We retired about a mile all in a bustle and disorder, then stopped about an hour or so to get the troops disposed into some order, and to collect the wounded and carry them in the best way we could, for not a wagon was thought of, and had it not been for the ammunition wagons a number must have been left behind.



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This night's march was as melancholy and as disagreeable a one as ever I experienced; it was dark and excessively cold; the roads were deep and narrow and enclosed with wood; we lost our way twice and had to turn about with guns and wagons in the narrow road; the very worst of all maneuvers. The horses were very bad and almost tired out, the drivers were a set of scoundrels. Add to this the groans of the wounded; the idea of being attacked in the rear by a sally from the fort while pent up in a road where we could not possibly make use of our cannon, and the probability of an encounter in front or flanks, for until day appeared we had no flanking parties out. We were lucky in meeting with no molestation except a few shot that did no harm.

About daylight of the 23<sup>rd</sup> we repassed Haddonfield and continued our march to the ferry opposite Philadelphia where we arrived about 11 o'clock in the morning, so that, between 4 o'clock in the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 11 o'clock in the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, we had marched about 42 miles, and been well thrashed into the bargain, so much for storming.

I crossed the river and went home most heartily tired and very low spirited, for the rebels not only gained the advantage on shore, but they have had the satisfaction of seeing the Augusta, a 64 gun ship, and the Merlin sloop blown up today. This fatal accident I was told was owing to their running aground or upon the chevaux-de-fries in attempting to pass them, the galleys keeping a constant fire upon them the whole time. I have not heard what number of men were killed or wounded in the storm, or what number the men-of-war lost.

**October 24<sup>th</sup>** – I am informed today that the Hessians had about 400 killed and wounded, and that Colonel Donop is not dead but very badly wounded and prisoner. A great loss for he is a brave and good officer. A great many Hessian officers suffered in the attack.