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## **CONDUCT OF SIR WILLIAM HOWE**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

**UPON THE**

**CONDUCT**

**OF**

**S-r W—M H—E**

**AT THE**

**WHITE PLAINS;  
AS RELATED IN THE GAZETTE  
OF DECEMBER 30, 1776.**

(By Israel Mauduit)

**LONDON:  
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**EDITOR'S PREFACE**

 **F** the four British commanders here during the Revolution, Howe was certainly the chief, so far as dullness amounting to apathy and slowness almost equal to immobility, went. His first experience of American determination was at Bunker's Hill; and he ever afterwards showed a wholesome respect for his opponents. On the particular event we are considering, his expedition northward from New York to White Plains in 1776, his ineptitude was so conspicuous that Israel Mauduit wrote this stinging pamphlet (now very rare) about it, in which Howe's various forms of inefficiency are so tersely and forcibly shown up. It was indeed fortunate for the patriots that a really active, energetic officer was not in command; for such a one as Simcoe or Maitland would have easily defeated them. Howe afterwards explained to Parliament his reasons for not following up his advantage at White Plains, by saying his inaction was "due to political reasons, which he could not then disclose." The fact, as it afterwards came out, was that he had received—and accepted—the treasonable offers of William Demont, the first American traitor, regarding the post of Fort Washington. By a—for him—rapid return to New York, he was thus enabled to capture Fort Washington and two thousand men. His statements as to his losses at Pell's Point are clearly untrue, as shown by the detailed accounts given in my "Battle of Pell's Point." Mauduit was probably unaware of the facts, or he would not have failed to include them in his pamphlet.

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 **S**IR W—m H—e having called for papers for the satisfaction of the public, and thereby invited us to read and attend to them, I have been accidentally led to the perusal of one of them, and here offer what has occurred upon the occasion.

The observations are confined solely to the General's and Admiral's own account. And, that the reader's mind may not be prejudiced, he is desired first to peruse the letters themselves; with Faden's and many other larger maps of New York and Long Island. The latter part of the letters, upon the taking Fort Washington, is omitted as having no relation to that subject.

THE LONDON GAZETTE  
Published by Authority

EXTRAORDINARY:  
*Monday, December 30, 1776*

*Whitehall, December 30, 1776*

This morning, Captain Gardner, one of General Sir William Howe's aids de camps, arrived in his Majesty's ship *Tamar* from New York, with the following dispatches from General Sir William Howe to Lord George Germain:

MY LORD, *New York, November 30, 1776.*

The service in which I have been employed since the departure of Captain Balfour with advice of the reduction of New York, would not allow of an earlier time to send an account to your Lordship

of the progress made from that period.

The very strong positions the enemy had taken on this island and fortified with incredible labour determined me to get upon their principal communication with Connecticut, with a view of forcing them to quit the strongholds in the neighborhood of King's Bridge, and if possible bring them to action. All previous arrangements having been made, the army embarked on the 12th of October, in flat boats and other craft, and passing through the dangerous navigation of Hell Gate in a very thick fog, landed on Frog's Neck, near the town of West Chester, about nine in the morning, the *Carysfort* being placed to cover the descent. The presence of Lord Howe, the activity of Commodore Hotham, most of the Captains of the fleet, and of the navy officers in general, were infinitely conducive to the King's service in this difficult movement; only one artillery boat was overset, having three six-pounders on board, which were lost, and three men drowned.

Lieutenant-General Earl Percy remained with two brigades of British and one of the Hessians in the lines near Haerlem, to cover New York.

The army remained in this situation until the stores and provisions could be brought up, and three battalions of Hessians drawn from Staten Island, which, together with some bad weather intervening, caused a delay of five days. On the 18th several corps re-embarked in flatboats, and passing round Frog's Neck, landed on Pell's Point at the mouth of Hutchinson's River; after which the main body crossed the mouth of that river to the same place, advanced immediately and laid that night upon their arms, with the left upon a creek opposite to East Chester, and the right near to New Rochelle.

On the march to this ground, a skirmish ensued with a small party of the enemy posted to defend a narrow causeway, who were pursued for a mile, when a considerable body appearing in front, behind stone walls and in woods, some companies of light infantry and a part of the chasseurs were detached to dislodge them, which they did effectually; Lieutenant-Colonel Musgrave commanding the first battalion of light infantry, and Captain Evelyn of the Fourth regiment, were both wounded; the latter is since dead, and much to be regretted as a gallant officer; but Lieutenant-Colonel Musgrave is in a fair way of recovery; three soldiers were killed and twenty wounded; the enemy's loss upon this occasion was a Lieutenant-Colonel killed, a Major wounded, and about ninety men killed and wounded.<sup>[1]</sup>

The part of the Sixteenth Light Dragoons that arrived with Lieutenant-Colonel Harcourt on the third instant (one transport being still missing) and the whole of the Seventeenth Light Dragoons, joined the army on the 20th. On the 21st the right and centre of the army moved to a position about two miles to the northward of Rochelle, on the road to the White Plains, leaving Lieutenant-General Heister, with two brigades of Hessians and one of British, to occupy the former ground. Lieutenant-Colonel Rogers,<sup>[2]</sup> with his corps of Rangers was detached to take possession of Mamaroneck, where the carelessness of his centries exposed him to a surprize from a large body of the enemy, by which he lost a few men killed or taken; nevertheless, by a spirited exertion he obliged them to retreat, leaving behind them some prisoners and several killed and wounded.

The sixth brigade, commanded by Brigadier Agnew, was moved the 22d to sustain the post of Mamaroneck. On the same day Lieutenant-General Knyphausen, with the second division of Hessians and regiment of Waldeckers, having arrived the 18th at New York, landed at Rochelle, was ordered to remain there to cover the disembarkation of the stores and provisions. Upon the movement of the army to Frog's Neck the enemy detached a corps to White Plains, and quitted their position about King's Bridge with some precipitation, leaving two thousand men for the defence of Fort Washington, extending their force behind the Bronx, from Valentine's Hill to White Plains, in detached camps every where entrenched. Their left by this means covering an upper communication with Connecticut, as well as the road along the North River, it was judged expedient to move to White Plains and endeavour to bring them to action.

Lieutenant-General Heister, with his corps, having orders to join on the march, the army moved in two columns on the the 25th, and took a position with the Bronx in front, the right of the line being at the distance of four miles from the White Plains; upon which the rebels immediately quitted their detached camps between King's Bridge and White Plains, assembling their whole force at the latter place, behind entrenchments that had been thrown up by the advanced corps. The army marched by the right in two columns toward White Plains, early on the 28th, Lieutenant-General Clinton leading the right and Lieutenant-General Heister the left column. Before noon all the enemy's advanced parties were drove back to their works by the light infantry and chasseurs, and the army formed with the right upon the road from Mamaroneck to the White Plains about a mile from the centre of their lines; and the left to the Bronx, near the same distance from the right flank of their entrenchments. A corps of the enemy was formed on a commanding ground, separated from the right flank of their entrenchments by the Bronx, which also, by changing its course nearly at right angles, separated this corps from the left of the King's army. Colonel Raille<sup>[3]</sup> who commanded a brigade of Hessians on the left, observing this position of the enemy and seeing a height on the other side of the Bronx unoccupied by them, from which their flank might be galled, took possession of it with great alacrity, to the approbation of Lieutenant-General Heister, who was acquainted with this movement by Sir William Erskine. Upon viewing the situation, orders were given for a battalion of Hessians to pass the Bronx and attack this detached corps, supported by the second brigade of British, under the command of Brigadier-General Leslie, and the Hessian grenadiers sent from the right, commanded by Colonel

Donop; giving directions at the same time for Colonel Raille to charge the enemy's flank as the Hessian battalion advanced to them in front; but there being some difficulty in passing the Bronx the 28th and 35th regiments, who were the first to support, passed it in a place most practicable and formed on the opposite side, though under the enemy's fire, with the greatest steadiness; ascended the steep hill in defiance to all opposition, and rushing on the enemy, routed and drove them back from their works. These two battalions were closely supported by the 5th and 49th regiments, who showed the same zeal to distinguish themselves; the Hessian grenadiers also coming up and passing the Bronx, ascended the height with the greatest alacrity and in the best order.

This material post being gained the Hessian grenadiers were ordered forward upon the heights, within cannon-shot of the entrenchments, the Bronx, from its winding course, being still between them and the enemy's right flank; the second brigade of British formed in the rear of the Hessian grenadiers, and the two brigades of Hessians on the left of the 2d brigade, with their left upon the road leading from Tarrytown to White Plains.

The right and centre of the army did not remove from their ground. In this position the troops lay upon their arms that night, and with very little alteration encamped the next day. The officers and men of the British and Hessian artillery deserve much commendation for their active services on this occasion. The killed, wounded and prisoners taken from the enemy during the course of this day, is said to be not less than 250—the loss of his Majesty's troops and allies was small, as your Lordship will observe by the general return, considering the strength of the ground from whence the enemy was forced; though the loss of Lieutenant-Colonel Carr, of the 35th regiment, who died the next day of his wounds, is much to be lamented.

The enemy drew back their encampment on the night of the 28th, and observing their lines next morning much strengthened by additional works, the designed attack upon them was deferred, and the 4th brigade, left with Lord Percy, with two battalions of the 6th brigade, were ordered to join the army. These battalions having joined on the 30th in the afternoon, a disposition was made for the attack next day, but the night and morning proving very wet, it was postponed; in the meantime the rebels, having intelligence by a deserter of their danger, most prudently evacuated their camp in the night of the 1st of November, after setting fire to all the houses in and near their lines, most of which were consumed, and retired with their main force towards North Castle, leaving a strong rear guard upon the heights and in the woods for one mile back from their entrenchments, the possession of which was immediately taken, and the Hessian grenadiers remained upon the ground. All these motions plainly indicating the enemy's design to avoid coming to action, I did not think the driving their rear guard further back an object of the least consequence.

Lieutenant-General Knyphausen being ordered on the 28th of October to leave the regiment of Waldeck at Rochelle, and to move with the six battalions of his corps towards King's Bridge, took post at Mile Square and Valentine's Hill, and on the 2d of November encamped on the island of New York near to King's Bridge; the enemy quitting the heights of Fordham upon his approach retired to Fort Washington. The army was ordered out the 3d, to provide three days' forage; and the next day Major-General Grant marched with the fourth brigade to Mile Square and Valentine's Hill, the sixth brigade to a bridge over the Bronx in West Chester, near DeLancey's mills,<sup>[4]</sup> and the Waldeck regiment took post at another three miles above the former, on the same river. On the 6th the army encamped at Dobbs' Ferry, upon the North river. When this movement was made, the rebels came down from their strong holds, burning what they had not before destroyed at White Plains, and distressing the inhabitants by small parties, in a most wanton degree.

*Admiralty office,  
December 30th, 1776.*

CAPTAIN MASON, of his Majesty's sloop the *Tamar*, arrived yesterday at Dartmouth, and came to Town this morning with dispatches from Lord Viscount Howe, of which the following is a copy:

*Eagle, off New York,  
November 23, 1776.*

SIR,

The General thinking fit to move with a large part of the army to the right of the rebel forces, who were preparing to establish themselves for the winter on the heights above King's Bridge as well as on the north part of York Island, the embarkation of the troops in the flatboats and small vessels provided, was made from Kip's Bay in the night of the 11th of last month, under the direction of Commodore Hotham, with the Captains of the ships from which the boats were manned, as in the former instances; and the troops were landed in the morning on the peninsula of Frog's Neck, in the Sound, about ten miles eastward from New York, without opposition. A thick fog prevailing when the boats entered the dangerous passage through Hell Gate, every ill consequence was to be apprehended; but it fortunately happened that no other injury was sustained besides the oversetting of an artillery boat, by which accident two field pieces and three men were lost. It had been some time before resolved in order to prevent the enemy from receiving supplies by the North River, to send a detachment of ships above their works at Jefferys' Hook on York Island and the opposite shore of Jersey, between which they had been lately making fresh attempts to block the channel. Captain Parker in the *Phoenix* was again

chosen for this service, with the *Roebuck* and *Tartar*. The wind did not permit the ships to pass the enemy's works, until the 9th. By the accounts I have a few days since received from Captain Parker, I find the ships had suffered much in their masts and rigging: the loss of men, as in the enclosed return, was considerable. Of four of the enemy's galleys chased from their stations behind the lines of sunken frames and vessels placed to obstruct the passage of the river, two were taken, one mounting a thirty-two pounder with swivels, the other two nine pounders and two four pounders. The two remaining galleys, with some small vessels, being favoured by the tide and weather escaped the ships in shoal water, where they had sufficient protection from the shore, which was in the enemy's possession. The General judging it necessary to make a second movement with the troops he conducted, further to the eastward of Frog's Neck, the light infantry, grenadiers and other corps of the first embarkation were again taken into the flat bottomed boats, and landed the 18th on Pell's Neck, separated from Frog's Neck by Hutchinson's River. The rest of the army, which had only that narrow stream to pass, were conveyed over with the artillery and baggage a few hours after, and the second division of the Hessians, that came under convoy of the *Diamond* the 19th were carried up in the flatboats, and landed the 23d on Myers' Neck, the post of communication with the fleet last established, nearer to New Rochelle.

This position of the army requiring further provision to be made for keeping the intercourse open by water with York Island, the *Rose* and *Senegal* were added to the frigates and small armed vessels before stationed in the Sound for that purpose.

It is incumbent on me to represent to your Lordship on this occasion, and I cannot too pointedly express, the unabating perseverance and alacrity with which the several classes of officers and seamen of the ships of war and transports have supported a long attendance and unusual degree of fatigue consequent of these different movements of the army. Captain Phipps and the detachment of seamen under his command, who were further appointed to assist in the service of the artillery upon an emergency, have acquired much credit by their spirited conduct on that duty.

The enemy retreating on every occasion as the army advanced, were forced from the White Plains (where they seemed prepared to make some stand) into the North Castle district, and have finally retired, with the greatest part of their forces, behind the Croton River, whereby the communication was open from York Island with the continent, by King's Bridge.

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*There* is a story currently told, that when General Heister was upbraided with the loss of the Hessian brigade at Trenton, and asked how he came to trust it to such a drunken fellow as Raille, the reply made was, "Sir, if you will tell me why you would not make an end of the war at White Plains, I will then give you an answer."

Heister is dead, and I do not warrant the truth of this story: but the hearing of it led me to read over the General's account of this affair. It sets out with telling us "The very strong positions the enemy had taken on this island (of New York) and fortified with incredible labour, determined me to get upon their principal communication with Connecticut, with a view of forcing them to quit the strongholds in the neighborhood of King's Bridge and if possible, to bring them to action."

The map, or any inhabitant of New York, will inform the reader that the principal road of communication between King's Bridge and Connecticut is through New Rochelle. That the whole tract of land south and southwest of Rochelle forms a peninsula, shut up on three sides by the North River and an arm of the sea called the East River. That there were only two roads by which the rebels at King's Bridge could escape out of this peninsula; the one due north towards Canada, and the other northeast through Rochelle towards Connecticut. That White Plains lies out of this peninsula, a few miles to the northward; and that Frog's Neck is a point of land at the bottom of this peninsula, forming the southeast corner of it.

And every one must understand by these expressions, that the General meant to avail himself of the benefit of the fleet, and land at the back of the rebels upon the Connecticut road, and attack them as soon as he could. This was certainly a very wise and just measure, and so obvious an one that many people wondered he did not pursue it above a month before, when the army lay encamped at Newtown, in Long Island. He might from thence have avoided the dangerous navigation of Hell Gate, and by landing at Rochelle and taking post between that and the North River, have shut up the whole rebel army.

- [1] Compare the statement of the American commander—see my "Battle of Pell's Point." (*Editor*).
  - [2] Robert Rogers—See Heath's Memoirs for account of this affair. Page 66.
  - [3] The same who was killed at Trenton in December. (*Editor*).
  - [4] The present Williams' Bridge.
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