

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, January 7, 1777

Morris Town Jan^y. 7. 1777 –

My dearest Love

I wrote to you from Trenton by a M^r Furnass which I hope you have received. I then informed you that we soon expected another tustle; I was not out in my conjecture, M^r Furnass had not been gone more than two hours before we had intelligence that the enemy were advancing with considerable Force from Princeton 12 miles distant we immediately made a disposition for a Battle which as the enemy did not come on immediately we afterwards varied in order to prevent their coming in on our rear – about 3 oClock on the 2^d of Jany. which was the same day on which M^r Furnass went away & the same day of which I'm writing – A Column of the Enemy attack'd a party of ours which was stationd about one mile above Trenton, Our party was small & did not make much resistance, the Enemy who were Hessians enter'd the Town Pellmell pretty much in the same manner that we had driven the Hessians a few days before – nearly on the other side of Trenton partly in the Town runs a Creek which in most places is not Fordable & over which thro Trenton is a Bridge the Grounds on the other side are much higher than on this and may be said to command Trenton Completely – here it was our army drew up with 30 or 40 pieces of Artillery in front – the Enemy push'd our small party thro' the Town with Vigor tho not with much loss, their retreat over the Bridge was thoroughly secur'd by the Artillery, after they had retir'd over the Bridge the enemy advanc'd within reach of our Cannon who saluted them with great vociferation and some execution, this Continued till dark when of course it ceas'd except a few shells we now & then chuck'd into Town to prevent their enjoying their new quarters securely – as I before mentiond the Creek was in our front – our left on the Delaware, our right in a Wood pariarell to the Creek the situation was strong to be sure but hazardous on this account that had our right wing been defeated the defeat of the left would almost have been an inevitable consequence, & the whole thrown into confusion or push'd into the Delaware as it was impassable by Boats from these Considerations the General thought it was best to attack Princeton 12 miles in the rear of the enemys Grandarmy and where they had the 17th 40th & 55th Reg^{ts} with a number of draughts altogether perhaps about 1200 men – accordingly about one oClock at night we began to march & make this most extra manoevre – our Troops march'd with great silence & order & arriv'd near Princeton a little after day Break – we did not surprize them as at Trenton, for they were on their march down to Trenton on a road about a quarter of a mile distant from the one in which we were – You may judge of their Suprize when they discoverd such large Columns marching up, they could not possibly suppose it was our army for that they took for granted was coop'd up near Trenton, they could not possibly suppose it was their own army returning by a back road – in short I believe they were as much astonish'd as if our Army had drop'd perpendicularly upon them – however they had not much time for

consideration we push'd a party to attack them this attack they repuls'd with great spirit & advanc'd upon another Column just then Coming out of a Wood Which they likewise put in some disorder but fresh troops coming up and the Artillery beginning to play they were after a smart resistance totally put to the rout – the 4th Reg^t us'd their Bayonets with too much Severity upon a party they put to flight but they now paid for it in proportion – very few escaping – near 60 were kill'd on the spot – besides the wounded. – we have taken between three & four hundred prisoners all British troops – they must have lost in this affair nearly 800 kill'd wounded & taken prisoners – we lost some Gallant officers – Brig^a General Mercer was wounded & supposd to have been kill'd he had three separate stabs with a Bayonet a L^t Col^o Fleming was killd & a Cap^t Neil of the Artillery an Exceedng fine officer Mercer will get better – the enemy took his parole after we left princeton – We took all their Cannon which consisted of two brass six pounders a Considerable quantity of military stores blankets guns &c – they lost among a number of other officers a Cap^t Leslie – son to the Earl of Leven & Nephew to Gen^l Leslie him we brought off & buried with the honors of War – after we had been about two hours at Princeton – word was brought that the enemy were advancing from Trenton – this they did as we have Since been inform'd in amost informal sweat, running puffing & blowing & swearing at being so out witted – as we had other objects in view to risk beating up their quarters we pursued our march to Somerset Court house where there were about 1300 Quarterd as we had been informed – they however had now off & join'd the Army at Trenton – we at first intend'd to have made a forc'd march'd to Brunswick at which place was the baggage of their whole army & Gen^l Lee – but our men having been without either rest rum or provisions for two nights & days were unequal to the talk of marching 17 miles further – if we could have procur'd 1000 fresh men at Princeton to have push'd for Brunswick we should have struck one of the most Brilliant Strokes in all history – however the advantages are very great already they have Collected the Whole Force and drawn themselves to one point to wit Brunswick the enemy were within 19 miles of Philadelphia they are now 60 miles we have driven from almost the Whole of West Jersiy – the Panic is Still kept up: we had a Battle two days ago with a party of ours & 60 Waldeckers who were all kill'd or taken, in Monmouth County in the lower part of the Jersies – another party of ours have routed the party of Tories there, kill'd and took two hundred prisoners – in short my Lucy America has a prospect of seeing this part of it entirely rid of her Foes – It is just our Interest <text loss> Gen^l Battle nor can I think under all circumstances it is the enemies – they have sent their Baggage to Staten Island from the Jersies & we are very well inform'd they are doing the same from New York – Heath will have orders to march there and endeavr to storm it on that side, There is a tide in the affairs of men such if taken at the Flood lead on to Vict'r'y – For my part my Lucy I look up to Heaven & most devoutly thank the great Govenor of the Universe for producing this turn in our Affairs of America – & this sentiment I hope will so prevail on the Hearts of the people as to induce them to be a people chosen of Heaven, not to give way to dispair but at All times & under all circumstances never to Dispair of the Common wealth – much is to be done by New England,

great exertions must be produced by her – Heaven seems to have given her hardy sons replete with Health & Fortitude <text loss> be equal to battle all the efforts of tyranny.

I wish something might or could be done with the enemy at Rhode Island – if God would so prosper our arms as to eject them out of American entirely – it would give Life & energy to the Formation of the new Army. I am not too Sanguine, I dont think that the Army of America is established firmly – the Fate of War is uncertain. Victorious to day defeated tomorrow – we shall shortly endeavor to make another stroke or two upon them – I repeat it again that New England must exert herself to the Utmost for a new Campaign – and if she does much very much may be expected –

I most devoutly long for the happy day when War shall cease & restore me to my much lov'd Lucy, when I shall have the happiness of seeing you for a short time I cannot with certainty say but I hope it will be in the course of six weeks or two months – May god preserve you & my sweet Babe

Adieu my Love

HKnox

Mrs Knox

Transcript Source: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History