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Sketch of the Surprise of German Town. by the American Forces commanded by General Washington. October 4th 1777 by J. Hills, Lt. 23d. Regt. & Asst.Engr.

Stock#: 55000
Map Maker: Faden / Hills
Date: 1784
Place: London
Color: Outline Color
Condition: VG+
Size: 21.5 x 18.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Very Rare and Authoritative Revolutionary War Plan of the Battle of Germantown

The present map showcases the Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania, an especially dramatic action of the Revolutionary War that occurred on October 4th, 1777, during the 'Philadelphia Campaign'. It is based on a manuscript map by British Lieutenant John Hills, and printed by the leading map publisher William Faden. It is considered to be the finest cartographic record of the altercation, and the only printed plan of the battle published during the Revolutionary era. While Germantown resulted in a defeat for General George Washington, importantly, it taught the American leader valuable lessons that would strengthen his judgment in the battles that were to follow.

The Military Action Depicted on the Present Map

By the early days of 1777, the American Revolutionary War was in something of a stalemate. While a massive British invasion in the autumn of 1776 had secured New York City and environs, General George Washington's dramatic 'Crossing of the Delaware' ensured that the hinterland remained in Patriot hands. Thereafter, attempts by the British Commander-in-Chief, General Sir William Howe, to goad Washington's forces into a direct showdown had proven unsuccessful.

Pursuing a 'shock and awe' strategy, Howe resolved to conquer the American capital, Philadelphia. In late



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August 1777, a massive British flotilla of 260 vessels landed 17,000 troops at the head of Chesapeake Bay. Over the next month this juggernaut steadily made its way northeastwards towards Philadelphia. The British met with American resistance on a number of occasions, most notably at the Battle of Brandywine. However, Washington was progressively forced to retreat. On September 26, the British marched into Philadelphia, which had been strategically abandoned by the Americans.

While Washington's force had repaired the Shippack, well to the north of the city, Howe made his main encampment of 9,000 British troops and Hessian mercenaries at Germantown, a hamlet located five miles to the north of Philadelphia. As shown on the map, Germantown ran for about two miles down a main road below where the Wissahickon Creek descended from a steep gorge to flow into the Schuylkill River. Howe also left a further 3,000 men under Lord Cornwallis to garrison Philadelphia.

As depicted on the map, Howe made his headquarters on a small rise to the south of the town, and the initial placement of his troops on the morning of October 4th is indicated by the columns, heightened in original color, marked with the letter A, corresponding to the 'References' notes in the lower left corner of the map.

Washington, aided by intelligence supplied by his extensive espionage network, knew that his force of 11,000 troops could overwhelm Howe's army if they were able to mount a stealth attack. He developed a rather sophisticated operational plan, which if properly executed, would have been quite formidable. Washington decided to divide his force into four columns, the main force of which was to assault Germantown directly, preoccupying the presumably surprised British, while the other American detachments would form a pincer movement, attacking the British flanks, and so entrapping the enemy.

Returning to the map itself, Washington's four columns are designated as points B, C, D and E. Washington ensured that his more experienced men joined the two center columns, C being commanded by General Nathaniel Greene and E commanded by General John Sullivan. Unfortunately for the Americans, events did not go as planned. At dusk on 3 October, the four columns began their 16 mile all-night march to Germantown. Sullivan's force advanced into the town through points F and then G. Meanwhile a thick fog had settled in, delaying and confusing the attacking force, and buying precious time for the surprised defenders.

A British force under Lt. Colonel Thomas Musgrave responded by advancing from point H, but upon encountering the Americans at point I, decided to make a strategic retreat to point K. These developments allowed the Hessian commander, Baron von Knyphausen to advance his forces to points L and M. Further British brigades under Generals Grey, Agnew and Stern moved in to shore up the defenses of the town at point N, forcing the Americans to retreat to the north.



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By this time Washington's element of surprise had been totally blown, and the British had succeeded in mounting an organized defense, causing the Americans to be surprised by this reversal of fortune. Lines under American General Adam Stephen, who was later said to have been inebriated, advanced from point *O*, but faltered badly upon being engaged by British lines under General James Grant who advanced to points *P* and *Q*. Grant was also able to repel Greene's American lines which had advanced from *C* to *R*. Washington sent a detachment of the Pennsylvania militia down the Schuylkill Valley to point *S*, however, they were only able to play a peripheral role in the battle. The result was an unequivocal victory for the British, although most of Washington's force survived to fight another day.

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that Washington's plan, which required the disciplined and coordinated movement of the four columns, was too sophisticated for an army that was largely composed of amateur volunteers, with little or no formal training. While the inclement weather certainly played a part, Washington had erred in placing his less effective militia columns on the right and left flanks. While the British were initially put on the defensive by Washington's central columns, General Stephen's lamentable effort to follow through on the planned pincer movement essentially sealed the fate of the enterprise.

While the British spent the winter that followed enjoying the comforts of Philadelphia, Washington's force endured legendary hardship in freezing conditions at Valley Forge.

However, in the spring, circumstances radically changed. Word reached America that the French had joined the war on the American side, such that both New York and the British West Indies were in immediate danger of French naval attack. In June 1778, the new British commander, General Sir Henry Clinton, had no choice but to abandon Philadelphia, leading his forces on a harrowing overland retreat across New Jersey in order to shore up the defenses of New York.

Ironically, after all of the herculean feats of force and melodrama of the British 'Philadelphia Campaign', the overall conflict essentially returned to the same state of stalemate as it was in the summer of 1776. The British were left in control of not much more than New York City, while Washington was once again headquartered up country at White Plains. From that point on, all of the major action of the Revolution shifted to Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia, as Clinton pursued his 'Southern Strategy.'

The Story behind the Creation of the Hills-Faden Germantown Plan

The present map represents the only printed battle plan of this crucial engagement published during the Revolutionary Era. It is closely based on a manuscript map drafted by John Hills, one of four known manuscripts of the Battle of Germantown, the others being drafted by John André and John Montresor,



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while the fourth is an anonymous sketch.

William Faden (1749-1836), the Geographer to the King, ascended to the apex of the London map world based on his groundbreaking cartography of the American Revolution. While he was able to publish maps of other aspects of the Philadelphia Campaign in short order, it seems that Faden faced considerable difficulty in obtaining a credible plan of the Battle of Germantown. Faden did not come out with the present map until 1784, when he included it in his, now phenomenally rare, *Atlas of Battles of the American Revolution*.

John Hills (fl. 1777-1816), who drafted the manuscript on which the present map is predicated, was one of the most talented and prolific cartographers of the Revolutionary War, and a direct eyewitness to many of the events captured by his maps. Serving as an ensign in the 38th, and later as a lieutenant in the 23rd Regiment, Hills's abilities were greatly valued by his superiors even though his mercurial personality led him into frequent violent altercations with fellow officers and civilians alike. While serving in the Philadelphia Campaign, Hills drafted a magnificent series of manuscript battle plans, and larger regional campaign maps. His excellent work done in the field was aided considerably by his knowledge of the most advanced surveys conducted before the war, for it seems that he had access to the manuscript maps contained in the archives of the Proprietors of East Jersey, and possibly West Jersey. He also maintained extensive contacts with various local surveyors in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania. His greatest work was the manuscript atlas of New Jersey he made for Sir Henry Clinton, now preserved in the Library of Congress. After the war, Hills settled in Philadelphia, where he published several fine maps of various locations in the Philadelphia-New York corridor.

Detailed Condition: