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Throughout the war, the British willingly used their naval superiority and experiences to maneuver their army by the sea. They did so in 1777 in their quest to take the rebel capital, Philadelphia. Using MCDP-3 as a means of analysis and a guide, this paper examines General Howe's 1777 expeditionary operation to understand why the British were not able to achieve a decisive victory through the combined efforts of their highly capable joint force. Examination of General Howe's planning efforts with London, followed by an in-depth look at operational and tactical decisions, illustrate how close and yet how far the British came to an actual significant victory.

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A Successful Failure?
The British Expeditionary Operation to take Philadelphia, 1777.

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Executive Summary

Title: A Successful Failure? The British Expeditionary Operation to take Philadelphia, 1777.

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Thesis: Following the fall of the rebels' capital, Philadelphia, in 1777, London initially viewed the expedition to take the city as an operational success, but the effort had no major adverse effect on the rebel forces nor did it create any strategic advantages for the British.

Discussion: Throughout the war, the British willingly used their naval superiority and experiences to maneuver their army by the sea. They did so in 1777 in their quest to take the rebel capital, Philadelphia. Using MCDP-3 as a means of analysis and a guide, this paper examines General Howe's 1777 expeditionary operation to understand why the British were not able to achieve a decisive victory through the combined efforts of their highly capable joint force. Examination of General Howe's planning efforts with London, followed by an in-depth look at operational and tactical decisions, illustrate how close and yet how far the British came to an actual significant victory.

Conclusion: Improper planning, combined with incorrect operational analysis and tactical missteps, illustrate an ineffective and wasteful use of expeditionary forces, resulting in strategic enemy gains - the survival of Washington's army. The British unproductive use of this type of warfare, a means used by the United States Marine Corps, is of contemporary value to all current practitioners.

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Preface

The onus for this paper began early in my first semester of Marine Corps Command and Staff college. During a seminar covering the American Revolutionary War, I realized how much I did not know about the war and its strategies and battles. Moreover, as a Philadelphian, I wanted to move past the tourist traps of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell and understand why the war moved to places near where I had grown up, such as Brandywine, Paoli, and Germantown.

As I initially researched the conflict I came across many examples of the British Army and Royal Navy working together, similar to contemporary expeditionary operations. As a Marine officer, used to serving in an expeditionary organization, I was intrigued by how often this tactic was used by the British. After delving into Britain's 1777 expedition for Philadelphia campaign, and fully comprehending its size and scope, I narrowed my research to focus on this operation. As a Philadelphian and Marine, I found the Philadelphia Campaign striking in that such a large force was mobilized, won tactical victories, and accomplished its operational mission, but nothing more. Brought up on the idea of the power and flexibility provided by expeditionary operations, understanding why an undertaking of this size was not decisive was paramount to me both personally and professionally.

This work is dedicated to Super Bowl 52 Champions, the Philadelphia Eagles.

I. Introduction

In 1998, the United States Marine Corps published its seminal work, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) – 3, *Expeditionary Operations*, which formally established how the service operates in defense of the nation. While this document provides case studies dating back to the Marianas Campaign of World War II, nowhere does it mention the embarkation and movement of 14,000 soldiers, who used operational maneuver by the sea to land, then engage the enemy and capture its capital. This scenario is not from the 20th century, nor is it a future scenario as is commonly found in the MCDP series. It is, in fact, a snapshot of the British 1777 expeditionary operation that captured the rebels' capital, Philadelphia. Although executed over 240 years ago, this paper will analyze the British use of expeditionary operations in the Philadelphia Campaign using key components of MCDP-3 as a reference point. Analysis of the campaign through this anarchistic lens will illustrate to contemporary readers that while the expedition accomplished its tangible objective, and London viewed the expedition as an operational success, the effort had no major adverse effect on the rebel forces nor did it create any strategic advantages for the British.

This paper assumes its reader possesses a rudimentary understanding of the Revolutionary War. Analysis and summarizations of outside events, however, will be addressed to provide additional context and to support the central argument. It begins with a summary of MCDP-3 to establish a doctrinal framework and covers British forces in theater and their strategic framework from the beginning of the conflict through the end of the 1777 campaign season. Next, an examination of General William Howe's plans for 1777, in conjunction with General Washington's, illustrate Britain's disjointed planning effort. Utilizing the phased

sequencing provided by MCDP-3, the British execution of their expedition is reviewed, highlighting Howe's tactical and operational successes, as well as his shortcomings.

II. Expeditionary Operations Defined

"Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest cases – either by what your army can do against your enemy's territory and national life or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do." [1] Julian S. Corbett

Published in the late 20th century, *Expeditionary Operations* was written to explain the Marine Corps' conduct of military operations and highlight itself as the nation's expeditionary force in readiness. To unfamiliar readers, it should be noted that although written in 1998, MCDP-3 did not signify the beginning of the Marine Corps' involvement with expeditionary operations. The Service conducted operations of this type many times before publication. Created for leaders executing or advising on the employment of Marine Corps forces in expeditionary operations, MCDP-3 also allows outside entities to understand the realm in which the Marine Corps operates.[2] It is important to note that *Expeditionary Operations* utilizes the ideas of maneuver warfare as its backbone. For context, maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that "seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope."[3]

The basic premise of expeditionary operations is the projection of a military force into a foreign area, away from a normal support base, to confront a crisis or conflict. From a contemporary standpoint, this force can come from forward deployed amphibious shipping, whereas in the late 18th century, technology allowed the British to launch strategic expeditionary operations from their home bases in England and operational level campaigns from their more permanent bases along the American east coast. Throughout the American Revolution, the

British relied on these bases as supply points, advanced naval bases, and as locations from which to project the power of the army along America's eastern seaboard.

This type of projection coincides with two key tenants of MCDP-3: operational mobility and operational maneuver from the sea. The former is the ability of a force to move within an operating area to perform its task. The latter is the "capstone operating concept"[4] from which the Marine Corps relies on naval maneuvers to effectively employ its forces and doctrine of maneuver warfare to "exploit enemy vulnerabilities to deal a decisive blow."[5] According to General Charles Kulak, this decisive blow is derived via the operational mobility provided by naval forces and comprises an ability for friendly forces to strike at an enemy's center of gravity or critical vulnerability, at the time and place of their choosing, to exploit an enemy weakness.[6] While 18th century British Army and Royal Navy technologies and doctrines are vastly different than modern standards and concepts discussed in MCDP-3 and by various senior Marine Corps officers such as General Krulak, are played out by British forces on multiples occasions in an attempt to accomplish their objectives.

MCDP-3 defines eight reasons for launching an expeditionary operation: to assure policy objectives have been secured; seizure or control key physical objectives (i.e. ports, political centers, etc.); to control urban or restrictive terrain; to establish a close, physical, and highly visible presence in order to demonstrate political resolve, deter aggressive action or compel desired behavior; to establish and maintain order in an area best by chaos and disorder; to protect or rescue citizens or civilians; to separate warring groups from each other; and, to provide relief support after a disaster.[7] The first six, however, are only applicable to the conflict in question. The British used their operational mobility by routinely placing themselves in positions where they could accomplish most, if not all, of these acts.

Like any other type of military action, expeditionary operations encompass more than operational mobility and an ability to utilize the naval forces to open new maneuver avenues. They must be adaptable to changing situations and sustainable as they will be conducted far from their regular sources of supply. They must be able to allow a force to reconstitute itself to take on a new mission. Therefore, the force needs to be cost-effective. For the British, this last point is not so much monetary in nature as much as it concerns how they employed their personnel and obtained their equipment. While the aforementioned characteristics are all pertinent to expeditionary operations the Marine Corps believes they are all for naught if an expeditionary mindset, one that can operate in austere conditions, does not exist with the operator. These characteristics, when combined, are utilized during each sequenced phase of an expeditionary operation.

Operational sequencing offers a structured projection of power. In most cases, the sequencing occurs in the following order: pre-deployment actions, deployment, entry, enabling actions, decisive actions, and redeployment.[8] Pre-deployment actions are usually linked to planning and organization of the force. While British commanders planned and organized this phase also includes administrative correspondence within the theater and or with London. The deployment phase is the actual movement of troops, supplies, and equipment from the point of embarkation until entry. In contemporary operations, the deployment phase has additional stages to move lighter forces, or forward positioned forces, to an area first, followed by heavier forces. In many cases, the British did not have this luxury since they deployed via the sea and their sails required agreeable weather. The entry portion begins with the introduction of forces into the contested area. Entry usually involves a point from which to enter the foreign area and the establishment of a base from which to operate. Enabling actions are initial actions that allow for

the accomplishment of the expeditions larger mission.[9] In the case of the American Revolution, where open warfare was prevalent, the seizure of key terrain best describes this phase. Decisive actions, put most plainly, are conducted to accomplish the mission. The final phase is the redeployment of the expeditionary force. Since expeditionary operations are temporary in nature, this phase is planned early and is executed only if the anticipated political situation has been met.

In many ways, the British were well accustomed and comfortable with expeditionary operations. Until the campaign for Philadelphia, they compiled and executed a massive expedition from Britain to America, which culminated in the victorious battles of Long Island and Manhattan. During the Seven Years War, General James Wolfe's assault and seizure of Quebec is a prime example of effectively using the strength provided in this type of warfare.[10] The projection of the British Army, via the Royal Navy, was also a successful strategic tactic used in Europe. Therefore, it is striking that a massive expeditionary operation, such as the Philadelphia campaign, offered only minor tactical victories but major strategic misses. One wonders if Howe realized the enemy had a vote in the matter.

III. The British Military and a Strategic Overview

"In every encounter Washington's army had been routed, and there were many who believed that the revolution in America would be crushed in 1777. But the reality behind an illusion is cruel, and in 1777 the apparently victorious British were going to flounder into a strategic quagmire."[11] David Syrett

Although at the outset of the war British forces faced heavy resistance at Lexington and Concord and were forced to evacuate Boston, they made up for their shortcomings with a successful campaigning season in 1776 under the command of General Sir William Howe. Howe had served favorably in the Seven Years' War in both Europe and North America.[12] He was a skilled in the use of light infantry tactics and had a background in amphibious operations.[13]

He was promoted in great confidence following the resignation of General Gage and was believed to be a stern disciplinarian and one who understood the best way to fight in America.[14] It was his job to secure Britain's strategic objective of ending the rebellion to reunite the "colonies and the mother-country."[15]

Howe's accomplishments in 1776 were due to professional skill of the British Army and the dominance and abilities of the Royal Navy. The British Army was tactically superior to most armies in the world, especially that of Washington's. It derived its strength from "close order volley and the bayonet charge" supported by effective artillery.[16] The Royal Navy, even after the downsizing experienced following the Seven Years War, was still a dominating force on the oceans and had no peer competitor in North American waters. Led by General Howe's older brother, Admiral Lord Howe, the Royal Navy owed its reputation to the superior training, professionalism, and abilities of its officers.[17] In 1776, it skillfully withdrew British forces from Boston, brought a massive number of British and Hessian soldiers to America, and deployed them in a successful landing on Long Island.

After landing on Long Island, General Howe used these strengths to defeat Washington at Brooklyn and on Manhattan. By the time 1776 came to a close, General Howe controlled New York, its harbor, and the southern approaches of the Hudson River. Moreover, he had pushed west and south and engaged Washington in New Jersey, seizing the majority of the state. By the fall of 1776, the British Army was the dominant force on land and the Royal Navy had control of the seas and was blockading ports along the east coast. Aside from ending the campaigning season at a position of advantage in North America, Howe's success had a global impact. Lord Germain, Britain's America secretary, had written to Howe that success in his endeavors against Washington's Army would hold Britain's European enemies, France and Spain, in check.[18] As

1777 neared, Howe's reputation in London was secure, and he had the backing of Germain to design plans for the upcoming fighting season, free of major interference from the government.[19]

Washington, on the other hand, was not as optimistic or in as good of a position as his counterpart. The continental army did not have the same good fortune that they experienced in 1775. While they displayed an ability to fight, especially from entrenchments, they were routinely defeated as Washington was often tactically out maneuvered by Howe.[20] Moreover, Washington's personnel numbers continued to recede. The rebels' defeat in Canada and New York cost them many missing, dead, or captured men. Additionally, desertions were occurring and some enlistments were ending.[21] As December 1776 approached, Washington's army, the source of American strength, was prime for destruction.

IV. Planning for Philadelphia

"As to Howe's proposal to switch his main effort to the southward, Germain called his reasons 'solid and decisive', and gave his approval."[22] Piers Mackesy

An examination of the Philadelphia campaign would be incomplete without first reviewing Howe's plans combined with Germain's decisions. Although General Howe was Commander-in-Chief of British forces in America, the politically connected John Burgoyne would soon arrive in Canada to lead its British Army contingent in a southerly advance. This plan had the backing of King George III, but it would be supervised by Germain to ensure the British forces worked together towards the common objective of ending the rebellion together. Although Germain faced communication difficulties, the multiple planning initiatives, coupled with a lack of realistic assumptions and personality conflicts, put the British at a strategic disadvantage before the campaign began.

In the fall of 1776, Howe, enjoying London's backing, began communications with Germain describing his plan to end the rebellion in 1777. Howe's first set of plans requested a

troop increase of 15,000 men and an additional "eight or ten ships of the line."[23] If approved, this increase would give Howe 35,000 troops and allow him, with the support of the Royal Navy, to contain the main portions of Washington's army in New Jersey, advance a force from Newport into New England, and simultaneously send troops from New York up the Hudson to link up with the British force moving south from Canada.[24] Once joined, the main force would isolate the rebellion in New England before moving south. Upon completion in New England, Howe proposed invading Pennsylvania in the fall, then moving the war into the southern colonies during the winter of 1777-1778.[25]

Shortly after he sent his note to Germain, Howe's 1776 campaign season ended with better gains than anticipated. The British controlled almost all of New Jersey, were rallying loyalist support, and were close to Philadelphia. After assessing these positive outcomes, and believing Washington's army to be nearby, Howe changed his plan. He judged that the rebellion was close to collapsing and that seizing Philadelphia could be the decisive action that would end the rebellion in the middle colonies.[26] In a letter sent on December 20, 1776, Howe explained to Germain that he planned to accomplish this by using 10,000 troops. The majority would move overland to Philadelphia, while a corps would move via the sea, down the coast of New Jersey, and up the Delaware River.[27] To obtain the correct number of troops, Howe planned to scrap the invasion of New England from Newport, reduce the garrison in New York, and remove the force that was supposed to march north on Albany. Instead, a force of 3,000 would remain in the vicinity of New York City, guarding New Jersey and assisting, as best as possible, the Canadian army moving south.[28] According to historian Piers Mackesy, "with this dispatch Howe broke from the design which had ruled British strategy since Bunker Hill."[29]

Less than a week after Howe's second plan was dispatched to London, Washington crossed the Delaware River on Christmas night and launched a surprise assault on Howe's Hessian troops garrisoned at Trenton. Although Howe's forces repulsed the Continentals and sent them back into Pennsylvania, Washington achieved a much needed tactical and morale boosting victory. Howe, on the other hand, conceded the larger gains he had in New Jersey and reduced his lines in the vicinity of Brunswick and Amboy in northeastern New Jersey.[30] Towards the end of February 1777, Germain received both Howe's revised plan and the news of Trenton.

Although Germain was concerned about Trenton's strategic implications, he responded approvingly in early March 1777 to Howe's second plan, calling it "solid and decisive." It did not, however, support the large reinforcements Howe had requested. At roughly the same time, however, Germain was working with General John Burgoyne on the offensive plan for the British army in Canada. Burgoyne would lead a British force, currently commanded by General Guy Carleton, from Canada, and "force his way to Albany, seconded by a diversion on the Mohawk [river], and place himself under Howe's command."[31] The execution of this plan went ahead with "the full understanding that though Howe's army would eventually co-operate with Burgoyne on the Hudson, it could not support his advance to Albany in strength."[32]

By April 1777, Howe finally had a plan for 1777 fighting season, although as soon as it seemed solidified, it began to wither. Howe's intent was still to push for Philadelphia and engage Washington in a decisive fight, but he was upset by London's inability to provide him with the 20,000 reinforcements he had requested in January. Moreover, he was frustrated by the performance of his German soldiers and the difficulties in making Washington fight in the open.[33] At this point, Washington's army had again crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey

and positioned his army in Morristown, on Howe's flank.[34] After an analysis of these challenges, and with Trenton in the back of his mind, Howe wrote to Germain in early April changing his plan for the third time. No longer would he march overland to capture Philadelphia. Instead, he would embark his forces on his brother's ships and move by sea, and the Delaware River, to take Philadelphia. Howe assumed he would have Philadelphia secured long before he would have to assist Burgoyne's Canadian force. [35]

V. Analysis of the British Planning Process

"Planning involves projecting our thoughts forward in time and space to influence events before they occur rather than merely responding to events as they occur. This means contemplating and evaluating potential decision and actions in advance."[36] MCDP-5, *Planning*

By the time Germain received Howe's latest change of plans and was able to respond with more specification to support Burgoyne, Howe was embarked on ships, far from his original landing area. While the details of the operation's execution will be duly covered later in this paper, it is pertinent to point out that the planning which had taken place at the highest levels of the British government was in and of itself a strategic failure. Howe and Burgoyne's armies were about to undertake two incongruous plans, unable to support each other. Moreover, these plans allowed for considerable risk as Washington could turn north and attack Burgoyne's force while Howe moved south. While the latter did not happen, Burgoyne most certainly did not enjoy the ease of movement or tactical superiority assumed by himself, Howe, and Germain. Burgoyne faced stiff resistance after his success at Fort Ticonderoga and was ultimately defeated at Saratoga.

Aside from Germain's inability to effectively orchestrate the army's grand plan, Howe's multiple plans show an attempt to analyze the situation and take actions towards a decisive victory. His first plan, the invasion of New England with support from the army moving south

from Canada, was excellent and kept with the British desire to end the rebellion in the Northeast and then methodically move south. It encompassed many of the elements of contemporary expeditionary operations. It was adaptable, as it encouraged the joining of two forces; it had elements of naval integration from Newport, and it was sustainable from the multiple British posts that existed throughout the region.

Howe obviously opted not to follow his original plan, and as Command-in-Chief, with no opposition from London, he was free to do so. Moreover, based on his position at the end of 1776, Howe assumed Washington's army, the Continental's center of gravity, was in the area, and assaulting Philadelphia would allow for a decisive engagement with this opposing force. Philadelphia also presented Howe with a "limited, practical, and rational objective."[37] As historian David Syrett points out, for Howe's 18th century military mind, the best way for the "cautious, slow, conservative" general to win the war was "systematically to increase the region of British control by striking at and holding limited and clearly defined objectives rather than thrusting at abstract points in the interior as Burgoyne's campaign seemed designed to do so."[38]

Howe's change in his mode of reaching Philadelphia, however, was the major misstep that supersedes his decision not to invade New England. The British controlled a solid portion of northern New Jersey, New York City, Staten Island, and via the Royal Navy, the New York harbor and Lower Hudson. By removing his army from the field, and embarking them with the fleet, he lost all the flexibility an overland march would allow. Until the Hessian defeat at Trenton, Howe's forces had shown tremendous success in New Jersey. A march overland from his cantonment area would put him back on familiar ground where he could press towards Philadelphia, while also protecting his gains, preventing enemy reinforcements from moving towards New England, and supporting Burgoyne with his own forces if necessary.[39]

The use of the fleet to move Howe's force had additional consequences which he and his brother either did not realize or just ignored. The plan split British troops between two main armies and smaller garrisons, the most notable of which were at New York and Newport, thereby removing their ability to mass. From a Royal Navy perspective, sourcing ships for the expedition came from vessels already assigned within the theater of operations. The Royal Navy was currently tasked with blockading continental ports and engaging American cruisers.[40] Therefore, by using the sea to maneuver around Washington's force, Howe not only gave up the flexibility that an overland march would provide, but his plan detached a large portion of the superior Royal Navy from its primary missions, opening opportunities for the enemy.

This decision affected his mindset too. In his letter to Germain explaining his plans for use of his brother's fleet to transport him, Howe included that his "hopes for terminating the war this year are vanished."[41] Whether this pessimism was due to his frustration for not receiving the forces he had requested, or because he realized his undertaking would be unsuccessful, or something else entirely, is a matter of speculation. Howe's statement does signify the "versatility and adaptability to respond effectively without a great deal of preparation time to a broad variety of circumstances" required of an expeditionary mindset was not present with the commander.[42] This mental failure would reveal itself at times throughout the expedition.

VI. The Philadelphia Campaign

"Notwithstanding that my instructions and many other unequivocal demonstrations tended to show that Sir William Howe's army was destined for an expedition to the southward, I owe I could not to the very last bring myself to believe it."[43] Sir Henry Clinton

As noted in Chapter II, MCDP-3 uses a sequenced approach to establish the framework with which a force can project an expeditionary operation into a foreign area. While U.S. Marine Corps doctrine was written some 225 years after British expedition in question, Howe's

execution mirrors, to an extent, the suggested phases. Using this sequencing, in conjunction with the characteristics of expeditionary operations, British mistakes and missed opportunities present themselves long after their planning debacle. While Howe's expedition reached its desired and tangible objective (per figure 1), his final premonition that it would not lead to the wars end was proven accurate.

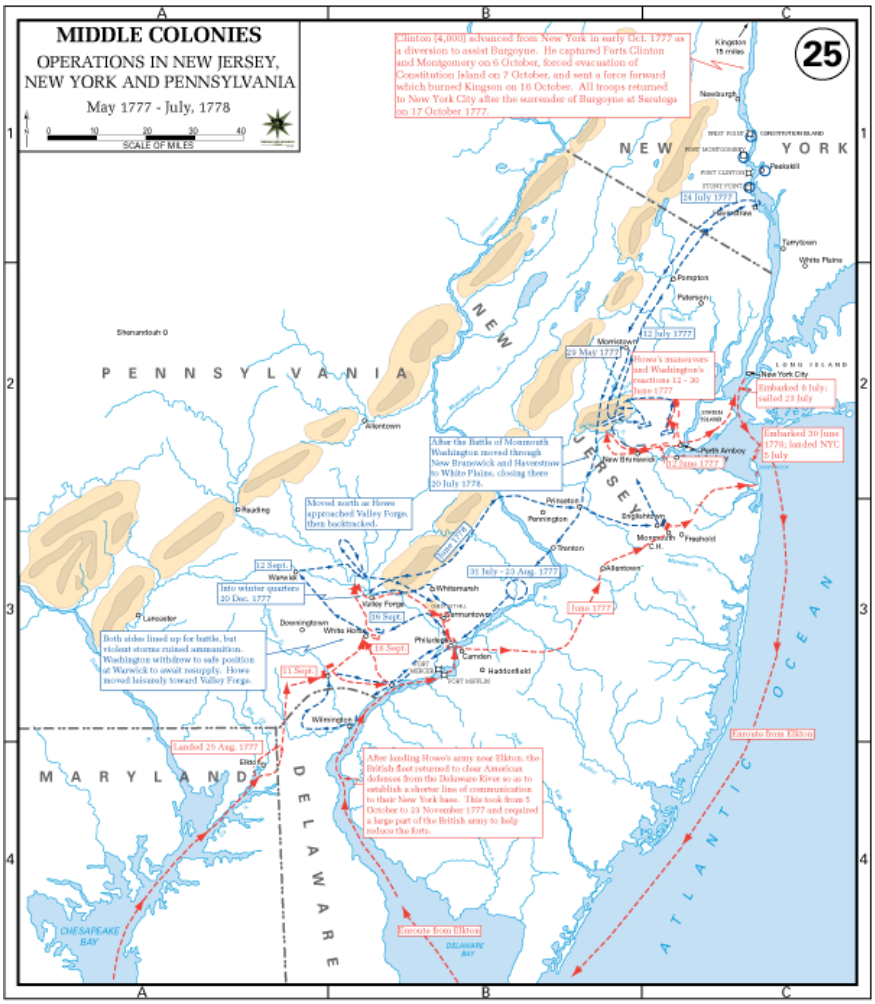

Figure 1. Source: United States Military Academy, History Department, *Operations in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, May 1777-1778*.

Pre-deployment

In June 1777, while preparing to embark for their coming expedition, Howe's forces patrolled the New Jersey countryside attempting to lure Washington into an open battle. This

action is ironic as it countered the reasons that Howe used to base his decision to maneuver by the sea. Regardless, after a week of marching, he was unsuccessful. Following Howe's movement back to his lodgment in Amboy, Washington moved forward from his flanking positions in an attempt to disrupt Howe's embarkation.[44] Howe, sensing a chance for battle, counter marched in an effort to "turn the American's right flank and cut it off from its mount stronghold as a prelude to its annihilation."[45] Near Westfield, Howe enjoyed a small tactical victory, but only after his forces under General Cornwallis encountered strong resistance and relied on a German bayonet charge to disperse the remaining rebel soldiers.[46] The remainder of Washington's forces withdrew to the protection of the mountains. Howe's forces, having received campaign equipment from Britain in July, withdrew most of their posts in New Jersey, embarked, and set out to sea towards the end of the month.

Howe's determination to bring Washington into a fight makes this pre-deployment phase interesting. His expedition was designed to maneuver around Washington's flanking position, yet his patrols during this period illustrate a relatively free movement throughout northern New Jersey. Howe confirmed other assessments such as Washington's reluctance to fight in an open field and when Washington was engaged, the battle ended before a decisive action could occur. In many respects, Howe's maneuvers may have been more beneficial to Washington as they allowed him to exercise his troops in limited engagements and attempt new tactics with his relatively inexperienced army.

Deployment

Howe's forces departed Sandy Hook, New Jersey in late July 1777. They were delayed slightly as Howe was waiting on General Clinton to return from London to take command of British forces in New York. Additionally, the Royal Navy experienced s unfavorable winds

along the New Jersey coast affecting embarkation. By July 21st some 14,000 troops were embarked on 267 ships, escorted by an additional 22 warships.[47] The fleet, under the command Admiral Lord Howe, sailed east and then south, and rendezvoused off Cape Henlopen, at the mouth of the Delaware Bay, with the British squadron blockading the Delaware River. The Howe brothers and the blockading squadron's commander, Captain Andrew Hammond, discussed potential landing sites for the Army's entry.[48]

During this meeting, General Howe was presented with incorrect information regarding Washington's movements. Howe was informed by Hammond that Washington was already across the Delaware and in a position to disrupt the British Army's entry around Philadelphia.[49] Therefore, Howe, in consultation with his brother, made the decision not to proceed up the Delaware River and land at Newcastle, Delaware as the original plan called. Instead, the expedition would again put out to sea and sail down the Delaware and Maryland coasts, into and up the Chesapeake Bay, and enter the region at the bay's headwaters near Head of Elk, Maryland.[50] From there, Howe surmised, he would force Philadelphia.

During this time, Washington was not in the position Howe assumed. Washington had spent the summer trying to determine Howe's true intentions. In the early summer, he assumed Howe would move up the Hudson to support Burgoyne, especially after the British successfully captured Fort Ticonderoga.[51] After the British sailed from Sandy Hook, Washington believed Philadelphia or New England were logical places for Howe to arrive. Washington confirmed this assumption upon notification of the British fleet off Cape Henlopen. Once the British departed the Delaware Bay, and headed east to open water, Washington was at a loss.[52] He could not believe Howe would not reinforce Burgoyne's success in upstate New York and assumed the British fleet's movements were designed to tire his army out. Until this point,

Washington had continually moved his army back and forth from New Jersey into New York state, attempting to put his army in a position to counter Howe's eventual landing. Washington's final placement was delayed by sightings of the British fleet off of Maryland, which caused Washington to think Charleston was an objective.[53] It was not until Washington received word of British fleet sightings off of the Virginia coast that he concluded the British would use the Chesapeake to attack Philadelphia.[54]

At Cape Henlopen, Howe's risk-based decision not to proceed into the Delaware Bay and up the Delaware River, had costly strategic and operational mistakes. Initial observations indicate Howe was fruitfully deceiving Washington, and exhausting his army, via the operational mobility his brother's fleet provided. Returning to sea, however, extended the length of the journey and was barely sustainable. Not only did landing at Head of Elk, Maryland put Howe at the same geographic distance to Philadelphia as his original lodgment in Amboy, but it also kept his force at sea for an extended period.[55] Howe's decision to trade time for the sea's maneuver space had multiple consequences.

From a strategic perspective, the main British Army in theater, experienced and victorious, did not engage the enemy in the middle colonies for over a month. Likewise, a vast number of ships from the Royal Navy, already taken from their blockade or interdiction missions, remained away from these tasks, as they ferried troops and protected the fleet.[56] Operationally, the voyage took place in the hottest part of the summer. While the men and animals were not marching, as Washington's were, they were exposed to the elements and short on drinking water and fresh rations. The horses faired the worse.[57] Howe, limited in cavalry throughout the North American theater, only brought one squadron on his expedition, Burgoyne's Sixteenth Light Dragoons.[58] This amount, if healthy, offered only a force to exploit

any success his infantry produced. Malnourished, and understrength due to deaths at sea, this small unit was anything but effective.

Howe's decision to use the Chesapeake Bay also allowed Washington to confirm his intentions. Until then, Washington had been frustrated by the British use of the sea as maneuver space. Washington described it as such,

> The advantages they derive from having command of the water are immense. At the same time, that they are transporting themselves from one place to another with the utmost facility and convenience, they keep our imaginations constantly in the field of conjecture, as to the point of attack, and our troops marching and countermarching in the disagreeable road of suspense and in certainty. I wish, we could but fix on their object. Their conduct is really so mysterious, that you cannot reason upon it, so as to form any certain conclusions.[59]

Historian David Syrett, on the other hand, does not share Washington's admiration. Syrett believes that Howe never fully comprehended the power, or how to properly employ his amphibious capabilities to achieve a tactical advantage. He argues that Howe missed opportunities to maximize these abilities during his successful 1776 campaign and that naval forces would have been better utilized in 1777 via an amphibious operation up the Hudson River to seize the rebel forts in the Hudson Highlands.[60] Alternatively, Howe was eager to engage Washington's army and his decision to move up the Chesapeake triggered Washington's movement not to reinforce his New England forces against Burgoyne, as many English had feared, but south to protect Philadelphia and engage Howe.

Entry

At the end of August, the British made landfall at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay. The Howe brothers conducted a non-forcible, although very complicated, amphibious entry into Maryland.[61] The British spent a week refitting, foraging, and replacing horses lost on their voyage. While Howe established an initial lodgment, it was not built in the typical British tradition. Howe was concerned about making up lost time, so he ordered the camp equipage to

remain packed. Howe departed Head of Elk, Maryland in early September, leaving behind one brigade to secure the lodgment for the fleet and protect his lines of communications as he moved north. Shortly after departing, on September 3rd, Howe's forces engaged the enemy for the first time in well over a month, at Iron Hill, Delaware.[62]

Although not a forcible entry, the entry phase for any expeditionary operation is complex. Debarking a ship, even for present-day standards, is a tedious and methodical process. The British having efficiently embarked their force, used easily accessible flat bottom boats to transport their force ashore. Beginning on Monday morning, August 25th, the British unloaded 265 ships, and moved some 3,000 troops, baggage, artillery, and ammunition ashore per wave. The British execution of debarkation and establishment of an expeditionary advance base, albeit 18th century style, illustrated how experienced and comfortable they were operating in an austere environment.

Enabling Actions

Whether planned or not, Howe relied on various enabling actions which led to his ability to take decisive actions for Philadelphia. Howe was victorious at Iron Hill, but after the battle, he made the risky decision of closing down his lodgment and source of supply at Head of Elk.[63] He made this call in order to free up the soldiers guarding the lodgment at the lines of communication, realizing that they would be needed to allow him to efficiently take Philadelphia and return British troops to New York in a reasonable amount of time.[64] From a sustainment perspective, Howe would be on his own until he rendezvoused with his brother and the fleet on the Delaware River, south of Philadelphia.

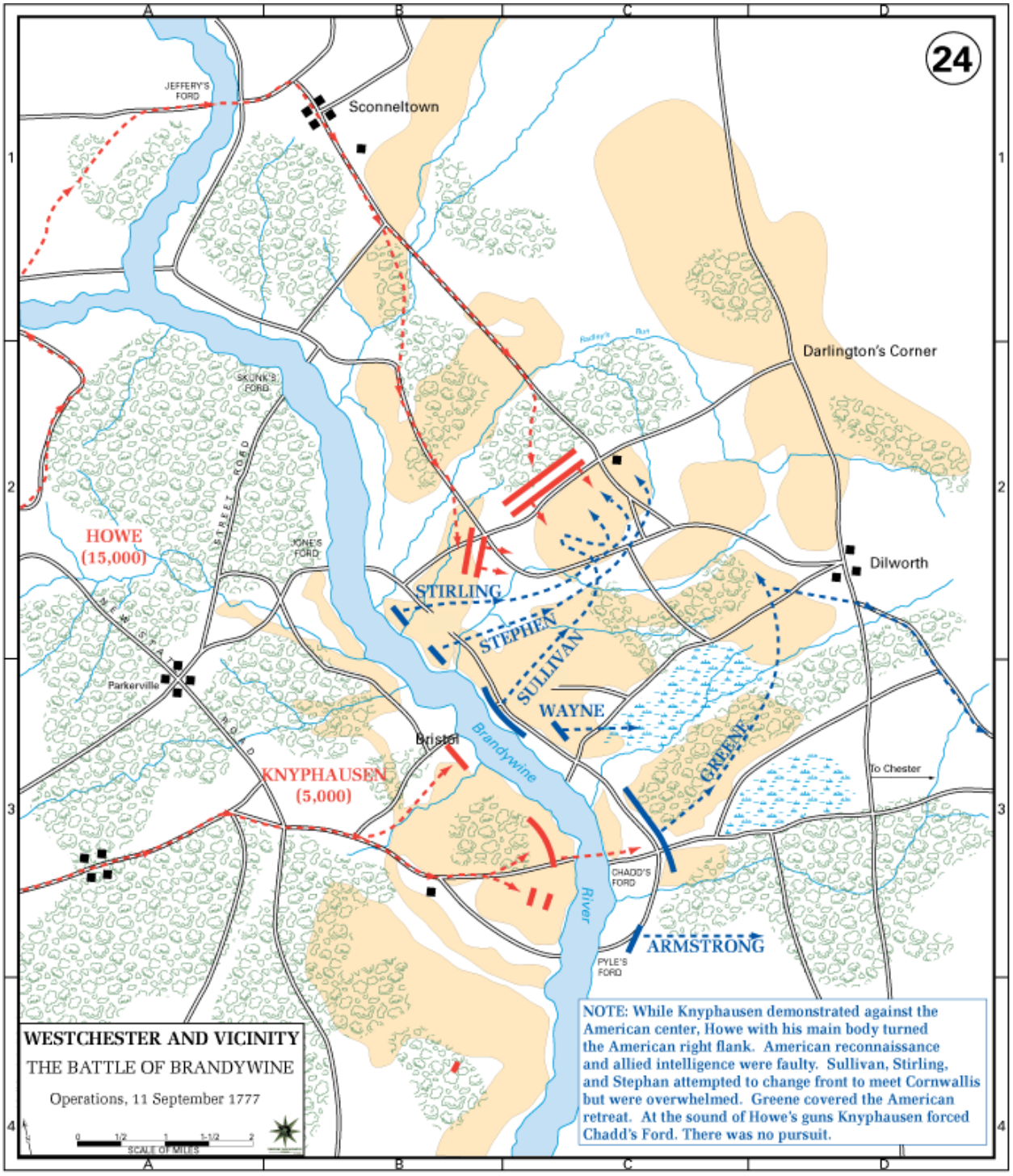

Figure 2. Source: United States Military Academy, History Department, *The Battle of Brandywine, 11 September 1777*.

Once free of his base and excess supplies, Howe was on his own but able to move without restrictions. This movement would allow him to support his army.[65] Intelligence indicated that

Washington's army was to the southwest of Philadelphia in vicinity of Brandywine Creek. Moving in two columns, Howe was able to put his Army into a position to finally confront Washington and his army. The armies engaged at Brandywine (Figure 2), and the British carried the day, following a pivotal flank attack ordered by Howe.[66] While Washington attempted to organize the remainder of his army, Howe's only attempt to capitalize on his success came at the end of the battle, under Cornwallis, who was halted after a long march by a well-placed reserve commanded by Nathaniel Greene.[67] Aside from sending patrols to confirm or deny intelligence and ridding the battlefield of dead and wounded, Howe was more concerned about his lack of an established supply line, which he needed before moving on Philadelphia.[68] Therefore, he did not immediately advance on Washington's remaining army, but took Wilmington, Delaware on September 13th and regained a supply base with support from the Royal Navy.[69]

While Howe enjoyed tactical success at Brandywine, it was not the decisive victory he had hoped for after finally deploying his full army against that of Washington's. Howe made multiple decisions which affected his ability to exploit his success as Washington's army retreated. Due to his voyage, Howe lacked effective cavalry of any size and strength to interfere with Washington's army.[70] Additionally, Howe's focus on linking up with the Royal Navy to regain his supply lines removed his attention from completing the destruction of Continental Army. This focus may be attributed to Howe's unease of not having a supply line since he dismantled his expeditionary base at Head of Elk. While he gained the brigade that would have defended this position and the lines extending from it, rebel militia, who most likely would have been the principal aggressors, had proven to be very ineffective to Washington's army and may not have been the burden Howe assumed.[71] By not pursing Washington and using his superior

force, Howe gave away his best chance to achieve the decisive victory he had longed for nor could he predict if he would get another chance.

Decisive Actions

Although Howe missed his first opportunity at destroying Washington's army in a conclusive victory at Brandywine, multiple events transpired in the days and weeks after the battle that allowed Howe to "accomplish the political objective" and "accomplish the mission"[72] of seizing the tangible objective, Philadelphia. Howe's expedition slightly deviates from contemporary doctrine when analyzing the campaign's decisive actions, as the combination of events is what makes the objective attainable. On the other hand, these actions also illustrate Howe's inability to adapt to his operating environment and impart a true decisive defeat on Washington's army.

From his position following Brandywine, Howe could not move further north and cross the Schuylkill River closer to Philadelphia. He did not have the proper boats for an operation of that size, nor was the Royal Navy able to transport him because of the obstacles and forts emplaced and manned by the rebels. Therefore, Howe moved to the northwest of the city to utilize the Schuylkill fords. Washington, however, had placed his army in-between the capital and these fords. During Howe's movement on the western side of the Schuylkill, the armies came close to fighting at White Horse but did not meet due to Washington's withdraw. Howe was able to gain a small victory along his march, via a successful battle at Paoli, but this effort did not include either of the main armies. By late September, Washington was on the east side of the Schuylkill River attempting to defend the fords. Howe, frustrated by lack of contact, made tactical forays northwest towards Washington's supply depots in Reading and Lancaster. These

forays caused Washington to abandon his defense of the southern river crossings, allowing Howe to cross the river and march on Philadelphia.[73]

Successfully across the Schuylkill, the British captured Philadelphia on September 26th. While the seizure of the city would indicate an immediate operational victory, due to the forts and obstacles along the Delaware River the city was isolated from Royal Navy resupply. While the Royal Navy worked to clear the Delaware, the British Army inserted a small garrison in the city, established Royal rule with remaining loyalist support, and encamped the main army outside of the city at Germantown.[74]

Howe's 9,000 soldier force was positioned at Germantown to defend the city and guard the British battalions sent into New Jersey to assault the rebels' forts affecting the Royal Navy's river clearance operation.[75] By late September, Washington had some 8,000 Continentals and militia at his disposal, having recalled reinforcements from his force facing the British army under Burgoyne in upstate New York. Moreover, morale was high amongst Washington's forces as they learned of the Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga. In early October, Washington was aware of Howe's disposition at Germantown and resolved to attack the British. He concocted a plan to simultaneously advance four columns, at night, towards the British position and attack at dawn.[76] Although Washington's plan was complicated and impacted by a dense fog, it initially had momentum and initiative. Although Howe was expecting the attack, his troops, similar to their actions at Trenton, had not entrenched themselves. Howe's forces ultimately massed and maneuvered on Washington's force, repelling it to Whitemarsh and earning themselves another tactical, but not decisive, victory.

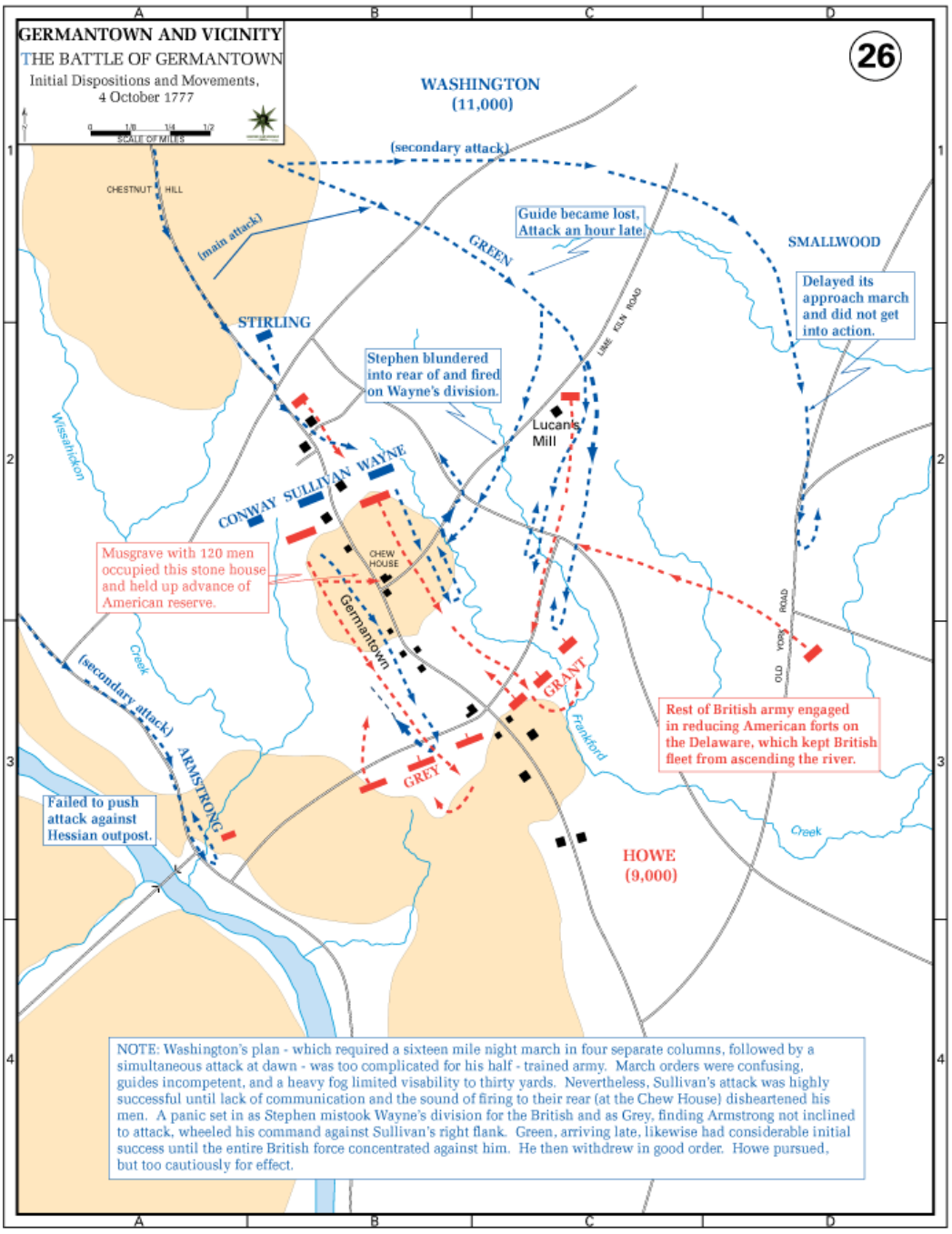

Figure 3. Source: United States Military Academy, History Department, *The Battle of Germantown, 4 October 1777.*

Meanwhile on the Delaware, multiple lines of underwater obstacles, called *chevaux-de-frise*, crisscrossed the river approaching Philadelphia.[77] These were defended by gunboats and two forts, Fort Mifflin on the Pennsylvania bank and Fort Mercer on the New Jersey bank. To

properly remove the obstacles, the forts needed to be captured or destroyed. The initial attacks by the joint British force against the forts were unsuccessful. Soldiers attempting to attack Fort Mercer were repulsed, while the Royal Navy attempts to bomb Fort Mifflin were hammered by unfavorable wind and ships that had run aground.[78] By mid-November, the British concentrated all of their efforts on Fort Mifflin and planned a bombardment followed by an amphibious assault. The bombardment proved to be enough, and British troops managed to capture Fort Mifflin without a forcible amphibious assault.[79] Philadelphia was now secure and able to be resupplied.

These events encompass the decisive phase of the campaign because the British objective was finally secured. While Philadelphia contained some loyalist support and was easily sustainable after the Royal Navy's intense clearing operation along the Delaware River, Howe ended the campaign as his last letter to Germain foretold; the rebellion, and Washington's army, was still alive. A review of these events offers strategic and operational missteps which add to the overall failure of the campaign.

Even following Brandywine, Howe was offered two opportunities to make the campaign beneficial. Before maneuvering Washington away from the Schuylkill's southern fords, he had successfully captured the rebel supply lots at Valley Forge and was in a position to march on the Continental supply depots at Reading and Lancaster. Washington understood the strategic impact of these locations and correctly withdrew to protect them. Howe's decisions to take the tangible objective, and not press his force on either of these supply depots, shows his inability to adapt to the strategic needs of the war. If successful, a move of this sort would have isolated Washington from almost all his supply stores, save what he recovered from Philadelphia, as the winter was setting in. Moreover, it would have most likely put his army in a direct confrontation

with Washington's force, enabling a battle on good ground between the armies that could have decisive results. Even without making this decision, Howe was presented with an opportunity to destroy Washington at Germantown. Howe, however, did not properly inspect his positions and instead of fighting his veteran, and professional force, from entrenchments against a makeshift force, he fought in the open. His successful maneuver and timely entrance of forces from Philadelphia enabled his tactical success but did not destroy the weaker force similar to events at Trenton and Princeton the previous winter.

The Royal Navy fought against stiff resistance to clear the river. While the British were ultimately successful in clearing the river and opening the supply lines of communication to Howe's army, the operation took nearly two months to complete. Although the whole fleet that had transported the expedition to Head of Elk was not involved, a significant number of ships participated. Instead of blockading the mouth of the bay, cruising the river, and hunting rebel slopes, the Royal Navy ships were methodically working their way up the river. Their operational action enabled strategic inaction, a persistent theme of the Royal Navy throughout the campaign.

As Washington retreated to Whitemarsh and later, Valley Forge, he did so with the knowledge that his army had fared well against Howe's force and the rebel movement gained a major strategic victory at Saratoga. Howe, on the other hand, went into winter quarters owning the rebel capital, and a supply line, but also a force splintered between garrisons in Newport, New York, and Philadelphia and a nonexistent Northern Army. More importantly, the French had monitored the entire British campaigning seasons of 1777.

Redeployment

Howes' original plan to redeploy troops back to New York never materialized after the seizure of Philadelphia. Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga, coupled with the resistance around Philadelphia and the time to clear the Delaware River, all contributed to the decision to not immediately return to New York. Counter to current Marine Corps doctrine; the British would not redeploy forces after stabilizing the situation in Philadelphia but garrison themselves in Philadelphia for the winter.

Under orders from King George III, the city was evacuated less than a year after its capture following France's entrance into the war on the side of the rebels.[80] In addition to this order, General Howe had requested, and was approved, to be relieved of his command of the British Army in America. He departed Philadelphia in late May of 1778 and was replaced by General Henry Clinton, his former deputy. In June, Clinton withdrew his army from Philadelphia and proceeded on an overland march to Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

VII. Conclusion

"There is more to naval expeditionary power projection, however, then using the sea to provide strategic or operational mobility."[81] MCDP-3, *Expeditionary Operations*

The British expedition for Philadelphia offers a unique study in the ineffective use of an intra-theater seaborne expeditionary operation. Expeditionary warfare, per MCDP-3, is undertaken to secure policy objectives, control key terrain (i.e., a capital city), demonstrate political resolve, and compel desired behavior.[82] In amphibious cases, operational mobility and using the sea's maneuver space to strike at the enemy's center or gravity through critical vulnerabilities provides success.[83]

The British did not succeed because of inexperience with expeditionary operations. As an island nation Britain projected its power via the Royal Navy and its ability to transport the British Army when needed. Using the sequencing provided in MCDP-3 to overlay the British

operation illustrates their abilities to maximize their naval superiority. For contemporary practitioners, therefore, it is essential to focus on the operation's key shortfalls to understand how a dominant force can wastefully exert a tremendous amount of manpower and equipment and achieve no real gains.

The British failure to achieve a decisive victory was a result of poor strategic planning from London and Howe's inability to maintain focus on the actual Continental center of gravity, Washington's army, in favor of the enemy capital.[84] While both parts allowed the operation to commence, the latter thought inhibited Howe throughout the campaign. Howe's choice of transportation acknowledges that he understood the capabilities of the Royal Navy but not how to adequately employ them. While his embarkation confused Washington, it also removed the army from the field for a considerable amount of time and kept the Royal Navy from its more important blockade duty. Moreover, Howe did not use the Royal Navy and the operational mobility it provided to position himself to engage Washington better.

Once ashore, however, Howe is lucky Washington felt politically tied to Philadelphia and choose to fight him in southeastern Pennsylvania. It was at the tactical level that Howe could have overcome the ill-advised strategic and operational decisions and save a wasted expedition and campaigning season. At times this outcome seemed within reach as Howe displayed an expeditionary mindset valued in current military organizations and made risky decisions such as removing himself from his base of supply to give himself additional troops and the freedom of movement to engage Washington. These decisions, combined with the limited tactical victories, were not enough. Ironically, the operation itself prevented it. For instance, the lack of cavalry brought on by the fleets embarkation size and slow movement ensured no reinforcement of success.[85] Moreover, Philadelphia itself loomed in the distance as the shiny object distracting

Howe.[86] He slowed his initiative by always returning to the city's capture, rather than adjusting to the operating environment.

Ultimately, Howe captured Philadelphia, but the expedition was nothing more than a successful failure because it did not produce worthwhile effects. It was predicated upon poor planning and unworthy operational objectives that only drained the force of needed personnel and resources. Washington's army meanwhile survived the expeditions' many tests and successfully encamped itself at Valley Forge with the knowledge that they could compete with the British in 1778 and beyond.

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[1] Corbett, Julian. *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988) p.16.
[2] Headquarters US Marine Corps. *Expeditionary Operations*. MCDP-3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, April 16, 1998), Forward.
[3] Headquarters US Marine Corps. *Warfighting*. MCDP-1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, June 30, 1991), 78.
[4] MCDP-3, 89.
[5] Charles C. Kurlak, "Operational Maneuver from the Sea." *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 21 (Spring 2999): 82.
[6] Ibid
[7] MCDP-3, 37-38.
[8] MCDP-3, 38.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Mitchell MacNaylor, "The Battle of Quebec: THE DAY FRANCE LOST NORTH AMERICA," *Military History* 24, no. 6 (September 2007): 57-61,4. https://search-proquest-om.lomc.idm.oclc.org /docview/212612228?acco untid=14746.
[11] David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in American Waters 1775-1783*, Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1989), 61.
[12] Piers Mackesy, *The War for America 1775-1783* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 75.
[13] Higginbotham and Mackey, 75.
[14] Don Higginbotham, *The War for American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1963), 68.
[15] Mackesy, 32.
[16] Ibid, 78.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, 105.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Macksey, 30 and 88.
[21] Stephen R. Taaffe, *The Philadelphia Campaign, 1777-1778* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 13-23.
[22] Macksey, 117.
[23] Syrett, 73.
[24] Coakley, 53.
[25] Macksey, 110. For reference: Howe's requirement of 15,000 reinforcements to give him 35,000 effective troops is confusing. At the time of Howe's request, he had some 27,000 troops in America. Therefore, London believed an additional 7,000 reinforcements, not the 15,000 he requested, would suffice. Howe's 15,000 request is based on his

assumption of the personnel needed to properly clear and hold the southern colonies in the latter part of the 1777 campaigning season.
[26] Ibid, 111.
[27] Syrett, 74.
[28] Mackesy, 112.
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid,
[31] Mackesy, 115.
[32] Ibid, 117.
[33] Ibid, 122.
[34] Ibid, 121. For reference: Howe's intelligence had Washington's Army strength at 8,000 when in reality it was only 3,000. Washington was so concerned about the state of his force he remarked, "If Howe does not take advantage of our weak state he is very unfit for his trust."
[35] Don Cook, *The Long Fuse: How England Lost the American Colonies, 1760-1785* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), 269.
[36] Headquarters US Marine Corps. *Planning*. MCDP-5 (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, July 1997), 4.
[37] Syrett 75-76.
[38] Syrett, 76
[39] Syrett, 74.
[40] Syrett, 74
[41] Syrett, 75.
[42] MCDP-3, 44.
[43] Sir Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 64.
[44] Mackesy, 125.
[45] Taaffe, 42.
[46] Ibid, 43
[47] Syrett, 78.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid, 80.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Taffee, 47.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, 48.
[55] Syrett, 80
[56] Ibid.
[57] Mackesy, 128. Additional reference: Of the 320 horses that began the voyage, fewer than half survived (http://www.ushistory.org/march/phila/debark.htm)
[58] Ibid.
[59] Taffee, 47.
[60] Syrett, 75.
[61] Independence Hall Association. "The Philadelphia Campaign: 1777." www.ushistory.org. http://www.ushistory.org/march/phila/debark.htm. For reference, flat bottom boats carried on the British ships would land 3,000 British troops ashore on each wave.
[62] Taffee, 55.
[63] Ibid, 56.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 77.
[67] Mackesy, 128.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Mackesy, 128. The Dragoons were most likely ineffective after the journey and even if Howe had brought more, as Mackesy implies, the horses would have most likely been ineffective as well.

[71] Taaffe, 106
[72] MCDP-3, 42.
[73] Taaffe, 88-89.
[74] Ibid, 90-93.
[75] Mackesy, 129.
[76] http://www.ushistory.org/march/phila/germantown.htm
[77] Syrett, 81. For reference: *Chevaux-de-frise* are underwater obstacles.
[78] Syrett, 83-84.
[79] Syrett, 85.
[80] Sir John Fortescue, *The War of Independence: The British Army in North America 1775-1783* (London: Greenhill Books, 1911), 102.
[81] MCDP-3, 45.
[82] MCDP-3, 36-38.
[83] MCDP-3, 91.
[84] Syrett, 72-77. For reference: This theme is reoccurring in Syrett's analysis and it was also discussed at length during the American Revolution elective at Marine Corps University's Command and Staff College taught by Dr. J.W. Gordon (Academic Year 2017-2018).
[85] Mackesy, 128.
[86] Syrett, 76.

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