

WASHINGTON'S PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE FROM BROOKLYN HEIGHTS IN AUGUST 1776

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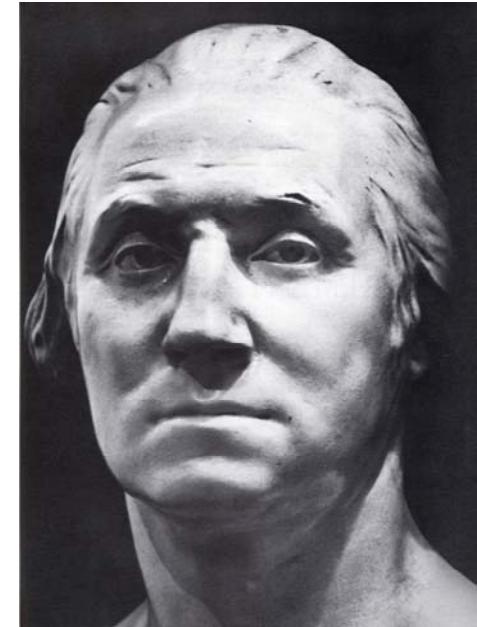
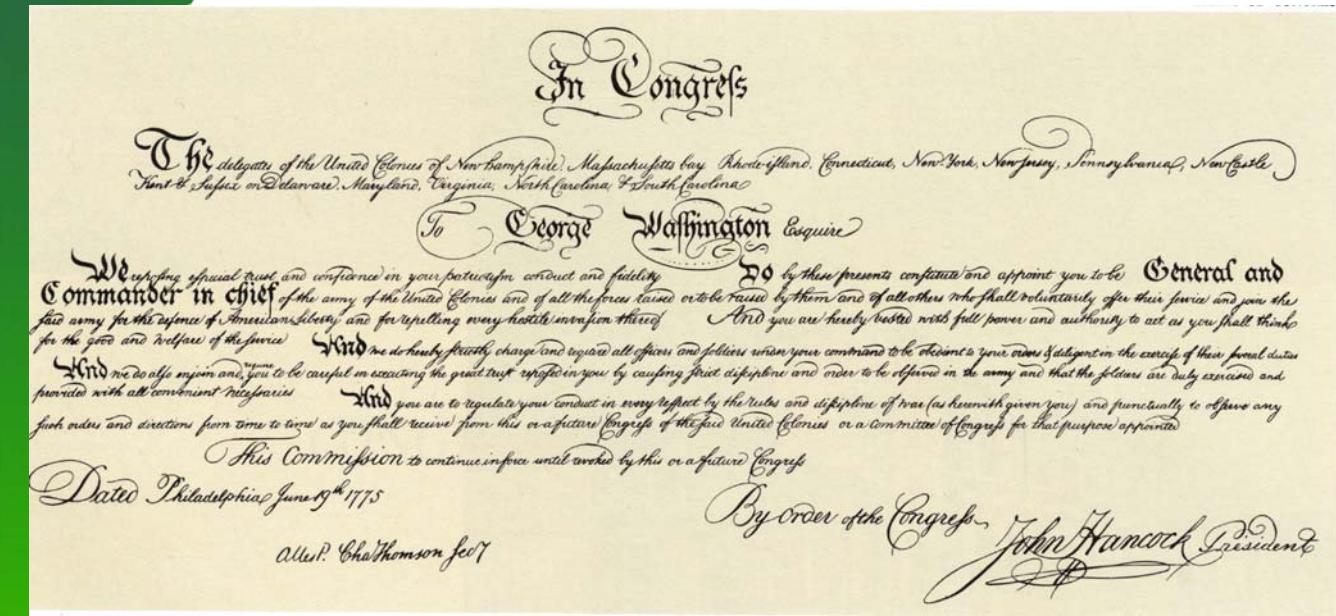
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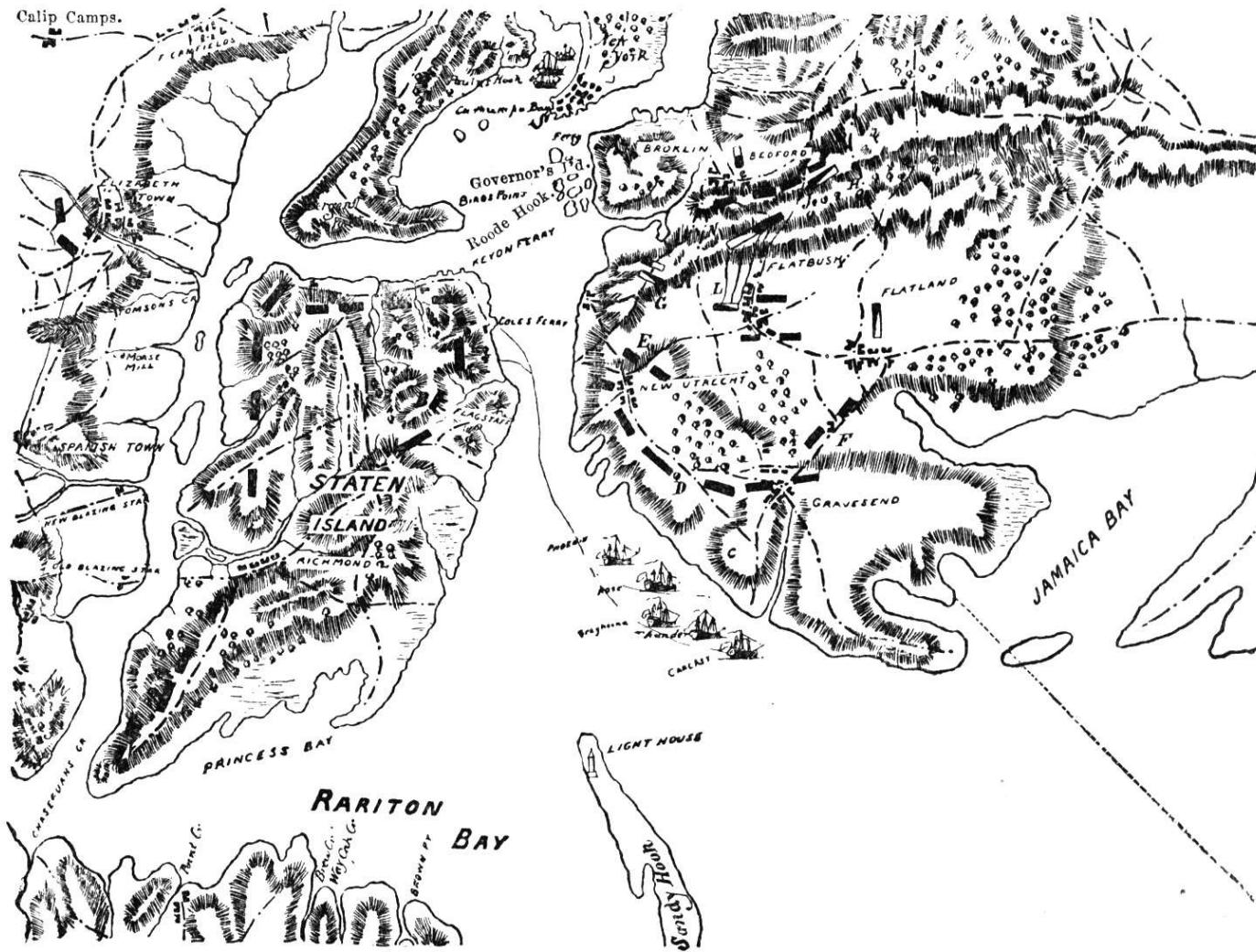


**THE
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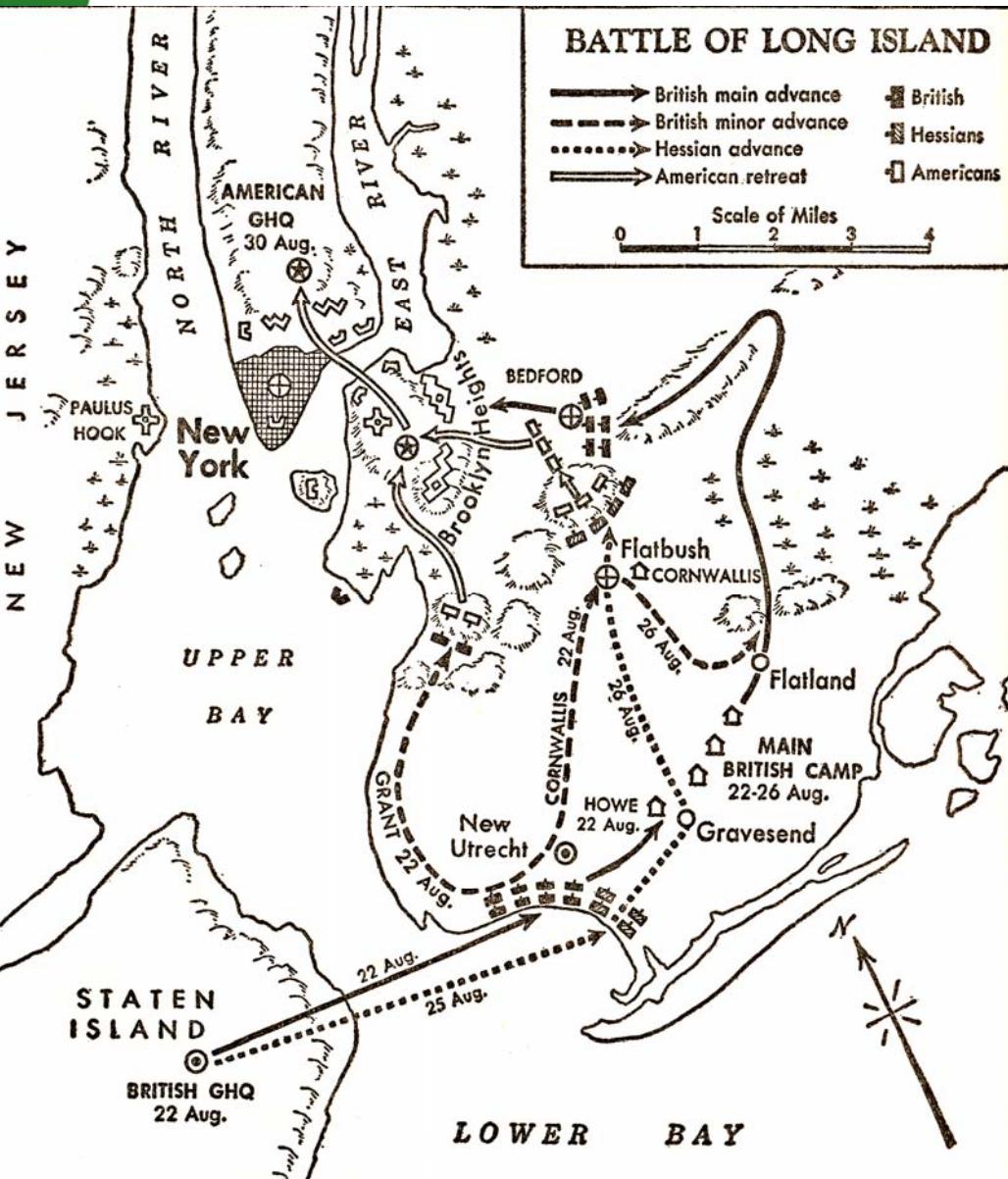


- At the Second Continental Congress in 1775 John Adams nominated George Washington to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the ragtag American Army fighting the British in Boston.
- He promptly set off for Boston, where he oversaw the American effort to keep the British bottled up in Boston. After occupying Dorchester Heights with troops and canon, the British abandoned Boston and regrouped in Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- Washington correctly surmised that the next British objective would be New York City, and moved his Army to New York to make preparations for the English onslaught.
- The ensuing Battle of Long Island and retreat from Brooklyn Heights would be the first time Washington commanded Continental forces in actual combat operations against the British.

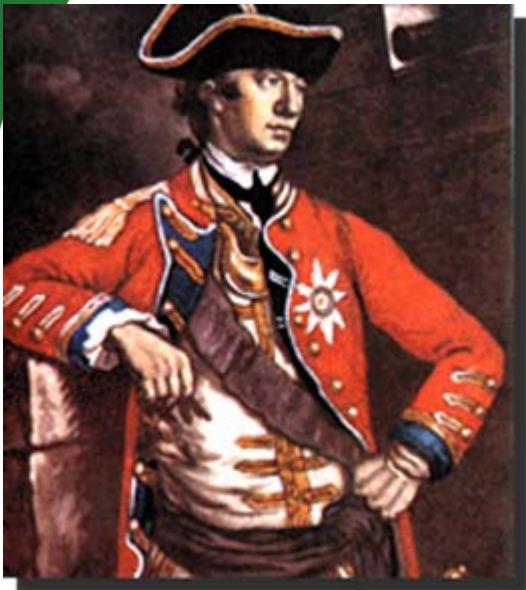


- Between late June and early August 1776 the British landed on Staten Island with the **largest amphibious force ever assembled in the 18th Century**: 30 battleships with 1200 cannon, with 300 support vessels manned by **10,000 sailors**, and embarking **32,000 ground troops**.

The British on Long Island



- Between August 22-25, 1776 20,000 English and Hessian troops moved to Long Island
- Washington was told the number of enemy troops was closer to 9,000, and feared this was a diversion and that the main British trust would come up the Hudson River, cutting off New York City.



William Howe

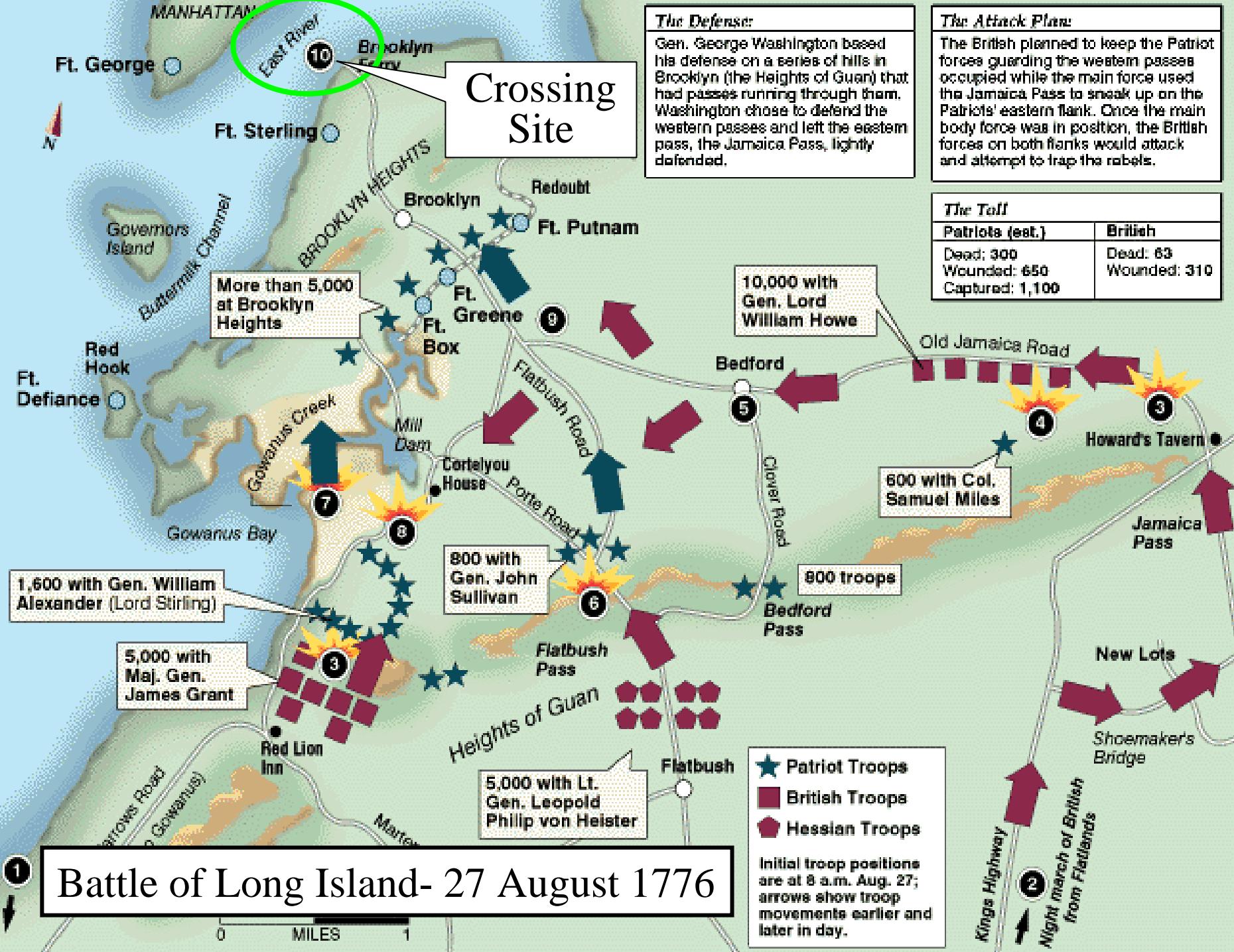


Henry Clinton



Washington

- **Washington deployed 3000 men in forward positions on the Heights of Gowan and on Brooklyn Heights, overlooking Flatbush, Flatlands, and Jamaica Bay.**
- **He retained 6000 troops in the Brooklyn forts, three miles behind the ridge. The Americans were out-numbered three-to-one.**
- **British General Henry Clinton proposed to Howe that they outflank the American positions by marching 3 miles north of the Bedford Road and climbing the ridge through the unguarded Jamaica Pass.**



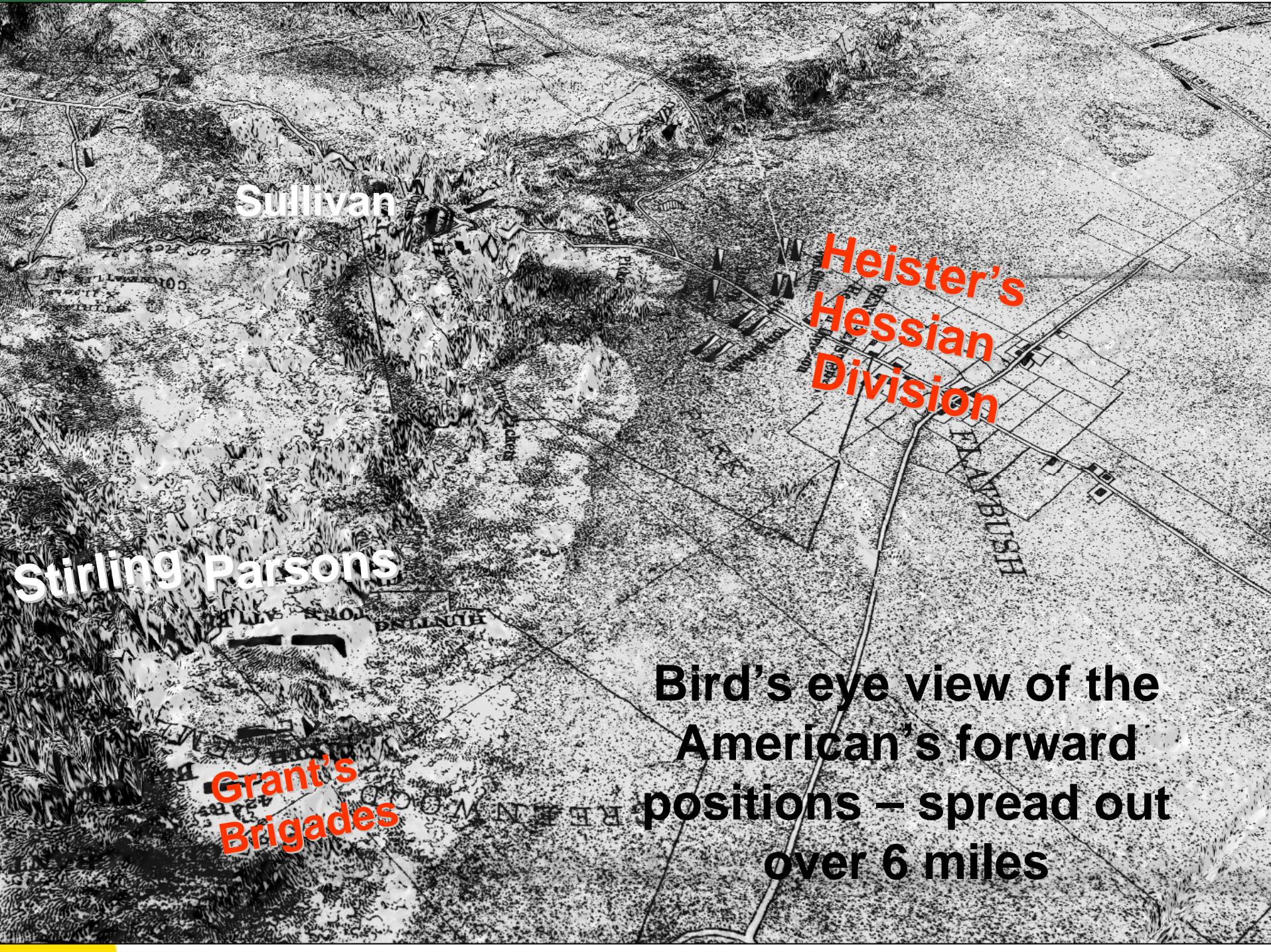
Johnston's 1878 Map

- The most authoritative map of the Battle of Long Island and Retreat from Brooklyn Heights was compiled and published by Henry P. Johnston in 1878



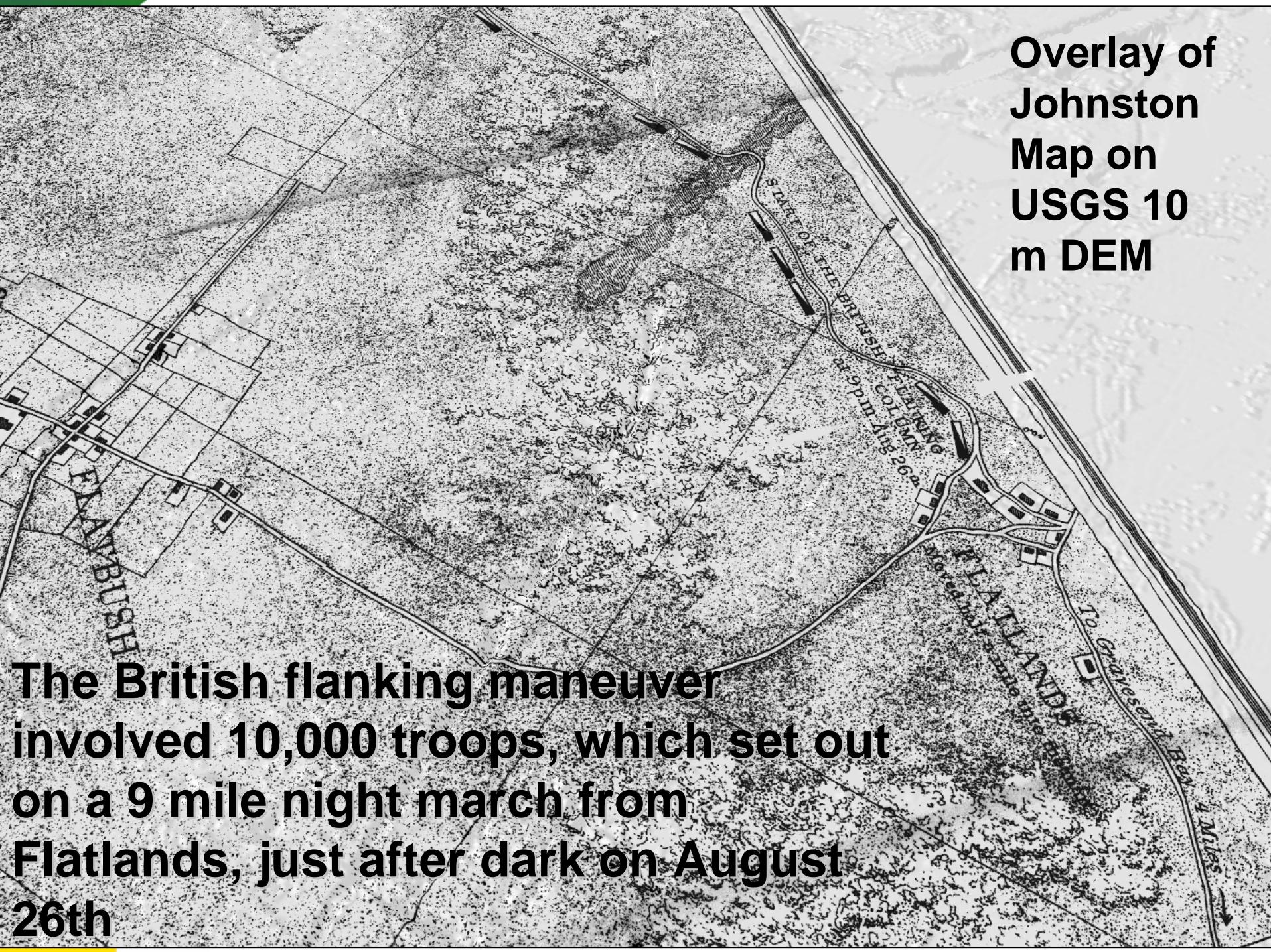
Using GIS to view the battlefield

- We scanned Johnston's 1878 map and selected various landmarks as points of registry we could lay over present day maps and charts.
- We used the program **ArcGlobe** within **ArcGIS 9.1** to overlay **Johnston's 1878 map** on a present-day **USGS 10 meter Digital Elevation Model (DEM)**
- This can then be rotated in space to provide a bird's eye view of the battlefield topography



Bird's eye view of the
American's forward
positions – spread out
over 6 miles

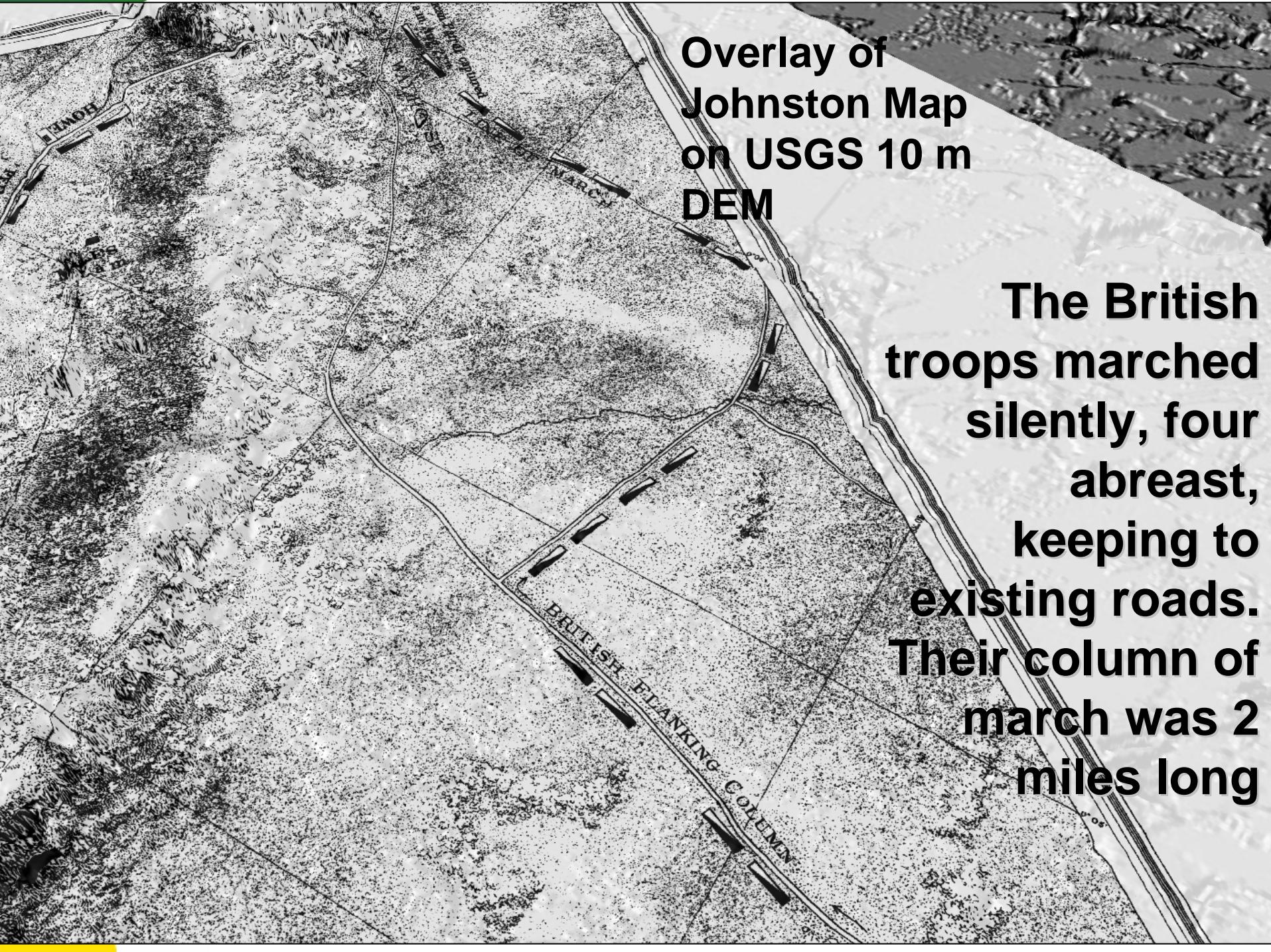
**Overlay of
Johnston
Map on
USGS 10
m DEM**



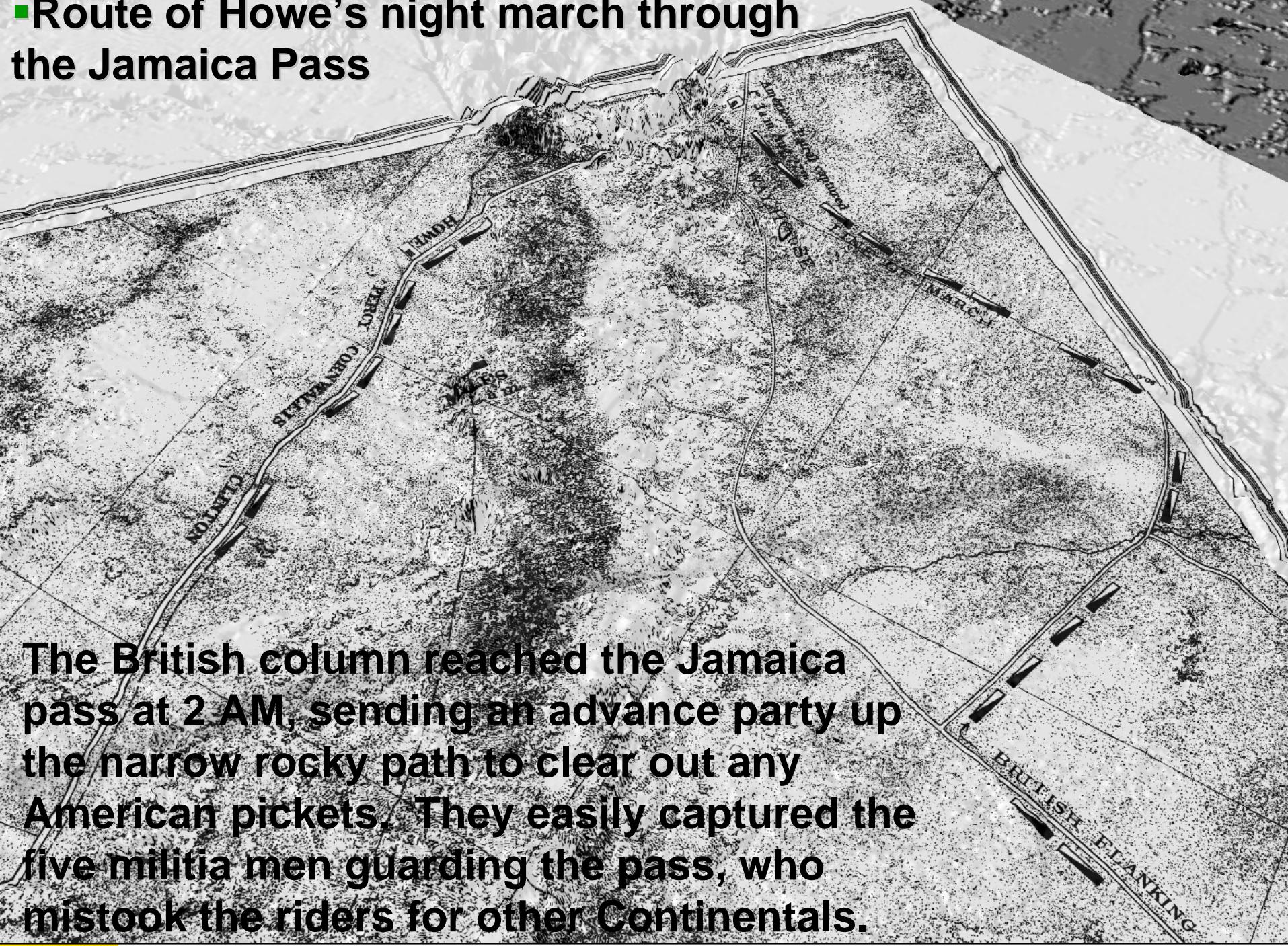
The British flanking maneuver involved 10,000 troops, which set out on a 9 mile night march from Flatlands, just after dark on August 26th

**Overlay of
Johnston Map
on USGS 10 m
DEM**

**The British
troops marched
silently, four
abreast,
keeping to
existing roads.
Their column of
march was 2
miles long**

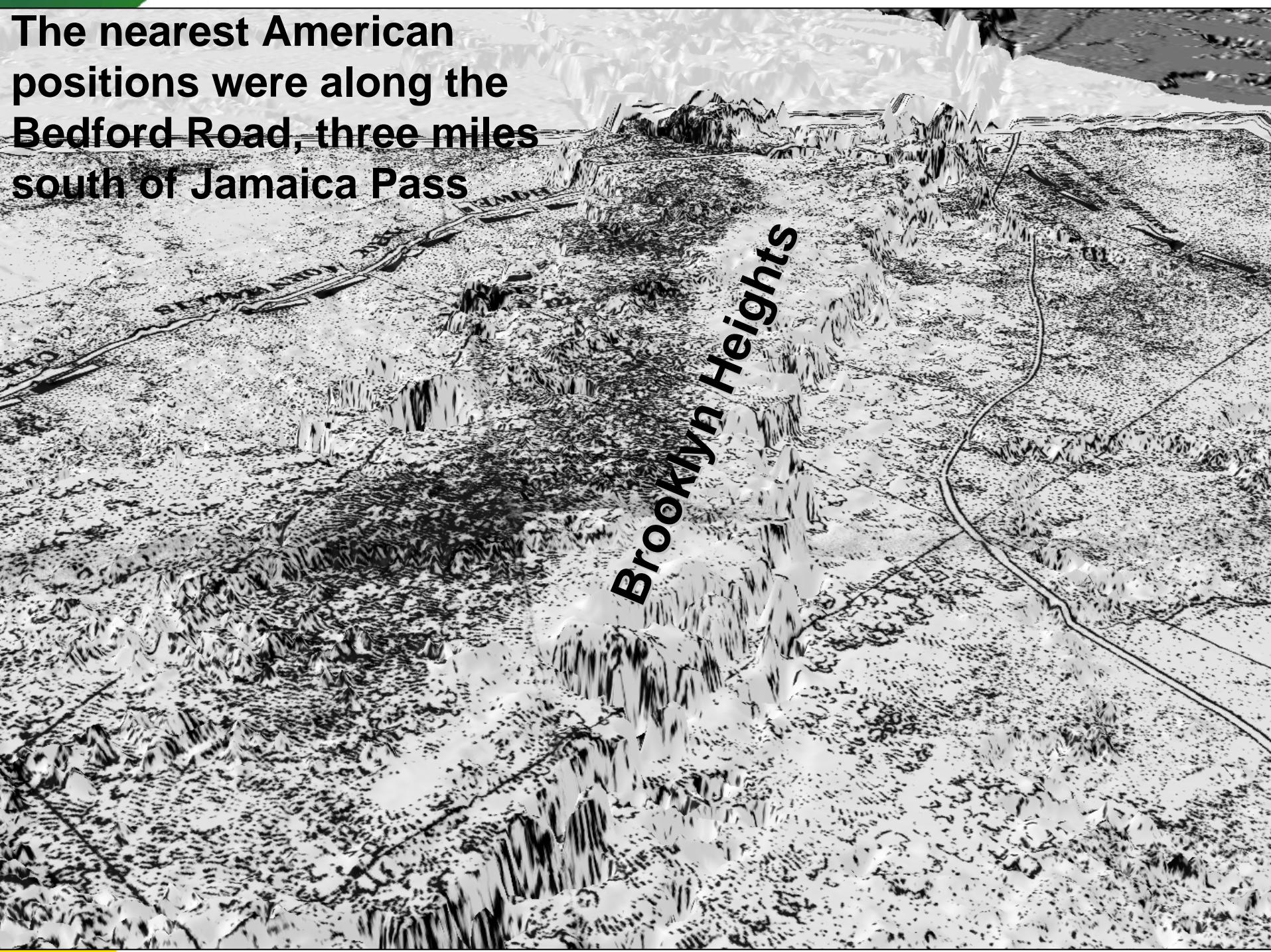


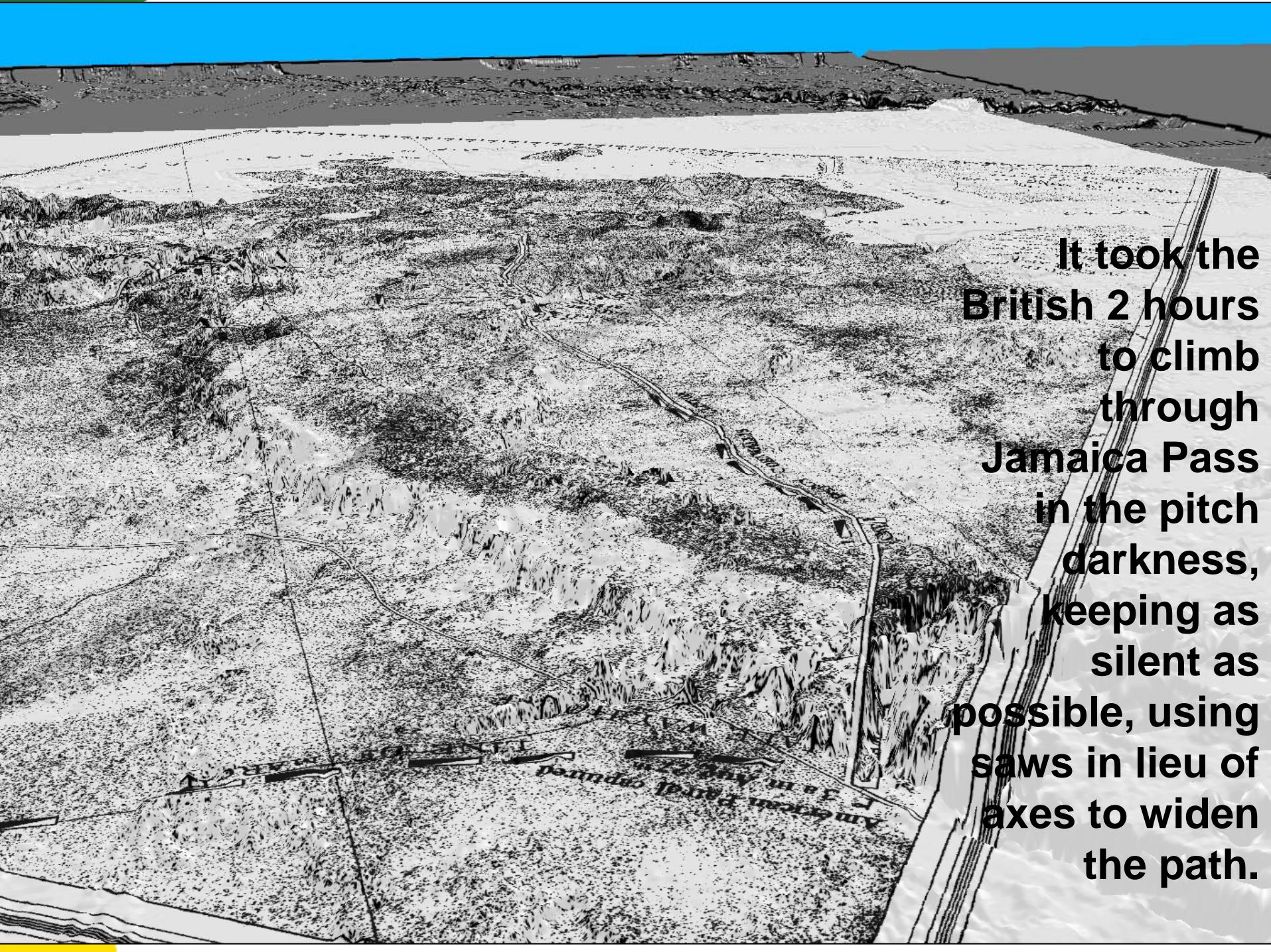
- Route of Howe's night march through the Jamaica Pass



The British column reached the Jamaica pass at 2 AM, sending an advance party up the narrow rocky path to clear out any American pickets. They easily captured the five militia men guarding the pass, who mistook the riders for other Continentals.

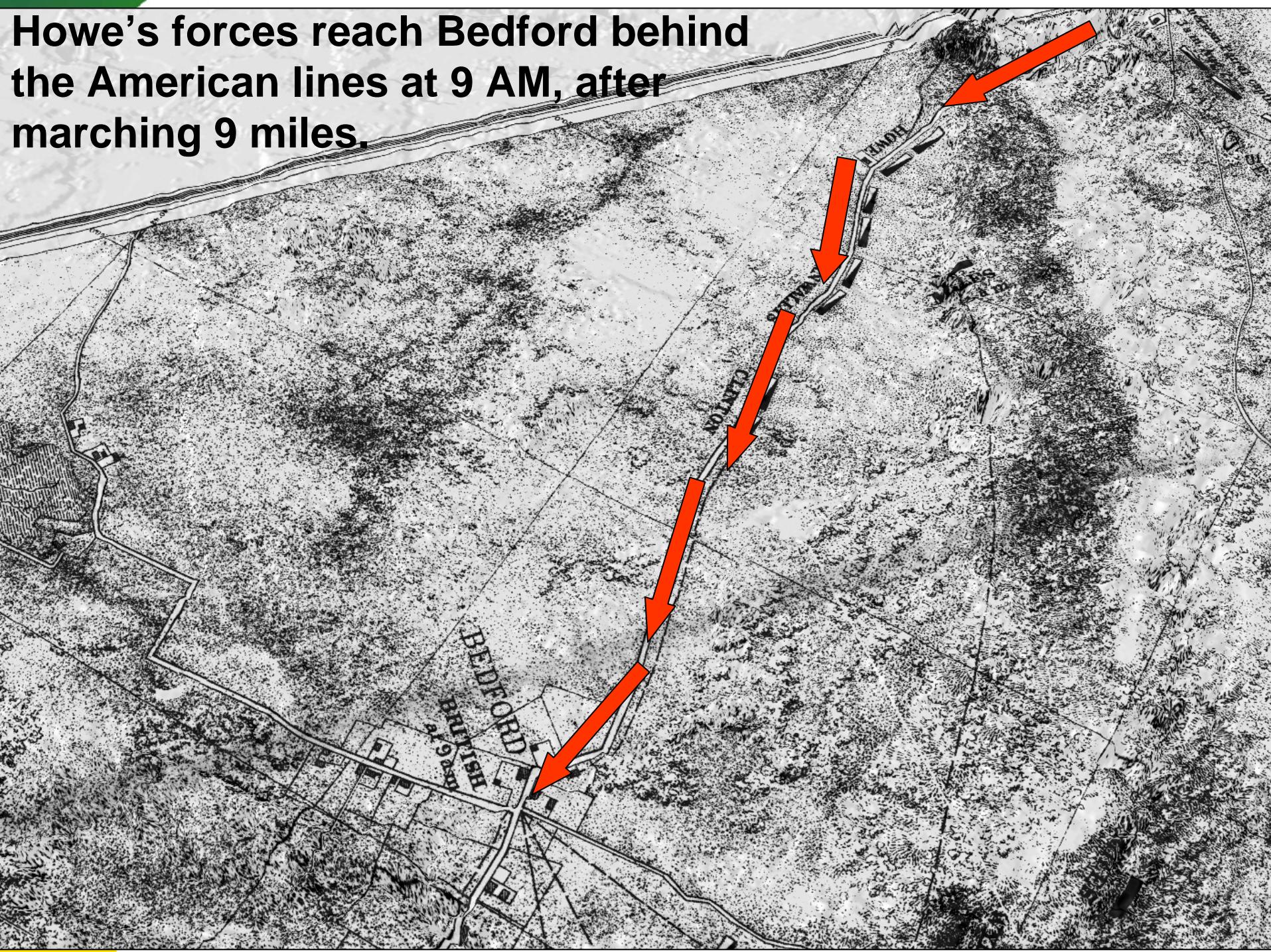
The nearest American positions were along the Bedford Road, three miles south of Jamaica Pass



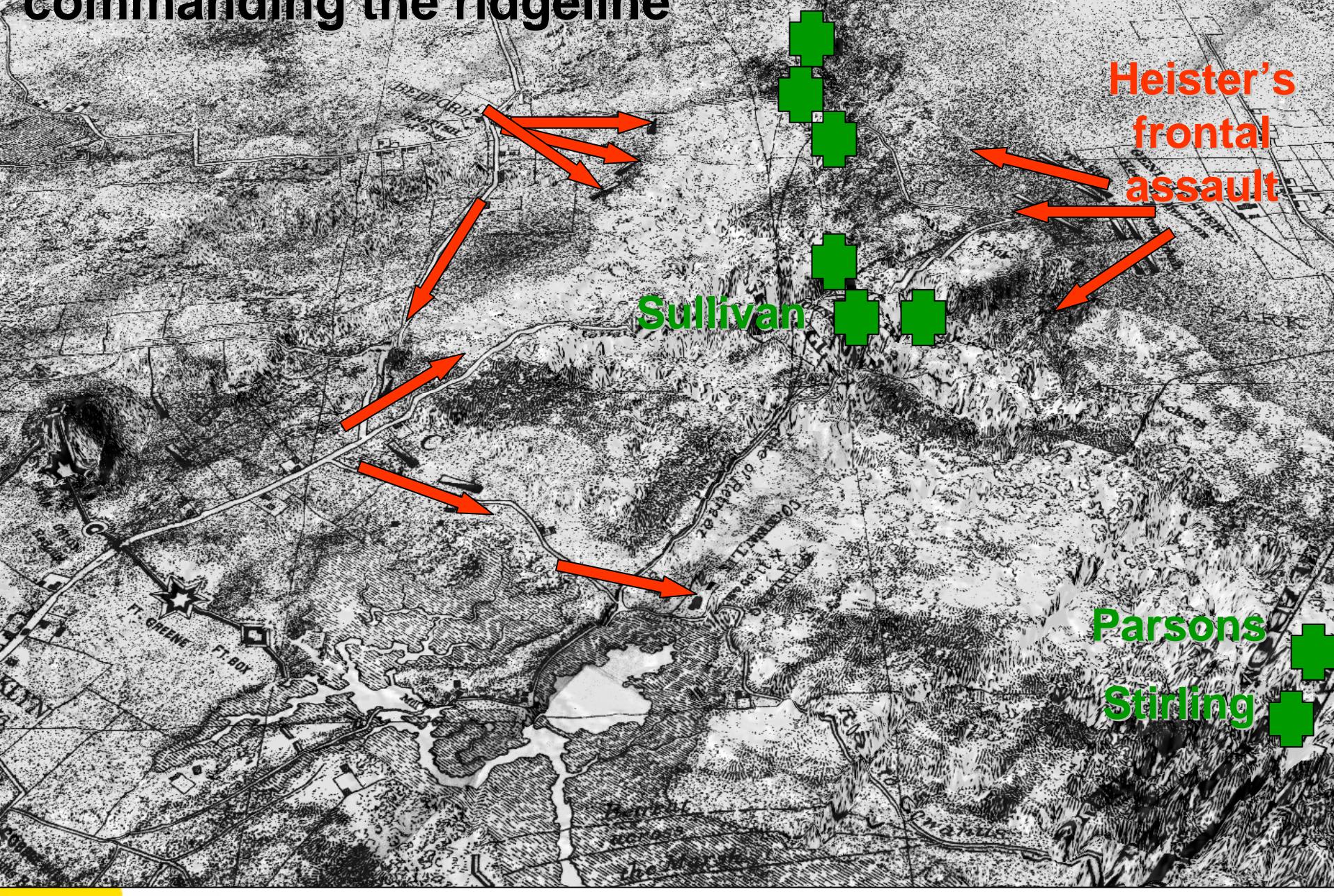


It took the
British 2 hours
to climb
through
Jamaica Pass
in the pitch
darkness,
keeping as
silent as
possible, using
saws in lieu of
axes to widen
the path.

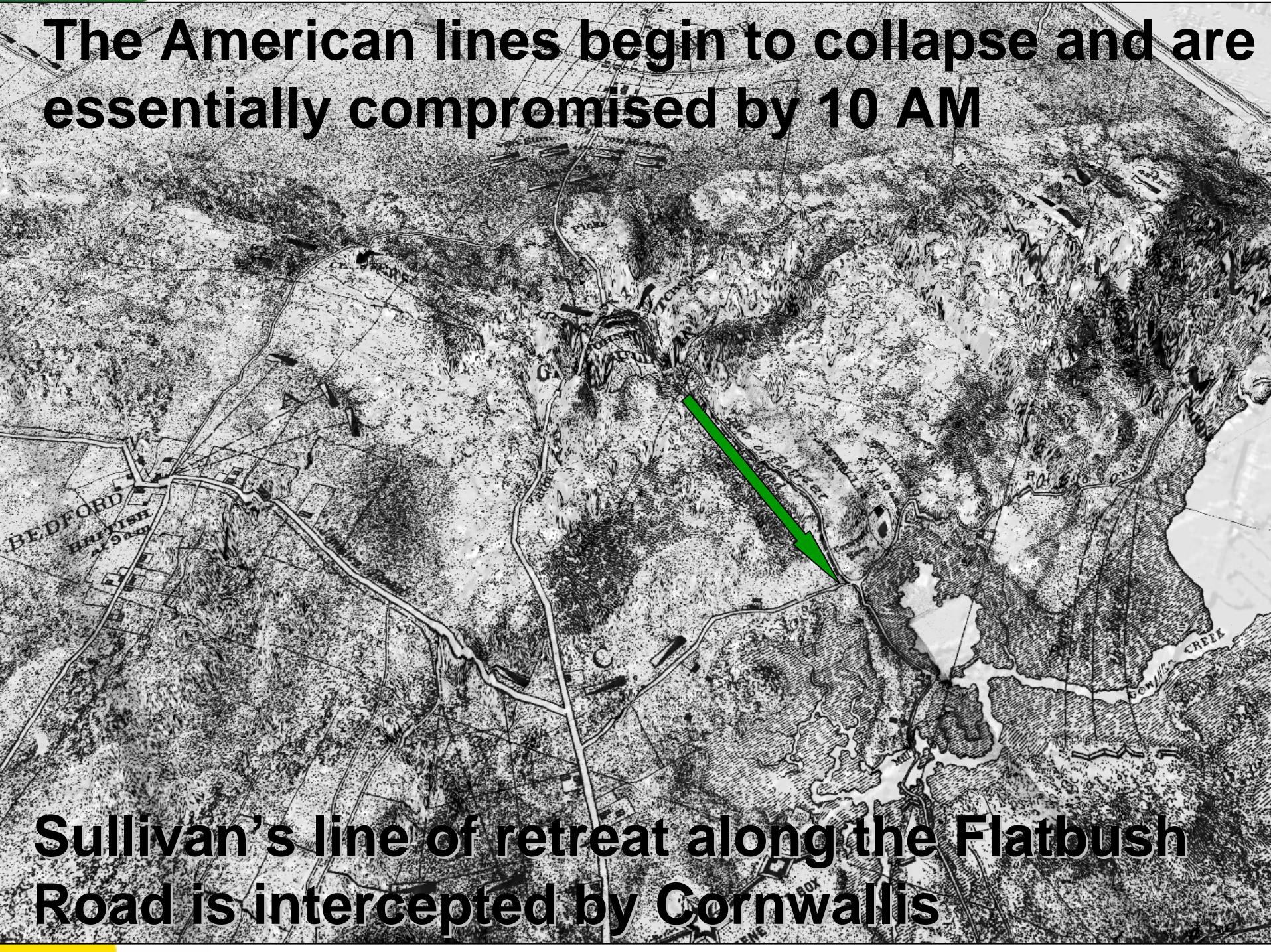
**Howe's forces reach Bedford behind
the American lines at 9 AM, after
marching 9 miles.**



British forces deploy behind the American lines commanding the ridgeline



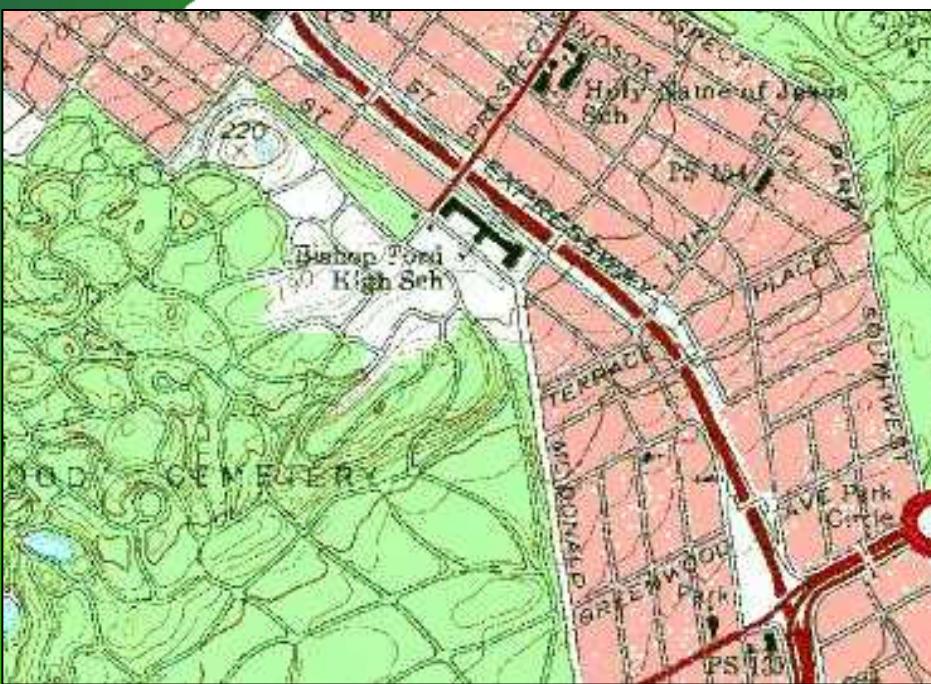
The American lines begin to collapse and are essentially compromised by 10 AM

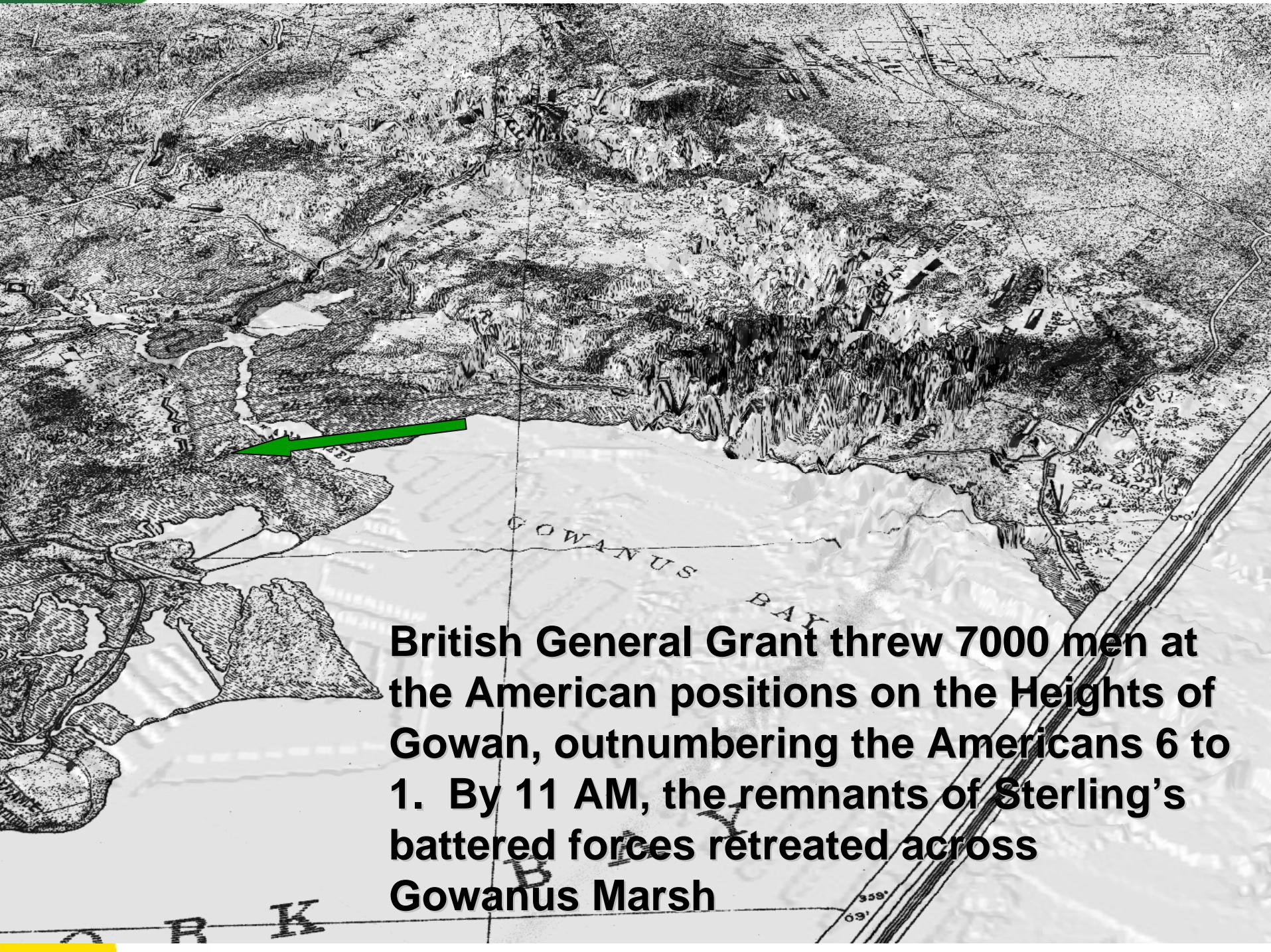


Sullivan's line of retreat along the Flatbush Road is intercepted by Cornwallis

Battle Hill

- At an elevation of 220 feet Battle Hill is the highest point in Brooklyn, now occupied by Greenwood Cemetery in Sunset Park
- This is where where the sacrifice of the **Maryland 400** occurred during the Battle of Long Island. Only 2 men managed to return to the American lines.
- By holding their positions and sacrificing their lives the Maryland regiment bought time for Washington's army to retreat and fight another day.
- The **Delaware Regiment** fended off a much larger British force and protected the Continental's right flank.





British General Grant threw 7000 men at the American positions on the Heights of Gowan, outnumbering the Americans 6 to 1. By 11 AM, the remnants of Sterling's battered forces retreated across Gowanus Marsh



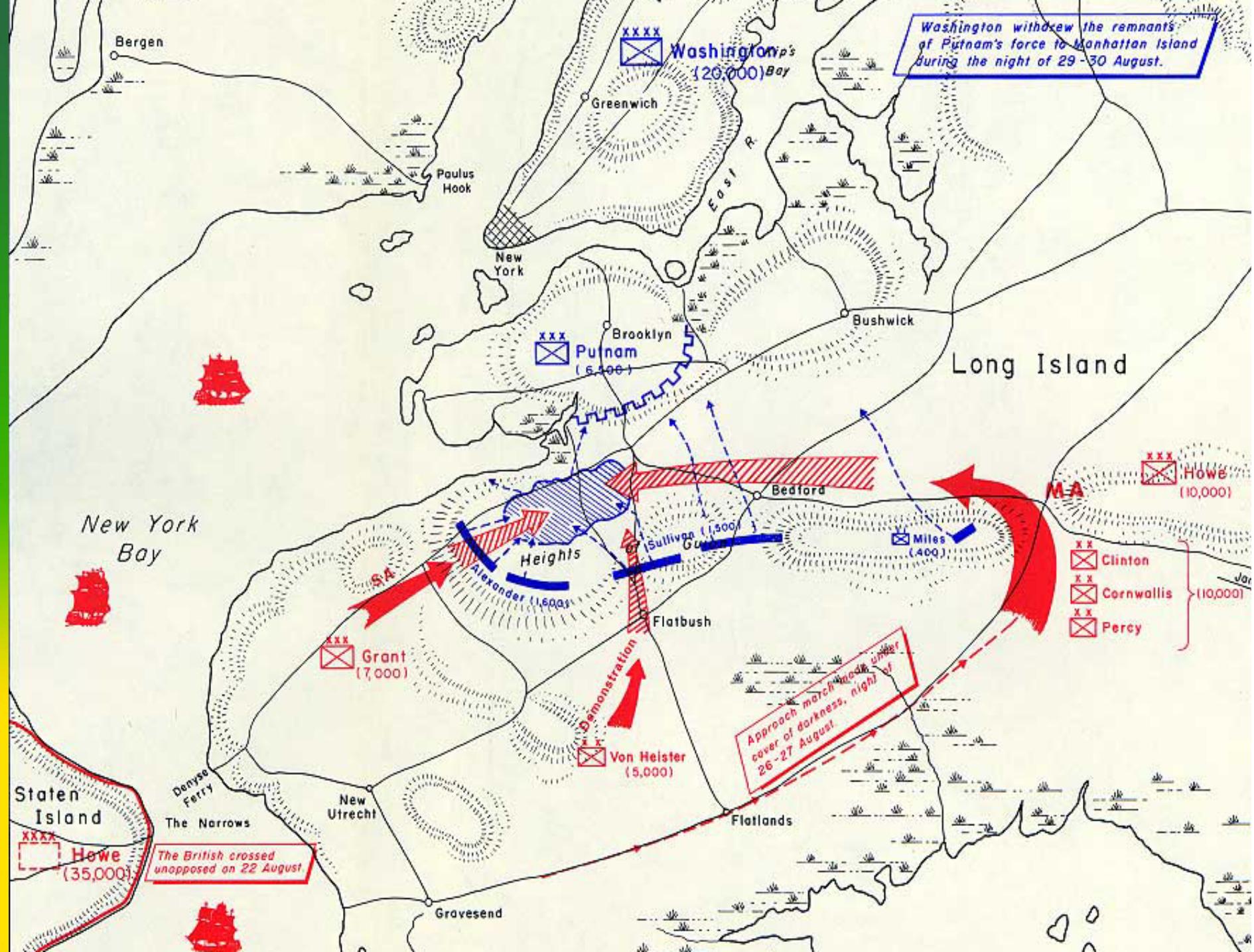
- On August 27th, the British lost 63 killed and 337 wounded and missing, while the Americans lost about 970 men killed, wounded or missing, and 1,079 taken captive.
- The Continental Army had lost almost a quarter of his entire strength.

- Alerted to the attack, **Washington** crossed over to Brooklyn around 9AM on the 27th. he remained cool and confident, as the battle raged out in front of his position, in the Brooklyn forts.
- The next day he ordered additional troops brought across the East River, giving him a force of 9,000 men against a British and German force of 14,600.
- The British now occupied the high ground, allowing them to look down slightly on the American forts in Brooklyn.





- During the afternoon of the 27th the **weather turned sour**. A serendipitous downpour made further British attacks unlikely.
- American troops found it hard to cook their food or to keep their powder dry (open pan flintlocks).
- But, unfavorable northeast winds also prevented Admiral Howe from moving his ships into New York Bay into the mouth of the East River, preventing encirclement.





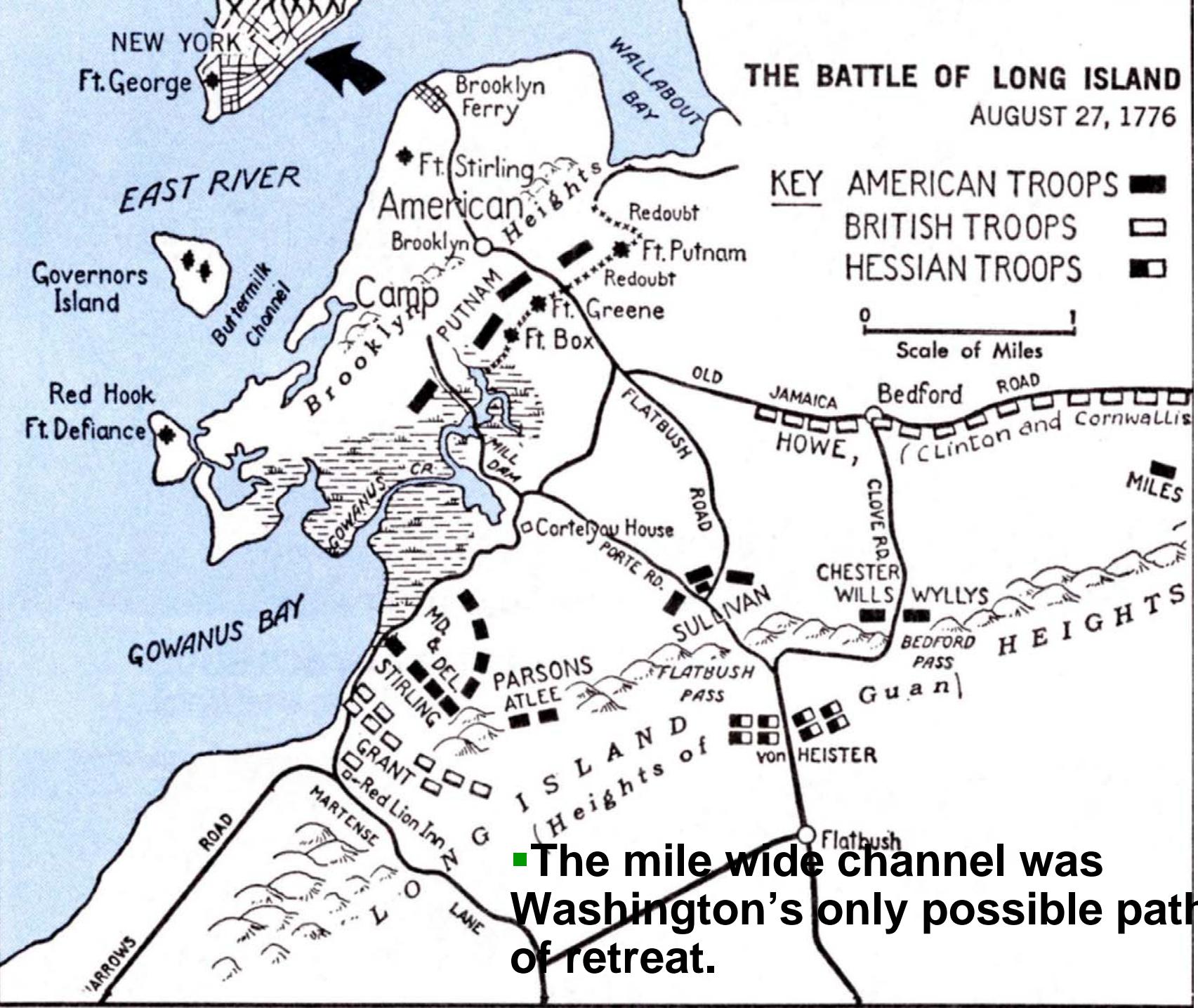
- Reeling from the American's embarrassing and lopsided defeat, Washington realized that he was now trapped between General Howe's forces and Lord Howe's fleet.
- He had split his troops between Manhattan and Long Island, with the Hudson River, East River, and Long Island Sound all controlled by British warships.



■ **Admiral Richard Howe, the brother of General Howe, could cut off Washington's forces if he moved his ships from the New Jersey Shore to the East River.**



Lord Howe was known as "Black Dick" because he seldom smiled.





- Though threatened, the American position provided topographic screening of Brooklyn Ferry by enemy forces



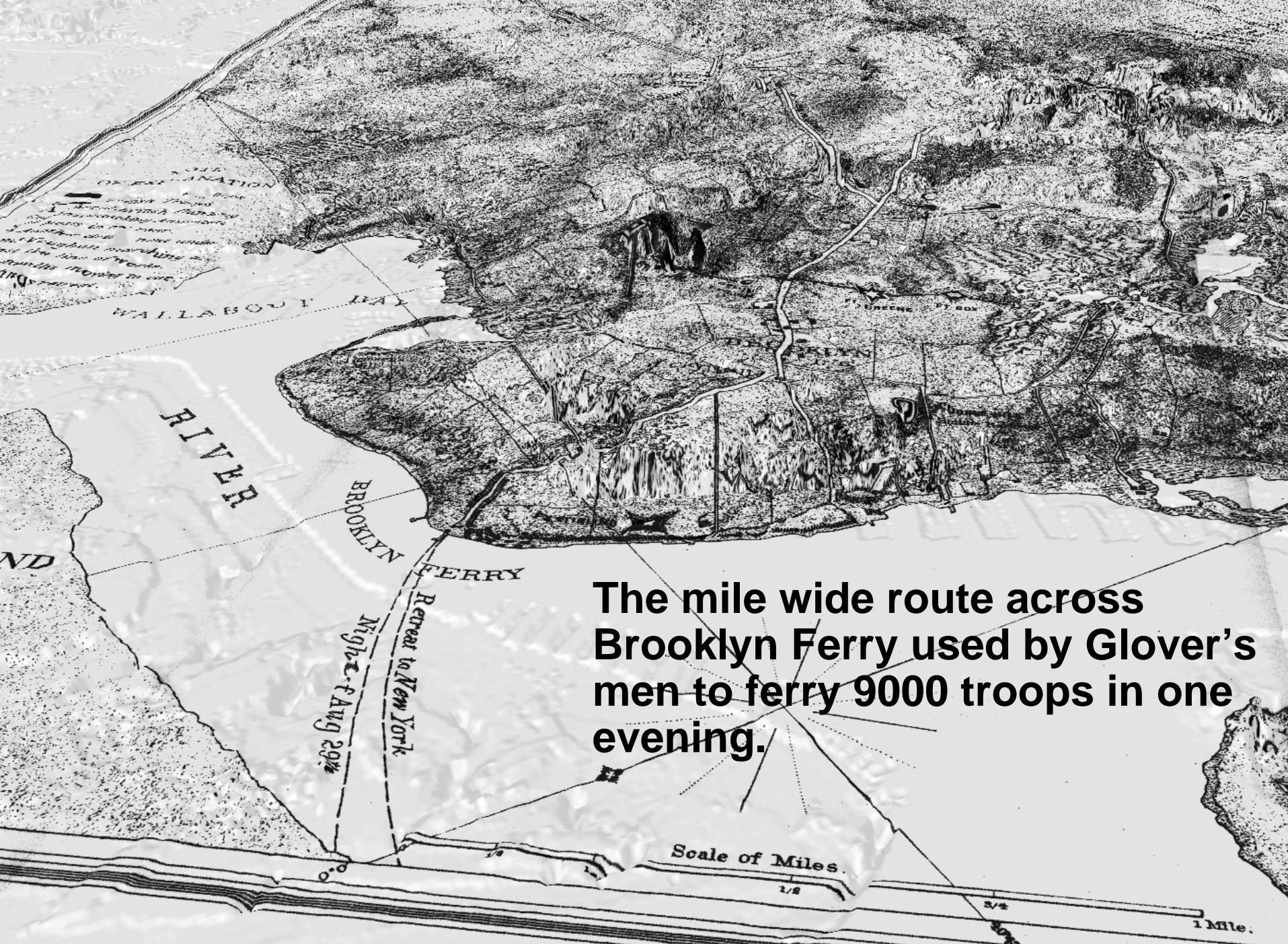
- Rain, lightning, thunder and vicious winds continued intermittently throughout August 29th.
- The poor weather forestalled further attacks, and Howe's forces busied themselves digging approaches towards the American positions.
- That evening it began raining again, but with an unusual northeast breeze.

A FEW GOOD MEN...



Colonel John Glover

- Washington turned to the seagoing soldiers of John Glover's 14th Massachusetts, known as “the Marblehead Regiment” to ferry the American troops across the East River to Manhattan that evening
- Troops were ordered to form up for a night attack, beginning at 9 PM on August 29th.



The mile wide route across
Brooklyn Ferry used by Glover's
men to ferry 9000 troops in one
evening.



A northeast wind, followed by calm, then a southwest breeze

- The river was too choppy to cross until 11 PM, when the northeast wind died down
- After an hour of calmness a gentle **southwesterly breeze erupted**, which allowed the Marblehead men to hoist sails, allowing transport of 4 times as many troops per hour.



■ **The entire retreat was carried out in strict silence.** By this time the sky had cleared and the moon was shining brightly. British forces were close enough to see all the American defenders, but none of the British sentries noticed anything unusual!



- When first light appeared, the evacuation of 9,000 American troops was far from complete, **the oarsmen needed at least three more hours**. The soldiers occupying the front line trenches and huddled along the beach worried that they would be spotted or left behind
- Then, rising out of the wet ground and off the East River came a **dense fog**, and **the fog covered Brooklyn side of the river**. When the sun rose the miraculous fog did not lift!



- The fog began to disperse around 8 AM on the 30th.
- The entire Army was extracted, except for the heaviest caliber canon. Washington took the last boat across, just as the fog was lifting.
- It was seen as a miracle by the troops and providential by Washington. 9000 men had been saved from certain capture or destruction, and the American cause preserved.

The British were astonished

- When the British advanced on the American positions around 11 AM they could hardly believe their eyes. There in the brilliant sunlight was the abandoned American fortifications and camp – totally deserted!
- Some of the British soldiers ran down to the shore and shot at the last of the departing boats, but the Americans were safely out of range. Washington's army had escaped their grasps to fight another day.
- The unusual combination of darkness, fog, the northeast wind blowing down the East River, and bad weather immobilized Admiral Howe's fleet and blinded British sentries.
- Washington's cool and firm command exacted superb discipline from green troops, who remained quiet and disciplined throughout the ordeal.

One of the greatest retreats in military history

“Those who are best acquainted with the difficulty, the embarrassment, noise and tumult which attend even by day, and with no enemy at hand, a movement of this nature (the crossing)...will be the first to acknowledge that this retreat should hold a high place among military transactions.”

- British military critic



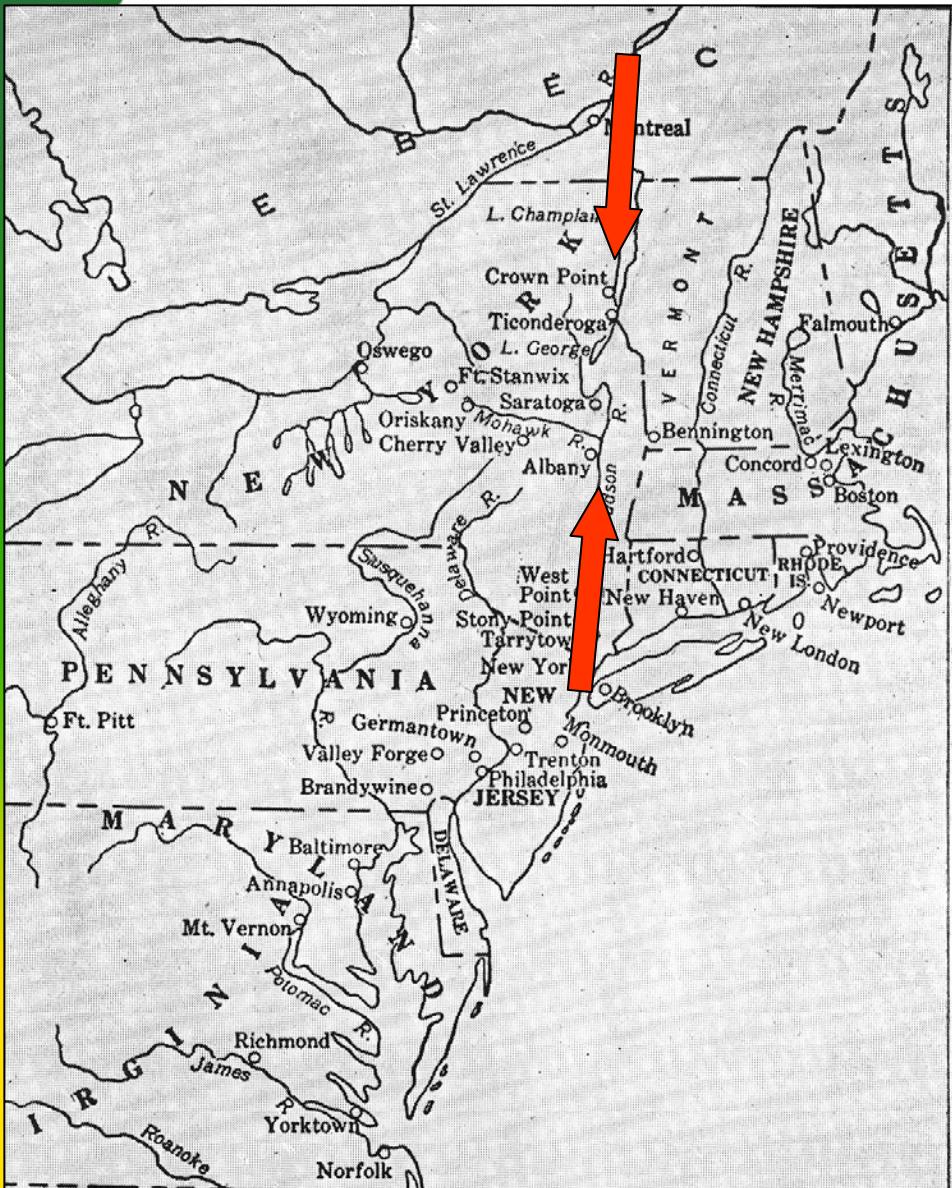
COL John Glover's Marblehead Mariners also ferried Washington's forces across the Delaware River in one of the greatest surprise attacks in history up until that time.

Nearly 1000 Hessian soldiers surrendered after an hour of fighting, while the Americans Washington suffered only six wounded. The victory provided a much needed boost to the morale of the Continental Army.



British Strategy fails

- Washington's forces were soundly defeated by superior British forces attacking and occupying New York City in 1776, which they kept until 1783.
- But, British designs on severing the Colonies along the Hudson River Valley failed at Saratoga and Oriskany, where General Burgoyne was soundly defeated by Nathaniel Greene's American forces.
- Kosciusko's defense of the Hudson River at West Point succeeded in blocking the British advance upriver.



This lecture will be posted at

www.umr.edu/~rogersda/umrcourses/ge342

**Under heading “Revolutionary War”
in .pdf format for easy downloading**

