

The second fight for Princeton

British and Americans unite to preserve 1777 battlefield

by Lindsey Morrison

After nearly 240 years, British and Americans meet again on the fields of Princeton, New Jersey. This time, the one-time adversaries are united in their determination to save the Revolutionary War Princeton battlefield from desecration and development.

The storied tale of the events that occurred at Princeton is deeply interwoven in the fabric of American and British history

On the frigid morning of 3 January 1777, a British force under Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mawhood was beginning to move to Trenton, New Jersey to join the rest of the 8,000-strong British Army, when scouts reported that the Continental Army under General George Washington was closing in on their position. Mawhood recalled his troops back to Princeton. Witnessing the British movement, the leading Continental troops under General Hugh Mercer pushed towards the British scouts guarding the road to Princeton. In response, Mercer was attacked in force by Mawhood and eventually surrounded by his red-coated adversaries, who – believing they had cornered George Washington – overpowered and fatally wounded Mercer who refused to surrender.



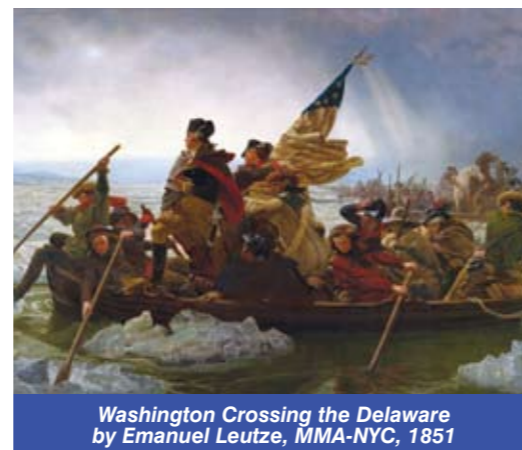
The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton - January 3 1777 by John Trumbull

As the remnants of Mercer's command fled, General George Washington appeared on the field with his hat in his hand. Washington and his staff rode among the disorganised Americans shouting, 'Parade with us, my brave fellows!' The Continentals reformed and rushed forward towards the outnumbered but resolute British line. After intense hand-to-hand combat, the British withdrew their forces back to the town of Princeton, where many were captured during the brief siege of Nassau Hall.

The battle of Princeton was the concluding action in a ten-day campaign that began with Washington's surprise attack on the Hessian garrison at Trenton on 26 December 1776. Those ten days transformed an American Revolution that seemed all but lost in mid-December. It would ultimately lead British forces to abandon nearly all of New Jersey by the spring of 1777.

The Americans and British alike lost capable officers in the battle, with casualties from both sides totalling more than 500 killed, wounded or captured. As such, the Princeton battlefield is a living memorial to the brave British and American soldiers who stood their ground on that field nearly 240 years ago. Many of the British and Americans who died at Princeton remain on the battlefield, buried in unknown graves.

Now, despite public outcry, a local international research centre, the Institute for Advanced Study, is moving forward with plans to construct fifteen faculty housing units on a 22-acre part of the Princeton battlefield known locally as Maxwell's Field. This property had remained pristine open space for more than two centuries before the Institute began initial construction work in late 2015.



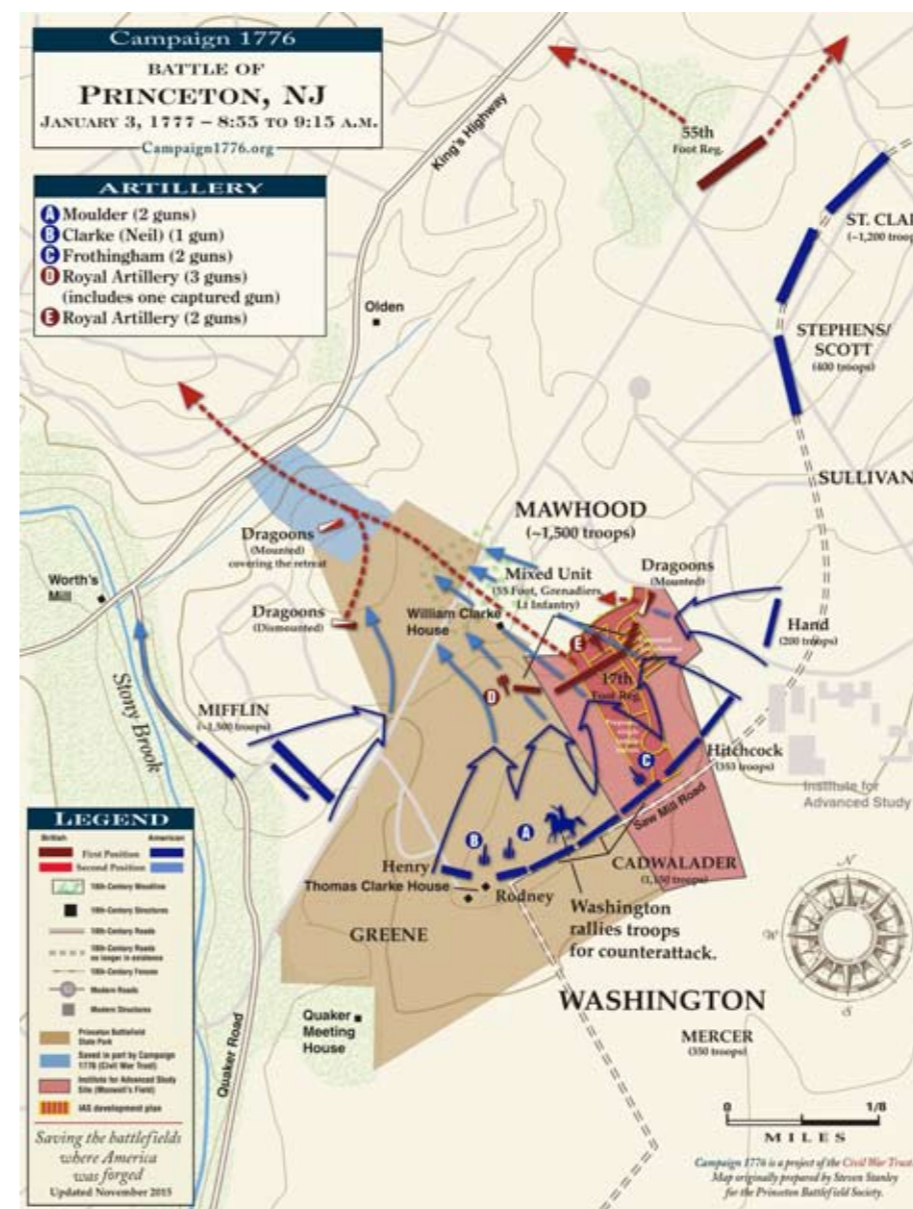
Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Leutze, MMA-NYC, 1851

The Battlefields Trust and the Royal Tigers' Association (the veterans association of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment) recently joined the Save Princeton Coalition, a collection of twelve preservation and conservation organisations united in their efforts to preserve this critical piece of the Princeton battlefield.

Maxwell's Field is confirmed by archaeologists and historians to be the site of George Washington's famous counter-attack and the 17th Regiment of Foot's valiant stand. Archaeological research conducted over the last twenty years reinforces arguments by the National Park Service and historians that Maxwell's Field was at the heart of the battle. Dozens of artefacts have been recovered as part of these studies, including grapeshot, lead musket balls and bayonet fragments, which clearly demonstrate a line of battle directly on the Institute's property.



Construction at Maxwell's Field



In an earnest effort to assist the Institute in finding alternate venues for its faculty housing, the Civil War Trust, a Save Princeton Coalition member, has offered to acquire the Maxwell's Field tract for \$4.5 million (more than \$1 million above the appraised value of the property).

Despite the immense historical significance of this battlefield, the Institute for Advanced Study is continuing with its construction work. Please join the Battlefields Trust, the Royal Tigers' Association and the Save Princeton Coalition in asking the Institute for Advanced Study to halt development on the Princeton battlefield. Visit www.saveprinceton.org to learn about this 'Second Fight for Princeton' and stand with us as we fight to save our common history.

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Washington at Princeton

The Brave 17th - Princeton

