

And here is how he described the American forces: The Americans had, he said, "19,000 largely untrained, undisciplined, untried, amateur soldiers, meagerly equipped and supplied, led by an amateur commander-in-chief who was supported by amateur officers. They were backed by not a single warship nor a single transport, and their war chest was in large part a printing press in Philadelphia."

This is how the two forces stacked up on that fateful day on Long Island. The storybook pattern, with the weak prevailing over the strong, was not followed in that battle. As was practically inevitable, the big fellow licked the little fellow. England won the battle, and might have won the war then and there had it not been for the action of a small detachment of troops under the command of William Alexander, who was known as "Lord Stirling." It was a small detachment, indeed, for it consisted of 1,600 men, the Maryland Line and a unit of Delawareans, facing 7,000 British. When the British poured through the American lines, and the American troops turned in flight, General Washington placed the 1,600 in position to hold as long as humanly possible. Lord Stirling, one witness said, "fought like a wolf." He fought until his force of 1,600 was reduced to 950, and then he set the Maryland line to do the holding and ordered the others to retreat. 404 men—that was what the Maryland Line had dwindled to by that time. They stood and fought until the retreat was secure. Less than 100 were left alive.

Accounts of the bravery of the Maryland Line have been left to us by eyewitnesses. One of these wrote: "Smallwood's battalion of Marylanders were distinguished in the field by the most intrepid courage, the most regular use of the musket and judicious movements of the body. All the other battalions behaved as became Americans and men of honor, fighting for their rights as free men. When our party was overcome and broken, by superior numbers surrounding them on all sides, three companies of Maryland troops broke the enemy's line and fought their way through."

And Tench Tilghman, in a letter to his father, said: "No regular troops ever made a more gallant resistance than Smallwood's regiment."

George Washington himself said the Marylanders were first to meet the veteran legions of British regulars "face to face with fixed bayonets," and that "no troops behaved more steadily." He said that hour—the stand of the Maryland Line—was "more precious to American liberty than any other in history." The American army was saved by a long retreat across New York and New Jersey, and all along