

Book Note

By William M. Dwyer. *The Day Is Ours! An Inside View of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, November 1776-January 1777.*

(New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983; reprint edition 1998. Pp xiii, 426, notes, bibliography, index.)

December 2000 marked the 224th anniversary of George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River and subsequent surprise attack on the Hessian garrison at Trenton. (It also marked the 48th consecutive year that the dramatic episode was commemorated at the site of The Crossing, an event which in itself is a cultural phenomenon.) William M. Dwyer's *The Day Is Ours!* is among the most compelling narratives of these revolutionary events. Using published letters, diaries, and memoirs, Dwyer presents an engagingly written story—not surprising in view of the author's long career as a veteran journalist—about the time when the American cause was truly in peril. Regarding the “Spirit of ’76, he reminds us that by year's end most Whigs would have agreed with Robert Morris, who was “heartily glad” it was over.

Dwyer places the battles of Trenton and Princeton in the proper context of the larger New York-New Jersey campaign, which until then had been a series of American Defeats. A large part of the rebels' success at saving their army was the “indolent progress” of General Howe in pursuing them, a fact which baffled British and German officers and infuriated Loyalists such as Joseph Galloway. Disaffection was rife in parts of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, notably in Bucks County. Not only did American recruiters have to contend with the recalcitrance of Tories, but also with resistance to mustering, sometimes to the point of bloodshed, by militia, who did not want to abandon their families. And typical of warfare in the eighteenth century, the civilian population, regardless of political persuasion, was plundered by Hessians, British, and Americans alike.

Dwyer points out that the American victory was favored by an almost providential concentration of circumstances. One was the British capture of the insubordinate Charles Lee on December 13. Another was the poor judgment of the Hessian Colonel Rall who ignored advice to build defensive redoubts at Trenton, and exhibited a general tendency to

underestimate the enemy. Count von Donop's dalliance at Mount Holly deprived the Germans of timely succor. And on more than one occasion during that fortnight, the weather played a crucial role. Although Washington can perhaps be faulted for the complexity of the multi-pronged attack on Trenton, he can certainly be commended for its boldness, as well as for his foresight in collecting all the rivercraft for miles north and south of Trenton in order to prevent pursuit. Ultimately, the propaganda value of the victory was not lost on either Americans, British, Germans, Loyalists – or later historians.

Although Dwyer admittedly writes “mostly with the general reader in mind,” one would have hoped that in a book so heavily reliant on contemporary sources he had selected a method of citation that facilitated targeting those sources. His narrative is drawn largely from published works: there may still be a fascinating, untold story regarding the event buried in manuscript collections that Dwyer did not tap. Why review a book originally published in 1983? Because Rutgers University Press reprinted it in an attractive, more accessible and affordable paperback format.

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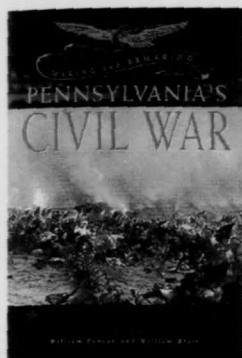
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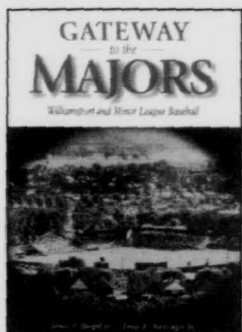


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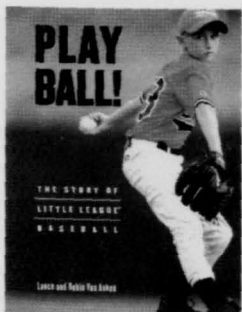
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