

ANCHOR

IN THE REMAINING HOURS of the day, after the guns grew silent, the Americans inside the Brooklyn defenses, expecting the British to attack full force, waited tensely hour after hour as nothing happened. All afternoon and into the night, pitiful cries could be heard from wounded men who lay among the unburied dead on the battlefield. Stragglers who had escaped capture kept coming into the lines almost by the hour, bedraggled single soldiers or clusters of three or four, many badly wounded. ("And the distressed wounded came crying into the lines!" wrote Philip Fithian.) The morning after, Mordecai Gist and nine others crossed into the camps. They were the only ones of the valiant Marylanders to have made it back.

### III

ON THE MORNING of Wednesday, August 28, the situation faced by Washington and the army was critical. Having been outsmarted and outfought, they were now hemmed in at Brooklyn in an area about three miles around, their backs to the East River, which could serve as an escape route only as long as the wind cooperated. With a change in the wind, it would take but a few British warships in the river to make escape impossible. Brooklyn was a trap ready to spring.

Yet early that morning Washington ordered still more of his army over from New York, almost as though he did not comprehend how perilous his position was.

Two Pennsylvania regiments and Colonel John Glover's Massachusetts troops—approximately 1,200 men—crossed the river and marched into the Brooklyn entrenchments with considerable show. Possibly it was

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this, the show, that Washington wanted, and if so, he succeeded. The sight of the new troops, wrote the Pennsylvania officer Alexander Graydon, brought a marked change. "The faces that had been saddened by the disasters of yesterday assumed a gleam of animation on our approach, accompanied with a murmur . . . that 'These were the lads that might do something.' "

In command of the fresh Pennsylvania brigades was handsome, self-assured Thomas Mifflin, formerly of Washington's staff at Cambridge and now, at thirty-two, a brigadier general. Mifflin immediately volunteered to survey the outermost defenses and report back to Washington, little expecting the part he was soon to play.

Joseph Hodgkins, so exhausted from the battle that he could hardly hold his head up, nonetheless took time to write home to report that "through the goodness of God," he was still in one piece. Like everyone, he expected at any moment to be in action again. "The enemy are within a mile and a half of our lines," he noted.

The weather had changed dramatically from the day before. Under darkening skies, the temperature dropped ten degrees.

Riflemen in the outermost defenses were ordered to keep up a steady fire at the enemy, if only to raise spirits, and the British fired back steadily on into the afternoon when the clouds opened in a cold, drenching downpour, the start of a northeastern storm that brought still further misery to the defeated army.

Afternoon, at three, an alarm [gun] in the midst of a violent rain [wrote Philip Fithian]. Drums heavily calling to arms. Men running promiscuously and in columns to the lines. All the time the rain falling with an uncommon torrent. The guns of the whole army are wetted. And after the alarm was over, which was occasioned by the regulars coming in a greater body than usual to drive our riflemen, our troops fired off their guns quite till evening, so that it seemed indeed dangerous to walk within our own lines—for we could from every part hear perpetually firing, and continually hear the [cannon] balls pass over us.

The storm and the roar of the guns continued into the night. Across the river in New York, Pastor Ewald Shewkirk wrote of the boom of can-

non at Brooklyn intermixed with flashes of lightning and the roar of thunder.

The following day, Thursday, August 29, the storm continued, heavy rains fell. Troops without tents also had little or no food. Fires were nearly impossible to keep going for cooking or warmth. Private Martin got by with biscuits he had had the foresight to stuff into his knapsack before leaving New York, biscuits "hard enough to break the teeth of a rat," as he wrote. Anyone who had a bit of raw pork to gnaw felt privileged. Nearly all were hungry and soaked to the skin. In places in the trenches men stood in water up to their waists. Muskets and cartridges were almost impossible to keep dry. Soldiers, unable to stay awake any longer, fell asleep standing upright in the rain or sitting without cover in the mud.

Washington, who had had little or no sleep, sent off a brief, somewhat incoherent report to Congress at four-thirty in the morning, saying his people were much "distressed." Of the defeat of the day before he said only that there had been "engagement" with the enemy and that he had heard nothing from General Sullivan or Lord Stirling. "Nor can I ascertain our loss." Nor did he report that in the night the British had started "advancing by approaches," as it was known. Instead of risking an open assault, they were digging trenches toward the American lines and throwing up embankments that already were no more than six hundred yards from Fort Putnam.

Yet for all the miseries it wrought, the storm was greatly to Washington's advantage. Under the circumstances, any ill wind from the northeast was a stroke of good fortune. For as long as it held, Lord Howe's ships had no chance to "get up" where they could wreak havoc.

But who knew how long such good fortune might serve? And what if his luck ran out? ("But lest some unlucky event should happen unfavorable to my reputation," he had told Congress when accepting his command, "I beg it may be remembered by every gent[leman] in the room that I this day declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the command I [am] honored with.")

He was now advised that the old ships that had been sunk in the East River could not be counted on as a serious barrier against British warships, and especially the smaller ships, which could come up through that

part of the East River between Governor's Island and Brooklyn where there were no barriers at all.

With the situation as grim as it could be, no one was more conspicuous in his calm presence of mind than Washington, making his rounds on horseback in the rain. They must be "cool but determined," he had told the men before the battle, when spirits were high. Now, in the face of catastrophe, he was demonstrating what he meant by his own example. Whatever anger or torment or despair he felt, he kept to himself.

Since he first arrived in New York in April, the essence of Washington's policy had been to keep close watch and make decisions according to circumstances. Sometime before noon, having heard General Mifflin's report on the progress made by the British with their "approaches" during the night, as well as the strongly expressed views of Joseph Reed, and having looked things over himself, he made a momentous decision.

A secret and deliberately deceiving urgent message went off to General Heath at King's Bridge. Every flatbottomed boat or sloop, almost any watercraft available, was to be rounded up "without delay" for the reason that "we have many battalions from New Jersey which are coming over to relieve others here." The message was signed by Mifflin.

Washington would later recall emphasizing that there be no "ceremony" in carrying out the order—meaning that whatever boats would serve should be confiscated on the spot.

Heath assigned the roundup to Colonel Hugh Hughes, a New York schoolteacher, who, in pursuit of his mission over the next twenty-four hours, would scarcely ever dismount from his horse.

At four in the afternoon, with still no letup in the rain, Washington called a meeting with his generals at the Livingston mansion, on the brow of Brooklyn Heights overlooking the river.

Mifflin, who had advised Washington that he must either fight or retreat immediately, asked to be the one to propose the retreat, with the understanding that if it were agreed on, he and the Pennsylvania regiment would serve as the rear guard in the outermost defenses, and thus hold the line until the rest of the army had departed. This would be the most dangerous assignment of all and he insisted it be his, Mifflin told Washington, lest by proposing retreat his reputation should suffer.

In the words of the minutes of the meeting: "It was submitted to the

consideration of the council whether, under all circumstances, it would not be eligible to leave Long Island and its dependencies [fortifications] and remove the army to New York."

Only one man expressed doubts: General John Morin Scott, a leading New York attorney and ardent patriot-turned-soldier.

"As it was suddenly proposed, *I as suddenly objected to it*," Scott later wrote, "from an aversion to giving the enemy a single inch of ground, *but was soon convinced by the unanswerable reasons for it.*"

Of the reasons put forward—ammunition spoiled by heavy rains, the miseries and discouragement of the exhausted troops, the enemy's advancing by approaches, the precarious situation of an army divided in half—the most serious was the looming threat of the British fleet suddenly in command of the East River. As Joseph Reed wrote in explanation, with Lord Howe trying every day to "get up" against the wind, "it became a serious consideration whether we ought to risk the fate of the army, and perhaps America, on defending the circle of about three miles fortified with a few strong redoubts, but chiefly open lines."

The decision was unanimous. Orders went out and by evening the plan was rapidly unfolding.

At Dorchester the year before, Washington had taken advantage of the night to catch Howe by complete surprise. On Long Island, Howe had sent 10,000 men through the night to catch Washington by surprise. The night of Thursday, August 29, it was Washington's turn again.

THE ORDERS CAME AT SEVEN. The troops were to be "under arms with packs and everything." It was to be a night attack on the enemy, they were told.

To Alexander Graydon, who was with the Pennsylvania regiments assigned to the rear guard, it seemed a desperate measure, almost suicidal. "Several nuncupative wills were made upon the occasion, uncertain as it was, whether the persons to whom they were communicated would survive, either to prove or to execute them." Graydon concentrated on summoning his own courage.

At about nine o'clock the troops with the least experience, along with the sick and wounded, were ordered to start for the Brooklyn ferry land-

ing, on the pretext that they were being relieved by reinforcements. But of this the soldiers nearer the front lines knew nothing. "The thing was conducted with so much secrecy," wrote another of the Pennsylvanians, Lieutenant Tench Tilghman, "that neither subalterns or privates knew that the whole army was to cross back again to New York." Nor were the officers told.

Alexander Graydon kept thinking what "extreme rashness" it was to order an attack, given the condition of the men and their rain-soaked arms. The more he thought, the more puzzled he became, until suddenly it "flashed upon my mind that a retreat was the object, and that the order for assailing the enemy was but a cover to the real design." The fellow officers to whom he confided his thoughts "dared not suffer themselves to believe it."

Others elsewhere in the forts and defenses began thinking that a night escape had to be the true intent, and to weigh the risks involved. As one particularly clear-headed officer, Major Benjamin Tallmadge of Connecticut, would later write, putting himself in Washington's place:

To move so large a body of troops, with all their necessary appendages, across a river full a mile wide, with a rapid current, in face of a victorious well-disciplined army nearly three times as numerous as his own, and a fleet capable of stopping the navigation, so that not one boat could have passed over, seemed to present most formidable obstacles.

The rain had stopped at last, but the northeast wind that had kept the river free of the British fleet was blowing still, and this, with an ebb tide, was proving no less a deterrent to an American retreat.

The first troops ordered to withdraw to the ferry landing found that the river was so rough that no boats could cross. The men could only stand and wait in the dark. According to one account, General Alexander McDougall, who was in charge of the embarkation, sent Washington a message saying that with conditions as they were, there could be no retreat that night.

It was about eleven o'clock when, as if by design, the northeast wind died down. Then the wind shifted to the southwest and a small armada of

boats manned by more of John Glover's Massachusetts sailors and fishermen started over the river from New York, Glover himself crossing to Brooklyn to give directions.

Glover's men proved as crucial as the change in the wind. In a feat of extraordinary seamanship, at the helm and manning oars hour after hour, they negotiated the river's swift, contrary currents in boats so loaded with troops and supplies, horses and cannon, that the water was often but inches below the gunnels—and all in pitch dark, with no running lights. Few men ever had so much riding on their skill, or were under such pressure, or performed so superbly.

As the boats worked back and forth from Brooklyn, more troops were ordered to withdraw from the lines and march to the ferry landing. "And tedious was the operation through mud and mire," one man remembered.

Wagon wheels, anything that might make noise, were muffled with rags. Talking was forbidden. "We were strictly enjoined not to speak, or even cough," wrote Private Martin. "All orders were given from officer to officer and communicated to the men in whispers."

They moved through the night like specters. "As one regiment left their station on guard, the remaining troops moved to the right and left and filled up the vacancies," wrote Benjamin Tallmadge, recalling also that for many of the men it was their third night without sleep. Washington, meanwhile, had ridden to the ferry landing to take personal charge of the embarkation.

The orderly withdrawal of an army was considered one of the most difficult of all maneuvers, even for the best-trained soldiers, and the fact that Washington's ragtag amateur army was making a night withdrawal in perfect order and silence thus far, seemed more than could be hoped for. The worst fear was that by some blunder the British would discover what was afoot and descend with all their superior force.

Those in greatest jeopardy, the troops in Mifflin's vanguard, were still holding the outer defenses. Waiting their turn to be withdrawn, they kept busy creating enough of a stir and tending campfires to make it appear the army was still in place, knowing all the while that if the enemy were to become the wiser, they stood an excellent chance of being annihilated.

In the event of a British attack, they were supposed to fall back and rally at the old Dutch church in the middle of the road in the village of Brooklyn. As the hours passed, there was no mistaking the sound of British picks and shovels digging steadily toward them in the darkness.

The full garrison at Fort Stirling on Brooklyn Heights also had orders to stay through the night, as cover against an attack by enemy ships.

At about two in the morning a cannon went off. No explanation was ever given. "If the explosion was within our lines," Alexander Graydon later speculated, "the gun was probably discharged in the act of spiking it."

For the rest of his life, Graydon could never recall that night without thinking of the scene in Shakespeare's *Henry V* of the long night wait before the Battle of Agincourt, in which, as Graydon wrote, "is arrayed, in appropriate gloom, a similar interval of dread suspense and awful expectation."

IT WAS APPROXIMATELY four o'clock and still dark when a young officer on horseback, Major Alexander Scammell, came riding through the outer defenses looking for General Mifflin.

Scammell was twenty-nine years old and well liked. A Harvard graduate and an attorney in civilian life, he was quick-witted, charming, six feet two inches tall, and had been serving as an aide-de-camp to General Sullivan.

Scammell told Mifflin the boats were ready at the river landing and that Washington was anxiously waiting for the arrival of the last remaining troops. Mifflin said Scammell had to be mistaken. He could not imagine that Washington meant his own vanguard. Scammell insisted he was not mistaken, saying he had ridden from the extreme left where he had ordered all the troops he met to march for the ferry, that they were then on the move, and that he would continue on to give the same orders.

Mifflin then ordered General Edward Hand to form up the regiment and move out as soon as possible.

But Scammell was mistaken. He had misunderstood Washington. The order was a blunder of exactly the kind that could spell disaster. The troops left the trenches and started for the river "without delay,"



until just beyond the Dutch church, within a half mile of the landing, where the column halted.

Washington, astride his horse in the middle of the road, demanded to know what was going on. General Hand was explaining when Mifflin rode up. Faces were hard to see in the dark, but Hand would remember Washington exclaiming, "Good God! General Mifflin, I am afraid you have ruined us!"

Mifflin responded "with some warmth" that he was only obeying Washington's orders as delivered by Major Scammell.

Washington said it was a "dreadful mistake," that they had come too soon, that things were in "much confusion at the ferry," and they must turn at once and go back to their posts.

For the weary troops who had held the lines through the night, counting the hours until they could be relieved and escape with the others, and who waited now in the dark, it was a moment of extreme difficulty, "trying business to young soldiers," as Alexander Graydon wrote. "Whoever has seen troops in a similar situation, or duly contemplates the human heart in such trials well knows how to appreciate the conduct of these brave men on this occasion."

They returned to the lines as ordered, and in the words of General Hand "had the good fortune to recover our stations and keep them for some hours longer, without the enemy perceiving what was going forward."

AT THE FERRY LANDING all this time troops and supplies and artillery were being loaded aboard one boat after another as quickly as humanly possible and sent on their way. Everyone worked furiously. A Connecticut soldier manning one of the boats would remember making eleven crossings in the course of the night.

But the exodus was not moving fast enough. Some of the heavy cannon, mired in mud, were impossible to move and had to be left behind. Time was running out. Though nearly morning, a large part of the army still waited to embark, and without the curtain of night to conceal them, their escape was doomed.

Incredibly, yet again, circumstances—fate, luck, Providence, the hand of God, as would be said so often—intervened.

Just at daybreak a heavy fog settled in over the whole of Brooklyn, concealing everything no less than had the night. It was a fog so thick, remembered a soldier, that one “could scarcely discern a man at six yards distance.” Even with the sun up, the fog remained as dense as ever, while over on the New York side of the river there was no fog at all.

At long last Mifflin and the rear guard and the troops at Fort Stirling were summoned. “It may be supposed we did not linger,” wrote Alexander Graydon.

Major Tallmadge, who with his regiment was among the last to depart on the boats, would write later that he thought he saw Washington on the ferry stairs staying to the very end.

Graydon estimated that it was seven in the morning, perhaps a little later, when he and his men landed in New York. “And in less than an hour after, the fog having dispersed, the enemy was visible on the shore we had left [behind].”

In a single night, 9,000 troops had escaped across the river. Not a life was lost. The only men captured were three who had hung back to plunder.

#### IV

Friday, August 30th. In the morning, to our great astonishment, found they had evacuated all their works on Brookland . . . with not a shot being fired at them . . . neither could our shipping get up for want of wind, and the whole escaped . . . to New York.

The immediate reaction of the British was, as Major Stephen Kemble recorded in his diary, one of utter astonishment. That the rebel army had silently vanished in the night under their very noses was almost inconceivable. The surprise for the British was no less than it had been the morning of March 5, at Boston, when they awakened to see the guns of Ticonderoga on Dorchester Heights. The great difference now was a feel-

ing of relief, not dread. All at once the whole of Brooklyn and its elaborate defenses were theirs for the taking and the rebels were on the run.

"We cannot yet account for their precipitate retreat," wrote General Grant. Like many of the British, Grant failed to understand how the Americans, having labored for months on their massive fortifications, could so readily abandon them.

General Howe had performed most admirably and deserved his success, Grant thought. The lesson of Brooklyn, Grant decided, was that if pushed the Americans would never face the King's troops again.

Lord Percy agreed. "They feel severely the blow of the 27th," he wrote to his father, "and I think I may venture to assert that they will never again stand before us in the field. Everything seems to be over with them, and I flatter myself now that this campaign will put a total end to the war." To Lord Germain as well, he predicted, "This business is pretty near over."

General Clinton, justifiably proud of his role in the triumph, wrote to his sister that he expected to be home by Christmas.

As many officers as could came to see the rebel works and enjoy the view from Fort Stirling. "This and the parts adjacent is the most beautiful and fertile spot I have yet seen in America," recorded Ambrose Serle, who was disturbed only by the reek of the unburied dead still strewn about in the fields.

As for the rebels and their flight, Serle, like many of the British, thought they had "behaved very ill as men."

But there were those, including General Grant, who saw that the Americans had made a daring and superbly executed move. They had "wisely" gotten out when they did, General Clinton would later comment, and "very ably effected the retreat of their whole army." Charles Stedman, an officer under Lord Percy, would later write a widely respected history of the war—one of the few histories by someone who was actually in the war—in which he called the retreat "particularly glorious to the Americans." Further, he saw, as apparently Grant did not, the peril the Americans would have faced in the event of a change in the wind. Had the *Phoenix* and the *Rose*, with their combined 72 guns, fetched up into the East River as they had done before on the Hudson,

Stedman emphasized, any chance of escape would have been cut off "most completely."

AS COMMENDABLE as Washington's leadership during the retreat had been, good luck had played a very large part, and wars were not won by withdrawals, however well handled. Nor could a successful evacuation compensate for the losses suffered in dead and wounded and the thousand or more who had been taken prisoner by the enemy.

The Battle of Brooklyn—the Battle of Long Island as it would be later known—had been a fiasco. Washington had proven indecisive and inept. In his first command on a large-scale field of battle, he and his general officers had not only failed, they had been made to look like fools.

Almost from the moment he took command in New York, Washington had put himself in an impossible position. He had failed to recognize that whether the British were to attack Manhattan or Long Island, he was in a trap either way. General Lee had seen clearly that "whoever commands the sea must command the town," and from the moment Washington chose to ignore that warning, he was in trouble.

Dividing his army, he had counted on his ability to respond to circumstances as need be, as though moving his forces back and forth over the East River would always be his choice to make. On the very eve of the British attack on Long Island, he was still baffled over whether it was the real thing and, if so, what he ought to do.

For the British everything went as planned, from the landing at Gravesend Bay to the night march of 10,000 men through the Jamaica Pass to the battle itself. For Washington almost nothing went as planned. The assumption that the British would make an all-out frontal assault at Brooklyn, as at Bunker Hill, and as they had seemed ready to repeat at Dorchester Heights, was the heart of the American strategy, and it was largely wishful thinking. So quickly, so completely was Washington outmaneuvered, the battle was virtually over before it began. It was as though in all his anguish over where and how he might be outflanked by water, he forgot that it could happen on land.

How a man so characteristically insistent that things be done just so,

who took such care about details, could have let the Jamaica Pass stand unguarded is impossible to explain—and particularly when he had spent the full day at Brooklyn, August 26, studying the situation.

Washington never accounted for his part in what happened at the Battle of Long Island, and for many the brilliant success of the night escape would serve both as proof of his ability and a way to ease the humiliation and pain of defeat. The Americans could also rightly claim that they had been vastly outnumbered by a far-better-trained army, and that given the odds against them, they had, in several instances, shown exemplary courage and tenacity.

General Putnam was blamed for not ordering Stirling to withdraw sooner. Sullivan was blamed for knowing too little about the terrain. Putnam and Sullivan were both faulted for leaving the Jamaica Pass unattended. Colonel Samuel Miles, the one supposed to be in charge of the left flank, later claimed to have had a hunch the enemy would make use of Jamaica Pass, yet he had done nothing about it. Stirling, for all his bravery, was criticized for trying to fight the British on the open field in their own fashion.

Many, including Henry Knox, would insist that had Nathanael Greene, with his familiarity with every detail of the Heights of Gowan, been present, the British would have met stiff opposition at the Jamaica Pass and things would have gone differently. Possibly they could have. Greene's illness and consequent absence was without question one of Washington's severest blows.

Washington would hold Sullivan largely to blame, for too little vigilance at the Jamaica Pass, thus implying that in his view Greene would never have allowed a British surprise to succeed there.

But in fact a British victory had been certain all day, no matter what the Americans did. The struggle might have lasted longer, the cost to the British might have been greater, but outnumbered by such superior troops and without control of the sea, Washington and his army never really had a chance—and this quite apart from the far greater experience of the British command.

General Howe's decision not to continue the attack the afternoon of the battle would be a subject of endless speculation and debate. Among Howe's severest critics was Captain John Montresor, who, the morning

of August 30, had been the first to discover that the Americans had vanished in the night. To Montresor there was no question that Howe should have pressed the attack and that to have failed to do so was a grievous mistake. "Never pursues his victories" was Montresor's curt assessment of William Howe.

General Clinton, too, seemed to feel that with the Americans "flying in such a panic" Howe had as good a chance as he would ever have to finish them off and end the war at a stroke. But Clinton would never say so when questioned. Rather he would write that had he been in Howe's position, he, too, would have "judged it prudent" to hold back.

In testimony before Parliament, General Cornwallis would refuse to say that the Brooklyn lines could have been taken by an immediate attack, and said that at the time he never heard anyone claim they could have been.

The Americans had wanted another Bunker Hill. Howe, remembering Bunker Hill, had no desire to squander lives with another bloody frontal attack on an army dug in on a hill, if, with a little patience, that same hill could be taken by less costly means. "It was apparent the lines must have been ours at a very cheap rate by regular approaches," he would say in explanation. "I could not risk the loss that might have been sustained in the assault."

Had Howe pressed on the afternoon of the 27th, the British victory could have been total. Or had the wind turned earlier, and the British navy moved into the East River, the war and the chances of an independent United States of America could have been long delayed, or even ended there and then.

WHEN NEWS OF THE BATTLE, together with Howe's exaggerated estimates of American losses, at last reached London, it caused a sensation. A victory so grand, said the press, "fully controverted" all the "full-mouthed predictions" of the opponents of the war. Edmund Burke, Charles Fox, and others in Parliament opposed to the war were as downcast as prominent Tories were jubilant. News to "enliven our countenances," the Tory historian Edward Gibbon called it.

All Britain was in "an ecstasy which I cannot express," a friend wrote

to Henry Clinton. Bells were rung in London and in rural hamlets, windows lighted with candles. The King was reported to have paused during a stroll in Kew Gardens to express his "great satisfaction" with the report of General Howe, upon whom he was to confer the Order of Bath.

IN CONGRESS the defeat was spoken of privately as an "unfortunate beginning" at best, and more candidly as a "disaster." But there was no panic.

Elsewhere in the country early reports of the battle were taken at first as "Tory news." Afterward, great anxiety, if not panic, set in. "All in solicitude," recorded the Reverend Ezra Stiles at his home in Newport. "Tories rejoicing. Sons of Liberty dejected."

Newspapers put heavy emphasis on Washington's daring night retreat, calling it renewed cause for confidence in the army and in Washington most of all. The escape from Brooklyn was "a masterpiece," read a report in the *New England Chronicle*. "The manner in which our retreat was performed," reported the *Virginia Gazette*, "reflects the highest credit upon our commander-in-chief, and the officers in general."

While one writer in the *New England Chronicle* declared, "Providence favored us," another in the *Massachusetts Spy* assured his readers that the defeat on Long Island and consequent distress were "loud speaking testimonies of the displeasure and anger of Almighty God against a sinful people."

We have thought God was for us, and had given many and signal instances of his power and mercy in our favor, and had greatly frowned upon and disappointed our enemies; and verily it has been so. But have we repented and given him the glory? Verily no. His hand seems to be turned and stretched out against us—and strong is his hand.

In New York the gloom of defeat hung heavy. The high spirits of the soldiers that had been counted on for so long to compensate for, even overcome, whatever advantages the enemy might have, were gone. The army that had crossed in the night from Brooklyn was, in the light of day

on August 30, a sorry sight to behold—filthy, bedraggled, numb with fatigue, still soaked to the skin, many of them sick and emaciated. The army that had gone off to Brooklyn cheering was no more.

“It was a surprising change,” Pastor Shewkirk noted in his diary, “the merry tones on drums and fifes had ceased. . . . It seemed a general damp had spread, and the sight of scattered people up and down the streets was indeed moving.”

They had been swiftly, overwhelmingly defeated. “A hard day this, for us poor Yankees” was young Enoch Anderson’s unadorned summing up of the Battle of Brooklyn.

But as resounding as the British victory had been, it was not a decisive victory. The war had not been ended at a stroke by a superior force of professional soldiers. Washington and his 9,000 troops had survived to fight another day.

FOR THE FIRST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS in New York, nearly all were collapsed in sleep, including the commander-in-chief. Not until Saturday, August 31, could Washington summon the strength even to notify Congress of the escape. He had been “entirely unfit to take pen in hand,” he explained. “Since Monday scarce any of us have been out of the lines till our passage across the East River was effected yesterday morning, and for forty-eight hours preceding that I had hardly been of [f] my horse and never closed my eyes.”

Presently he was “much hurried and engaged in arranging and making new dispositions of our forces,” he said. He would save for another letter the extremity of the concern he felt.