

The Brandywine battlefield diorama measures 24 inches by 45 inches and features figures by W. Britain.



Brandywine Inspires Battlefield Diorama

The Toy Soldier Museum's James H. Hillestad builds a diorama based on the Revolutionary War's biggest battle

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

When one conjures up a battle of the American Revolutionary War, engagements like Boston, Long Island, Princeton and Saratoga come to mind.

W. Britain's American Continental Firing Line Set No. 3 (ref. 18004).



But did you know that the largest battle of the ARW took place at Brandywine Creek in Pennsylvania Sept. 11, 1777? About 33,000 soldiers engaged in combat from sunup until after dark.

I was inspired to re-create the clash with a diorama using painted metal figures from W. Britain. The miniature battlefield's stone meetinghouse and garden walls came from J.G. Miniatures.

WASHINGTON'S STAND

The Battle of Brandywine took place 25 miles southwest of Philadelphia.

British Gen. Sir William Howe was intent on occupying Philadelphia, the rebel capital. American Maj. Gen. George Washington was intent on stopping him.

Howe embarked his forces in New York City and sailed south to the Chesapeake Bay. The British troops landed in Maryland at Head of Elk (present-day Elkton).

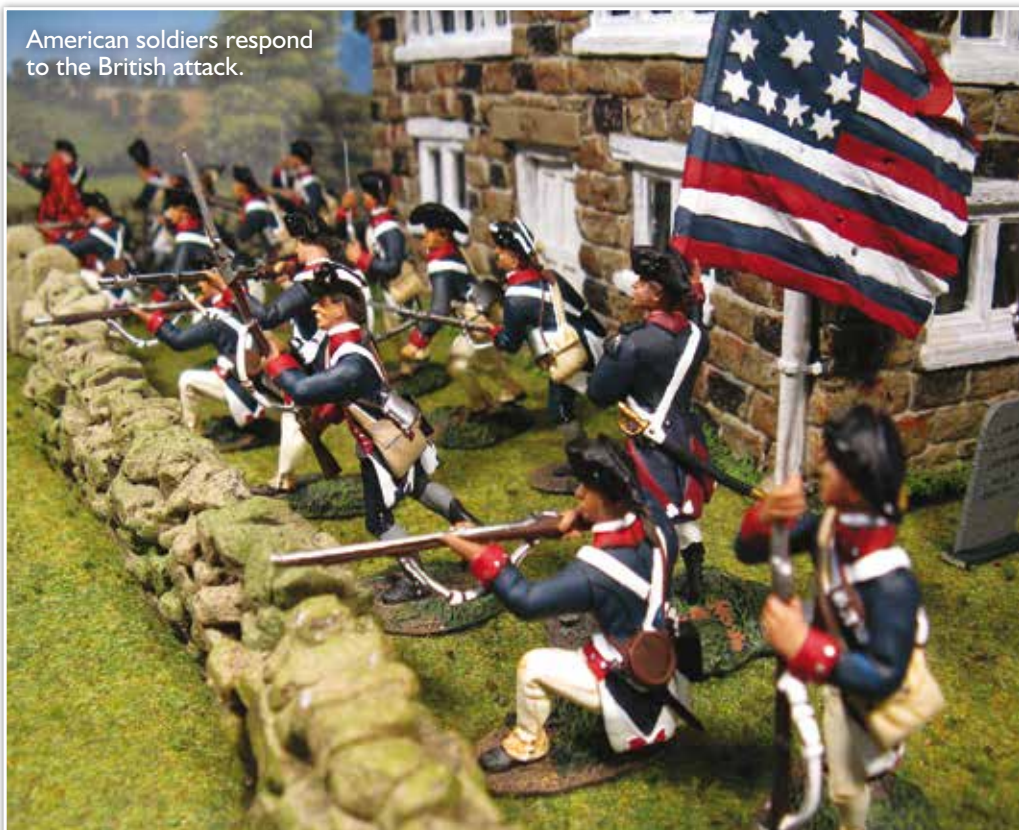
Washington chose to make his

stand along the Brandywine Creek. He concentrated his force of 12,000 Continental regulars and 3,000 militia at Chad's Ford (now called Chadds Ford), believing that this would be the route the British would take for their advance on Philadelphia. Washington failed to reconnoiter the area, but he thought that he was well-protected by the creek.

Howe, on the other hand, obtained intelligence that there was an unguarded crossing, Jeffries Ford, two miles upstream from Buffington's Ford, which was the farthest extent of Washington's right flank. The British commander devised a plan that replicated the one he had successfully employed at the Battle of Long Island one year earlier.

HOWE'S DIVERSION

Howe divided his 18,000-man army. He ordered Hessian Lt. Gen. Wilhelm von Knyphausen to assault the rebels' center at



American soldiers respond to the British attack.

Chad's Ford with 5,000 men. That was a diversion.

Assisted by Lt. Gen. Lord Cornwallis, Howe marched with about 10,000 Redcoats to Jeffries Ford, where he would cross the Brandywine Creek and fall on Washington's right flank. Then this would trap the rebels in a pincer movement.

Washington was alerted to Howe's troop movements, but dismissed the reports. The Patriot commander believed that Knyphausen's force was the real threat.

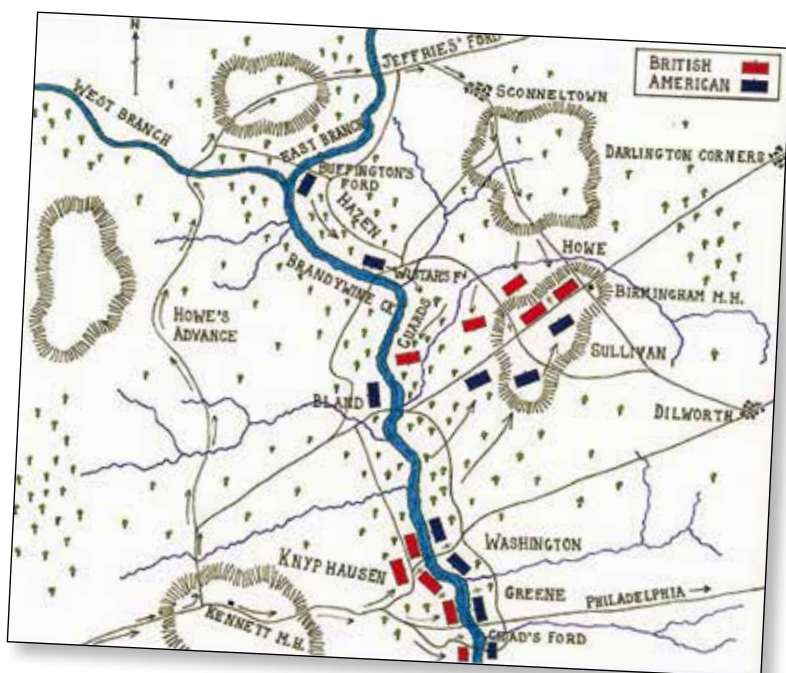
REDCOATS PREVAIL

At 4 p.m., after a ferocious artillery bombardment that could be heard in Philadelphia, the British infantry emerged out of woods, marching to the music played by their military bands.

Fighting centered on a hill where the Quaker Birmingham Meetinghouse stood. This engagement is the focus of the 1:32-scale diorama.

The outflanked Americans were unable to withstand the British assault.

RIGHT: Map of the 1777 Battle of Brandywine.



ABOVE: W. Britain figure of American Maj. Gen. George Washington.

**BRITISH MUSKET BALL
'HONORED' LAFAYETTE**

French aristocrat Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, came to America in June 1777 despite opposition from both his family and King Louis XVI.

Lafayette was determined to find glory and fight British tyranny. American Maj. Gen. George Washington met him in July 1777.

Washington was so impressed with the young Frenchman that he offered him a place on his staff. Lafayette accepted eagerly and was, at the age of 19, commissioned as a major general by the Continental Congress July 31, 1777.

Lafayette played an important role in American Revolutionary War's Battle of Brandywine Sept. 11, 1777.

In the midst of the fighting around the Quaker Birmingham Meetinghouse, Lafayette was shot in the leg. Nevertheless he helped rally rattled American troops -- enabling them to make a more orderly retreat -- before being treated for his wound.

Lafayette was taken from the field, bandaged and moved to the Sun Inn in Bethlehem, Pa., where he recovered to fight another day.

The Frenchman was cited for his "bravery and military ardor" by Washington.

Lafayette recounted in a letter to his wife, "The English honored me with a musket ball."

--James H. Hillestad

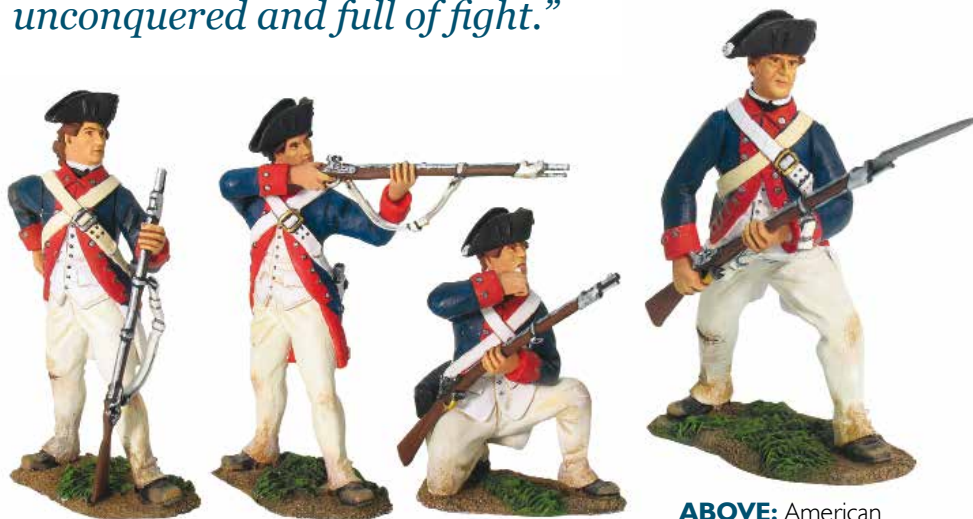


Marquis de Lafayette figure by W. Britain.



ABOVE: A 6-pounder gun and crew are featured in W. Britain's British Artillery Set No. 1 (ref. 18008).

"Brandywine was a tactical victory for the British. Howe failed, however, to deliver a knockout punch. Washington's army withdrew, but remained unconquered and full of fight."



ABOVE: W. Britain's American Continental Infantry Firing Line Set No. 1 (ref. 17845).

ABOVE: American Continental Infantry at the Ready (ref. 17840) by W. Britain.



British Gen. Sir William Howe's disciplined troops advance.

BELOW: W. Britain's American Continental Line New Jersey Regiment Charging Set No. 1 (ref. 18000).



LEFT: W. Britain's American Continental Line New Jersey Regiment Casualty Set No. 1 (ref. 18001).



LEFT: British Firing Line Set No. 2 (ref. 17963) by W. Britain.

REBELS RETREAT

As his army retreated in disarray, Washington brought up elements of Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene's division to fight a rear guard action. Saved from being completely routed, the American army retreated to Dilworthtown and Chester.

The 587 British casualties at

Brandywine included 93 killed, 488 wounded and six missing. Washington's army sustained 1,300 casualties, including 300 killed and 600 wounded. About 400 Colonials were captured by the British.

After suffering another defeat at Germantown, Pa., Oct. 4, Washington and his army spent the winter at Valley Forge,

Pa. Howe captured Philadelphia Sept. 26, beginning a British occupation that lasted until June 1778.

Brandywine was a tactical victory for the British. Howe failed, however, to deliver a knockout punch. Washington's army withdrew, but remained unconquered and full of fight. ■



Continental forces suffer casualties in the face of the British onslaught.



Colonial reinforcements rush into action.

“British Gen. Sir William Howe was intent on occupying Philadelphia, the rebel capital. American Maj. Gen. George Washington was intent on stopping him.”



British artillery opens fire on the American position.

RECRUITING FIGURES FOR ARW DIORAMA

One of the advantages of collecting W. Britain figures is the manufacturer's extensive dealer network and with it, the opportunity to obtain figures no longer in production.

It might take a few inquiries, but the chances are better than good of finding needed items. The depth of dealers' inventories is amazing!

And to supplement this, there is W. Britain's free "Seek and Find" Internet locator service. Collectors can communicate their "wants," then W. Britain will e-mail them to more than 3,000 collectors and dealers worldwide.

Some of the American Revolutionary War Colonial figures needed for my Battle of Brandywine diorama were no longer in production. But with the help of a number of dealers, I was able to fill in the gaps.

My thanks to those who came to my aid in replicating the battle and the confrontation at the Birmingham Meetinghouse.

Plans are under way to install the diorama at the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia when it opens.

--James H. Hillestad

about the writer

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.