

SMALLWOOD AT WILMINGTON

Washington acceded to the political pressures from Congress and the legislature of Pennsylvania in selecting a winter headquarters near Philadelphia to protect the surrounding area from pillaging by the British, but he recognized the wisdom of Gen. William Smallwood's recommendation to occupy Wilmington, Delaware. Although not unassailable, Wilmington could be fortified so as to present an imposing threat to the enemy, and with Americans in control of the town British shipping on the Delaware River could be hampered. More importantly, Delaware, New Jersey, and the Eastern Shore of Maryland could be protected from British occupation and foraging parties. Thus, on the same day that Washington arrived at Valley Forge he ordered General Smallwood to take command of the division previously under General Sullivan and to march it to Wilmington. The division consisted of one Canadian and one Delaware regiment in addition to the seven Maryland regiments commanded by Colonels Stone, Gist, Richardson, Gunby, Hall, Williams, and Price. This constituted the entirety of Marylanders under Washington, except for four companies in the German Regiment under Gen. Peter Muhlenberg, who remained at Valley Forge during the winter. Nevertheless, the men detached to Wilmington totalled only 1,400, and the same day Washington ordered Smallwood to that town he wrote to George Read, president of Delaware, requesting that he call forth the state's militia to supplement Smallwood's force. Read wrote Smallwood on the 21st, explaining that he had ordered the militia to "hold themselves in Readiness to march at a moments warning," but he added that he was "sorry to say that [he believed] they will be very little Regarded. A want of Zeal in some and disaffection in others is so prevalent that little good is to be Expected of them in this way, it is a misfortune that our Militia Law is not calculated to bring them to the Field."

By the time he received Read's letter, General Smallwood had already witnessed the disaffection of the inhabitants in the area around Wilmington. An "Extract of a Letter from an Officer in the Army dated Wilmington, Dec. 25, 1777," printed in the Maryland Journal, and Baltimore Advertiser on December 30 described the arrival of Smallwood and his men in the Wilmington area:

On our March to the Place, our Regiment was in the Front, all cloathed in Red. As we advanced near the Town, we met a Number of