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Director Robert Child talks about plans to film "America's First D-Day — Washington Crossing" at [www.philly.com/robertchild](http://www.philly.com/robertchild)

A scene from a trailer for the forthcoming documentary.

## Lights, camera, U.S. history

By Bill Reed  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The story of George Washington and his colonial troops crossing the Delaware and routing the Hessians on Christmas Day 1776 has all the elements of a Hollywood blockbuster — action, intrigue, suspense. Even sex.

That's why Robert Child, an award-winning director of historical documentaries, is gearing up to film *America's First D-Day*

— *Washington Crossing* in Bucks County. "There are several aspects that most people don't know," Child said this week. "There actually were three crossings, in the middle of a nor'easter. And there was a mystery woman."

Producers are negotiating with *CSI: NY* star Gary Sinise to narrate the 90-minute film, and *Mad Men's* Jon Hamm "would be the ideal Washington," Child said. Casting  
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# Movie

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is scheduled to start next month, with the hiring of many local actors.

Local reenactors also will be used, but not as Washington, Child said. "He was 44 when he crossed the Delaware — most local Washington reenactors are in their 60s."

The crossing on Christmas Day and the ensuing Battle of Trenton were a pivotal point in the Revolutionary War. Washington and his troops were in retreat from New York City and New Jersey when they set up camp near McKonkey's Ferry Inn in December 1776.

But, instead of settling in for the winter, Washington launched a daring river crossing of 2,400 men back into New Jersey, a nine-mile march to Trenton, and the surprise attack on the 1,500 Hessian troops in and around the Barracks.

The victory — the first for the Continental Army — boosted troop morale and support for the war among the leaders of the fledgling nation.

Fifty to 80 actors will be filmed to look like Washington's force. "That's the reason I was picked," Child said. "I can make big-looking films on a modest budget."

The budget for the film is less than \$1 million, said Child, 48, who has made films about the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, and who plans a film for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Filming of *America's First D-Day* will run from December to February, when the weather is colder. "I can use fake snow, but it's better for the leaves to be off the trees," the director said.



**Robert Child**, who lives in Washington Crossing, will direct the documentary.

The actual locations of the crossing and the Barracks in Trenton will hardly be used, said Child, who, coincidentally, lives in Washington Crossing.

"Washington Crossing Historic Park is too close to roads and modern elements," such as the two-lane steel bridge, he said. "The exteriors of the buildings at McKonkey's Ferry were clapboard, not stone. We may shoot the interiors of the barracks, but there's too much city noise."

Most scenes will be shot on properties owned by the Heritage Conservancy, one of several nonprofit organizations sponsoring the movie. The crossing will be staged on a wide section of the Neshaminy Creek north of Newtown that resembles the Delaware, Child said.

In the film, the story will be interspersed with interviews of historians, including David Hackett Fischer, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Washington's Crossing*, and Gregory Urwin, a Temple history professor.

The story will offer elements not covered in the 2000 TV movie *The Crossing*, starring Jeff Daniels, Child said.

For example, two other colonial generals tried to lead crossings in Bristol and Morrisville, but the ice was too thick and the current too fast, Child said.

And then there was the "mystery woman" who "entertained" a Hessian colonel in Mount Holly when his troops

should have been on their way to Trenton.

"Some historians say it was Betsy Ross who used her feminine wiles to delay the colonel and that Washington arranged it," Child said.

A 48-minute version of the movie will be ready to run on cable — possibly HBO or the History Channel — next fall, Child said. The longer DVD, workbooks, and other educational materials will be made available to schools.

"It's a broad project, not just a film," Child said.

Some of the proceeds will go to nonprofits, including the Heritage Conservancy; the Friends of Washington Crossing Park; the National Museum of the American Revolution, and the David Library of the American Revolution, both at Washington Crossing; and the Old Barracks Association.

As for referring to Washington's crossing as "America's First D-Day," Child said: "It's America's first decisive day, when this country became a country. It's when the British knew America was going to win the war, when they saw America's resolve in action."

Contact staff writer Bill Reed at 215-801-2964, [wreed@philly.com](mailto:wreed@philly.com), or @breedbucks on Twitter.

## A Sneak Peak

■ To see the trailer for *America's First D-Day — Washington Crossing*, go to [www.americasfirstdday.com](http://www.americasfirstdday.com)

■ For more information about the film, go to [www.robchild.net](http://www.robchild.net) or [www.facebook.com/americasfirstcrossing](http://www.facebook.com/americasfirstcrossing).