

Letter from Henry Knox to Lucy Knox, December 28, 1776

Delaware River near Trenton Dec^r 28, 1776

past 12 °Clock

my dearly beloved friend

It grieves me exceedingly that I still date my Letters from this place, & That I am so far distant from the dearest object of my affections. This War with all its variety is not able to banish your much lov'd Idea from my heart. Whatever I am employ'd about still you are with me I often say to myself no my Lucy not so your Harry will return as soon as the Sacred calls of his Country will permit – will return with the permission of heaven and enjoy all the blessings of conjugal affection, – I wrote you a few days past by Mr Shaw. it was short as my then hurry would not suffer me to do otherwise

You will before this have heard of our success on the morning of the 26th instant against the enemy – The enemy by their superior numbers had oblig'd us to retire on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware by which means we were oblig'd to evacuate or give up nearly all the Jersies, even after our retiring over the river the preservation of Philadelphia was a matter exceedingly precarious – The Force of the enemy three or four times as large as ours. however the Enemy seem'd contented with their success for the present and quartered their troops in different & distant places in the Jersies – of these Cantoonments Trenton was the most Considerable – Trenton is an open Town situated nearly on the Banks of the Delaware accessible on all sides, our army was scatter'd along the river for nearly 25 miles. – our intelligence agreed that the force of the enemy in Trenton was from two to three Thousand with about six field Cannon and that they were pretty secure in their situation & that they were Hessians, no British troops – a hardy design was form'd of attacking the Town by storm accordingly a part of the army consisting of about 2500 or three thousand pass'd the River on Christmass night with allmost infinite difficulty, with eighteen feild peice, floating Ice in the River made the labour almost incredible however perseverance accomplished what at first seem'd impossible – about two OClock the troops were all on the Jersey side – we then were about nine miles from the object, the night was cold & stormy It haild with great violence the Troops march'd with the most profound silence and good

order. they arrivd by two routs on roads at the same time about half an hour after day light. to within one mile of the Town the storm continued with great violence but was in our backs & consequenly in the faces of our Enemy – about half a mile from the Town was an advancd Guard on each road consisting of a Captains Guard –these Guards we forc'd & enter'd the Town with them pell-mell, & here succeeded a scene of war of which I had often Conceived but never saw before. The hurry fright & confusion of the enemy was unlike that which shall be when the last Trump shall sound – they endevord to form in streets the heads of which we had previously the possession of with Cannon & Howitzers, these in the twinkling of an eye clear'd the streets, the backs of the houses were resorted to for shelter, these prov'd ineffectual the musketry soon dislog'd them finally they were driven through the Town into an open plain beyond the Town – here they form'd in an instant – during the contest in the streets – measures were taken for putting an entire stop to their retreat by posting troops and Cannon in such passes and roads as it was possible for them to get away by – the poor fellows after they were form'd on the plains saw themselves Completely surrounded – the only resource left was to force their way thro numbers unknown to them – strongly posted with Cannon. The Hessians lost part of their Cannon in the Town they did not relish the project of forcing, & were oblig'd to Surrender upon the spot with all their artillery 6 brass peices army Colors &c &c. – a Colo Rawle commanded who was wounded – the number of prisoners was above 1200. including officers all Hessians there were but few kill'd or wounded on either side – the Hessians might have about 30 or 40 Kill'd & perhaps a hundred wounded, our kill'd and wounded did not amount to more than 30 – after having march'd off the prisoners & secur'd the Cannon stores &c we returnd to the place 9 miles distant where we had embarkd from – Providence seem'd to have smil'd upon every part of this enterprize; great advantages may be gaind from it if we take the proper advantages – at another port we have push'd over the River 2000 men – to day another body and tomorrow the whole army will follow – The troops behav'd like men contending for every thing that was dear and valuable – It must give a sensible pleasure to every friend to the rights of America to think with how much intrepidity our people push'd the enemy & prevented their forming in the Town these bugbears, I hope will now be strip'd of their Lions skin the people will see I hope that nothing but an exertion of their own strength is wanting to chase

tyranny from this Country devoted to Liberty His Excellency The General has done me the unmerited great honor of thanking me in public orders in terms strong & polite – This circumstance I should blush to mention to any other than to you my dear Lucy & I am fearful that even my Lucy may think her Harry possed of a Species of little vanity in doing at all – It is an exceeding great satisfaction to amind of any sensibility to find approbation succeeding well meant endeavors. – I was in hopes I should have been on my way from Philadelphia to Hartford ‘ere this, but this matter has prevented me for the present – my business will render my going there indespensible this winter & then I hope to have the happiness of being for a few days with my Lucy at N Haven or Boston – I wish to know at what place you are – I recd a queer note from Peter but it inform’d me neither of one thing or another – may that kind Being who presides over thee in quality of a Guardian angel, keep vigilant watch that no evils befall thee or thy babe & render the safe to your anxiously tender Husband

Harry

Mrs Knox

Transcript Source: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History