

But before Washington could depart for Valley Forge where his army was to spend the winter, his men were to be engaged by the enemy twice more. Washington was well entrenched at Whitemarsh, but General Howe hoped to lure him into the open fields for battle before Washington had an opportunity to move into winter quarters. The same day of the congressional visit to Washington's camp--December 4--the general learned of a major advance by the British from Philadelphia. According to Maj. Henry Dearborn, writing on December 5, "this morning we were allarm'd at 4 O clock by hearing that the Enemy were advancing, in consiquice of which the whole army Turnd out, & form'd the Lines of battle, & Sent the baggage of the army back out of Camp." By daylight the enemy could be seen on Chestnut Hill, three miles from the American encampment. Washington refused to engage his entire force in battle with the British, but instead sent Brig. Gen. James Irvine and the Pennsylvania militia under his command to attack their advance parties. Irvine was wounded and captured in the ensuing skirmish, but the British failed to advance on Washington's main lines. That night the enemy shifted ground toward Washington's left flank, with the Americans making appropriate adjustments in their own defensive posture. On December 7, the British appeared ready to launch a major offensive on Washington's left flank, but they were met by a spirited assault from Daniel Morgan's corps of Virginia riflemen and Col. Mordecai Gist's Maryland militiamen. In his report to Congress, Washington wrote that about sunset "after various marches and countermarches they halted, and I still supposed from their disposition and preceding Manoeuvres, that they would attack us in the Night or early the next morning, but in this I was mistaken. On Monday afternoon, they began to move again and instead of advancing filed off from their Right...in full March towards Philadelphia by Two or Three Routes." Washington could not ascertain British losses in the engagement, but two exaggerated accounts he received claimed "that Five hundred wounded had been sent [to Philadelphia]; Another is that Eighty two Waggon's had gone in with Men in this situation." In reality, losses on both sides had been small, with Morgan's riflemen sustaining twenty-eight killed or wounded and Gist's Marylanders sixteen or seventeen wounded. British casualties were about equal in number.

THE ARMY MOVES TO VALLEY FORGE

The most significant result of the Battle of Chestnut Hill was that it delayed the American retreat to winter quarters. On December 11, Washington was finally ready to move his army westward, intending to cross the Schuylkill River at Matson's