

The Battle of Cooch's Bridge, 1777, First Battle the American Flag is Flown.

On this day in history, *September 3, 1777, the Battle of Cooch's Bridge is the only battle of the American Revolution to take place in Delaware. It is also the first battle during which the American flag is flown.*

British General William Howe landed 17,000 troops at Head of Elk, Maryland on August 25th, 1777, with the goal of capturing Philadelphia, the capital of the rebel Continental Congress. Over the next few days, while Howe unloaded troops and supplies, George Washington and the Continental Army reconnoitered the British army to gauge its strength and intentions.

Washington's main force was camped near Wilmington, Delaware. Washington himself traveled to the nearby hills overlooking Head of Elk to spy on the British troops. The Commander of the Continental Army placed sentries and small groups of troops at various roads and bridges to watch for British movements and advances, since it was not known which way Howe would try to approach Philadelphia.

About *1,000 Pennsylvania and Delaware troops were placed under the command of Brigadier General William Maxwell, who had them divided between Iron Hill, the tallest hill in Delaware, near modern day Newark, and the nearby Cooch's Bridge.*

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On September 2, British and German troops under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis took over Aiken's Tavern about 5 miles east of Head of Elk and 3 miles south of Cooch's Bridge. In the morning, an advance company of Hessian dragoons scouting the road north of the tavern were fired on by Maxwell's light infantry. This brought a rush of German jagers, (light infantry) who engaged the militia.

Maxwell held for some time, but a German bayonet charge forced him to retreat. The jagers chased Maxwell back to Cooch's Bridge where they made an heroic stand. Eventually, though, they ran out of ammunition and another bayonet charge forced Maxwell to retreat to General Washington's camp at White Clay Creek. The Germans pursued them for a few miles, but turned back to shore up their gains.

The Battle of Cooch's Bridge would be the only engagement of the American Revolution fought in Delaware. After driving off Maxwell's troops, General Cornwallis occupied Cooch's Bridge and Iron Hill, while General Howe made his headquarters at Aiken's Tavern for the next week.

The Battle of Cooch's Bridge also has the distinction, according to many historians, of being the first engagement during which the new American flag was flown.

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The flag was created on June 14, 1777 by the Flag Act of 1777. The act stated that the flag would have "thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation."

According to legend, Betsy Ross then created the flag at the request of George Washington. There is debate, however, about the accuracy of the Betsy Ross flag story, which you can learn more about at our Betsy Ross Flag page.