



Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site

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Pell's Point: The Battle That Saved Washington's Army

Pell's Point was an important, but often overlooked, Revolutionary War battle fought about a mile from St. Paul's Church National Historic Site on October 18, 1776. A small American force, under the command of Colonel John Glover, held off a large British-Hessian army, under the command of General Sir William Howe, long enough to allow George Washington's army to re-deploy from northern Manhattan to White Plains.

The Battle of Pell's Point was part of the New York area campaigns of August through December 1776. This series of battles matched the largest armies of the war in engagements that determined the survival of the American independence movement. In the summer, the British, with their hired Hessian (German) allies, defeated Washington's forces at battles in Brooklyn and Manhattan. It was only Washington's ability to direct timely retreats, and General Howe's unwillingness to aggressively pursue the colonials, that saved the Americans from total destruction. By late September, Washington's forces were pinned at Harlem Heights in northern Manhattan, with the British army in front and the British navy patrolling the Hudson River.

In mid October, General Howe began a flanking movement that brought the war to Westchester County. Leaving behind a holding force in Manhattan, Howe transported about 4,000 troops, mostly Hessians, up the East River toward Long Island Sound, for a landing at Throg's Neck, part of the Bronx today. Howe's goal was to cut off the American supply line, which ran over the King's Bridge from Manhattan onto the mainland, and along the Post Road into Connecticut. The British commander also hoped to draw Washington out into a general engagement, or to smash the Americans from the right flank while the holding force launched a frontal assault.

Aware that the enemy was landing at his rear, Washington stationed troops at key points. While he thought the stone fences and the marshy land made the approaches to his position defensible, the commanding general, fearing entrapment, made the important decision to withdraw from northern Manhattan to Westchester. That movement, which put the main American army in a vulnerable position, began on October 18.

On October 12, the British force landed at Throg's Neck, a marshy peninsula, which was actually not part of the mainland. Marching westward toward the King's Bridge, Howe's troops were held off by a small group (about 25) of American riflemen at a bridge near Westchester Square. Today, this is the site of Herbert Lehman High School, along the Hutchinson River Parkway.

Early on the morning of October 18, Howe began another amphibious operation, transporting his forces around Throg's Neck to Pell's Point, about three miles further north, at the mouth of the Hutchinson River. Another contingent marched overland from Westchester Square, and were ferried across Eastchester Bay, at the site of today's Co-Op City. Two experienced British officers, Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis, directed the landing. The attacking force of approximately 4,000 included four Hessian regiments (about 3,000), along with

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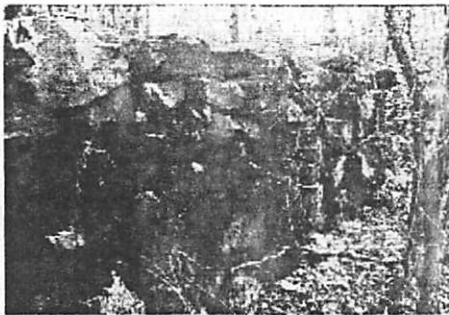
British light infantry, grenadiers and light dragoons. The landing, on a beachhead at what is today Pelham Bay Park, achieved complete surprise, and was largely unopposed. It was the first British invasion of the American mainland. While Lord Cornwallis led troops to the right on a flanking move, most of the invaders, led by a British light infantry company, marched up the Shore Road, and veered onto Split Rock Road.

Opposing the Crown forces were four regiments (about 750 soldiers) from Massachusetts, under the immediate command of Colonel Glover. Using St. Paul's Church as a staging ground and hospital, Glover's forces were arrayed on the west side of Hutchinson River, at today's Glover's field. Rising on the morning of October 18, Glover climbed a hill and, with his spyglass, spotted the British forces moving into Eastchester Bay.

The colonel from Marblehead quickly moved his troops to check the British. He stationed his riflemen, at staggered intervals, behind stone walls that bordered the Split Rock Road. This provided fine cover and secrecy, and the Americans were able to get off numerous musket volleys at close range against the surprised Crown troops. After those volleys, the Americans withdrew to join the hidden riflemen stationed at the next interval, where the same pattern was repeated. The fiercest fighting of the day took place around the Split Rock, located near the intersection of the New England Thruway and the Hutchinson River Parkway.

As more Crown troops were brought into the fray, Glover's position became untenable. In addition, around noon, Cornwallis completed his flanking movement on the right, and the Americans faced possible envelopment. Sensing this, Glover ordered a withdrawal, across the Hutchinson River, and then a re-deployment north along the Post Road to Tuckahoe. There was no British effort to pursue the Americans. But there was continued skirmishing in Eastchester over the next few days. On October 21, Hessian forces moved into St. Paul's Church, using it as a hospital.

Glover's Massachusetts soldiers had performed an outstanding service, inflicting dozens of casualties on the enemy, and, more importantly, giving Washington time to complete his removal to White Plains.



Recent photo of the stone walls on the Split Rock Golf Course, Pelham, Bronx, NY.