



# The Philadelphia Campaign, 1777-1778 (Modern War Studies)

*Stephen R. Taaffe*

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American fortunes were at a low point in the winter of 1777-78. The British had beaten the Continental Army at Brandywine and Germantown, seized the colonial capital of Philadelphia, and driven Washington's soldiers into barren Valley Forge. But, as Stephen Taaffe reveals, the Philadelphia Campaign marked a turning point in the American Revolution despite these setbacks.

Occurring in the middle of the war in the heart of the colonies, this key but overlooked campaign dwarfed all others in the war in terms of numbers of combatants involved, battles fought, and casualties sustained. For the first time, British and American armies engaged out in the open on relatively equal terms. Although the British won all the major battles, they were unable to crush the rebellion.

Taaffe presents a new narrative history of this campaign that took place not only in the hills and woods surrounding Philadelphia, but also in east central New Jersey and along the Delaware River. He uses the campaign to analyze British and American strategies, evaluate Washington's leadership, and assess the role of subordinate officers such as Nathanael Greene and Anthony Wayne. He also offers new insights into eighteenth-century warfare and shows how Washington transcended traditional military thinking to fashion a strategy that accommodated American social, political, and economic realities.

During this campaign Washington came into his own as a commander of colonial forces and an astute military strategist, and Taaffe demonstrates that Washington used the fighting around Philadelphia as a proving ground for strategies that he applied later in the war. Taaffe also scrutinizes Washington's relationship with the militia, whose failure to carry out its missions contributed to the general's problems.

Still, by enduring their losses and continuing to fight, the Americans exacted a heavy toll on Britain's resources, helped to convince France to enter the war, and put the redcoats on the defensive. As Taaffe shows, far from being inconclusive, the Philadelphia Campaign contributed more to American victory than the colonists recognized at the time.

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