

December in the Revolution

1775

Canada

On December 1st, General Montgomery joins General Arnold's patriot forces outside Quebec. On December 8th they begin besieging the city, an action that would last until December 31st.

To deploy their cannon against the city, on December 17th Patriot forces began build ramparts of snow and ice. An American describes the event in a letter stating, "Who but Yankees would have thought of such a contrivance or who but enthusiastic for liberty would carry on a siege at such a season of the year." These battlements however did not improve the American situation with most of the American troops enlistment due to expire on December 31st.



On that day a blizzard began, prompting General Montgomery to order an attack. He had hoped the snow would mask his attack allowing his troops to scale the city walls. It failed however with Montgomery being killed and Arnold wounded.

Boston

December 3rd, at the American camp in Cambridge, the captain of an American schooner brings in a captured enemy vessel carrying 5000 pounds of badly needed dry goods. On the same day the British revive a fear of smallpox within the colonial ranks by sending victims of the disease out from Boston to the patriot lines.

December 4th, in an effort to prevent Connecticut troops from leaving the service, General Lee threatens to cut off provisions to those who do not reenlist for three weeks, and posts a notice to innkeepers between Cambridge and Hartford asking them to refuse service to deserters.

Soldiers react to the notice by posting one of their own stating, "General Lee is a fool and if he had not come here we should not know it." The next day recruitment and retention woes continue for Washington as Massachusetts sets a monthly pay schedule of twenty-eight days, adding another month of pay per year to each soldier's salary. He writes the Massachusetts Council, ". . . it aims the most fatal stab to the peace of this army that ever was given, and that Lord North himself could not have devised a more effective blow to the recruiting service."

To provide much-needed fuel for the colony, on December 12th, the Massachusetts Council allows decayed barns, stores, and houses to be torn down, as well as any public buildings if needed. December 30th, General Washington's recruitment officers are allowed to discuss with free African Americans enlistment in the American army.

The South

December 9th, Loyalist and British troops under Governor Dunmore are defeated at Great Bridge, Virginia. Five days later, with reinforcements from Williamsburg and North Carolina, American forces occupy Norfolk. Then on the 15th, following the patriot capture of Norfolk from the British, the Virginia Gazette reports that Lord Dunmore will bombard the city if frontier riflemen enter the fight. December 18th A company of foot rangers raids Sullivan's Island, South Carolina, where Governor Campbell has retained slaves and loyalists.

Congress

On December 11th Congress approves a \$3000 appropriation to support American diplomats in Europe. On the 13th Congress authorizes the Naval Construction Act of 1775. On December 26th, the Continental Congress calls for another three million dollars in bills of credit to be issued to help defray the costs of building a navy and supplying the army. The thirteen colonies pledge for the redemption of the bills of credit by levying taxes in each colony. December 16th a representative of the Delaware tribe visits the Continental Congress where he is thanked by John Hancock for keeping Delaware neutral in the conflict between Britain and America. In late December Congress gets word that France may offer support in the war against Britain.

Parliament

December 21st the British Parliament passes a bill calling for the confiscation of all American vessels, and the impressment of their crews, into service in the English Navy. The next day they pass the American Prohibitory act. King George III then issues a royal proclamation December 23rd closing the American colonies to all commerce and trade, to take effect in March of 1776.



1776

Withdrawal through New Jersey

On December 1st Washington wrote to Congress that he did not have the troops to stop the enemy at the Raritan River and had started moving stores toward Philadelphia. They did however destroy the bridge at New Brunswick slowing the advance of Cornwallis to Princeton. Washington arrives at Princeton on December 2nd and on the 3rd he reported to Congress that he

had much of the Army stores and baggage across the Delaware. If the boats arrived from Philadelphia, the move would be finished by the next night: The move across the Delaware is completed on the 5th. Washington also received a letter from General Lee's (dated November 30) that he was about to cross the Hudson River near Peekskill.

December 10th The Congress prepared and published an address to the American people. It was a plea for military support against the advancing British army. "What a pity it is then that the rich and populous city of Philadelphia should fall into the enemy's hands."

As Congress tries to rouse the public Trenton Falls: Washington was uncertain whether Cornwallis would cross the Delaware above here or down river from Trenton. A Chatham New Jersey, Washington once more wrote to General Lee to join him to save Philadelphia. It's a letter General Lee will not receive as Banastre Tarleton captures him at Breakfast in the Whites Tavern on December 12th.



On December 11th Congress' decision to flee to Baltimore if the British approached Philadelphia, apparently became known to the populace. The members asked General Washington to issue an order denying such a plan was in place, but the general declined to do so. The following day Congress gives Washington Dictatorial powers before fleeing to Baltimore.

But on December 14th British General Cornwallis returned to Trenton after a short march to inspect the Delaware River. Since "the weather having become too severe to keep the field" he thus ordered the troops marched to their respective stations in the Neighborhood." The following day, from information beginning to come back from spies sent across the Delaware, Washington surmised that the British were beginning to pull back the supply forces for their troops and they showed no signs of forcing a river crossing.

It was at this time of crisis; on December 19th Thomas Paines' published in the Pennsylvania Gazette "The American Crisis." Thus came the words "These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." Washington is so moved by the pamphlet he order's it read aloud to his troops on December 23rd. The next day Washington's army is issued 60 cartridges per man and provisions for three days in the field. Then, at noon on the 25th 5,000 men begin marching to McConkey's Ferry on the Delaware. Washington also posted a few letters, including one to Robert Morris that closed, "I hope the next Christmas will prove happier than the present to you."

Trenton



December 26th, though the River had succeeded in keeping over half of Washington's troops from reaching the New Jersey shore, at 8:00 Washington had arrived at Trenton with some 2,400 men. The battle was furious, but short, with 1,000 Hessian troops killed, wounded, or captured. Also captured were food, blankets, shoes and particularly cannons and ammunition; badly needed supplies for the US Army.

France

On December 7th Franklin arrives in Nantz France. He reached Versailles on December 20th. And three days later he, Deane and Lee called on the Count de Vergennes to inform him they had been "empowered by the Congress of the United States of America to propose and negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce between France and The United States.

New England

December 7th President John Hancock wrote the four New England states urging troops to be sent to reinforce General Schuyler in northern New York. Two days later Connecticut Governor Trumbull: "Is America to be lost?" He opened a strong plea to Massachusetts urging the New England States to meet to discuss their finances, defense and "to bring about a general reformation of the people." In the meantime, the State began moving militia and supplies to Rhode Island to counter the arrival of the British fleet on December 8th. The following day General Henry Clinton wrote Lord Germain in London that he had landed his 6,000+ troops and was in possession of Newport, RI "without the least opposition."

December 22nd Congress received reports from the Northern Army in Ticonderoga, NY. that were no better than those from Philadelphia. "The poor creatures are now (what's left alive) laying on the cold ground, in poor thin tents, and some none at all, and many down with the pleurisy. No barracks, no hospitals to go in. The barracks is at Saratoga. If you were here, your heart would melt. At present we have not one pair of shoes nor blanket in the store." On December 24th Congress requested the President to inform the New England States of the "critical state" of the Fort at Ticonderoga and the threat of invasion from General Carlton of Canada and the need of 4,500 men to fill the militia quotas.

1777

Philadelphia

December 5-8, Howe withdraws to Philadelphia after leading a British raiding force to Whitemarsh, Chestnut Hill, and Edge Hill for forage. On December 11th Washington begins moving his troops from Whitemarsh to Valley Forge only to have his troops clash with those of General Cornwallis. In the encounter the British capture over 2,000 sheep and cattle at Gulph's Mill, Pennsylvania.

Washington delays the march to Valley Forge for several days after this, finally setting up winter quarters on the 19th.

1778



December 17th Lieutenant-Governor Henry Hamilton, also a Lieutenant Colonel in His Majesty's armed forces, retakes Fort Sackville (also known as Vincennes) for the British. Hamilton displays leadership skills heading a combined force of 175 white soldiers along with 60 Indians and takes the fort virtually unopposed. But he didn't hold it for more than two months before Clark arrived with a larger combined Indian, French Canadian, and American force. The fort was retaken, and Hamilton was captured and sent to Virginia.

On December 23rd a British and Loyalist force of 3,600 men arrive just two miles south of Savannah Georgia. Though the American force of some 900 men is outnumbered three to one, the British

commander (Col Campbell) feels that the American defense line is sound. This all changes however when a local slave tells Campbell of an unguarded path through the swamp to the American rear.

A slave guided the British force into the American rear while raising no alarm. The American commander first hears the sound of battle coming from his own barracks. When he then realizes the main British force is also attacking he orders a retreat which quickly turns into a

rout. The colonials lose 83 men killed and another 483 captured while the British lose 3 men killed and another 10 wounded.

1779

On December 1, Washington establishes winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey. It had been an inconclusive campaign season in the North, combined with the failure of d'Estaing to arrive with his fleet at Sandy Hook to reinforce Lafayette. Record-breaking cold along with a breakdown of the army's supply system causes numerous desertions and some attempts at mutiny. Many consider this the worst winter of the war.

While Washington is freezing in Upper New Jersey, on December 29th General Clinton and 8,000 troops depart New York for South Carolina. There he begins a new campaign with the goal of capturing Charleston. He would arrive on February 1st.

1780



The Carolina's

On December 4th a force of Continental dragoons commanded by Colonel William Washington obtains the surrender of a Loyalist force by guile at Rugeley's Mills, South Carolina. They use the "Quaker gun trick," i.e., fabricating a cannon from a pine log. The approximately 100 Loyalists led by Colonel Rugeley surrender rather than face "bombardment." Eight days later Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," discovers that Major

Robert McLeroth is moving approximately 200 Tory recruits from Charleston to Winnsboro. McLeroth uses his own guile and succeeds in making Marion believe he is camping for the night. He then skulks away, leaving his campfires burning to deceive the Americans.

As Patriot and loyalist forces engaged each other, on December 16th General Greene made a major decision. In complete conflict with military doctrine he split his forces: placing Brigadier General Daniel Morgan in charge of one division. He is to then move west and threaten the garrison at 96 while Greene stays in his position threatening Charleston while defending Charlotte. It is now up to Cornwallis to decide which division he will engage.

While he awaits further orders from Greene, and to provoke Cornwallis, on December 27th Morgan detaches a force of approximately 275 dragoons commanded by Colonel William Washington to destroy a force of Loyalists terrorizing the countryside in the vicinity Fairfort Creek. Without incurring any losses to his force, Washington kills or wounds 150 of the Loyalists and takes 40 prisoners at Hammond's Store (Williamson's Plantation).

1781

South Carolina

Encounter at Dorchester, South Carolina

The Battle of Eutaw Springs greatly depleted the manpower of General Nathanael Greene. It is not until December 1st (two months later) that he feels strong enough to launch an assault at Dorchester. British forces are now commanded by Major John Doyle who takes over from a wounded Alexander Stewart. Dorchester is just 15 miles northwest of Charleston and defended by 850 men. But the British do not stand and fight; instead they beat a hastily retreat to Charleston after destroying what they are unable to carry with them. British forces are so concerned about a Patriot attack upon the city that they take the extraordinary step of arming black slaves. Later in the month Richard Henry Lee launches an attack on British forces on John's Island. But the assault has to be abandoned because the Wapoo River could not be forded as planned.

1783



December 4th, General Washington bids farewell to his officers during an address at Frances Tavern in New York City. Washington then resigns as commander in chief of the Continental Army on December 23rd and retires to his home at Mount Vernon.