

## *American General John Stark dies, May 8, 1822*

On this day in history, May 8, 1822, American General John Stark dies. John Stark was a Revolutionary War hero from New Hampshire, especially known for his victory at the Battle of Bennington. Stark was born in 1728 to Irish immigrants who settled in Derryfield, which is now Manchester, New Hampshire.

When he was 23 years old, Stark was captured by Abenaki Indians while on a hunting trip and was forced to "run the gauntlet," which meant he had to run through two lines of Indian warriors who would pummel him with their fists. John attacked the first warrior in the line, which so impressed the chief that he adopted him into the tribe. The following year, John was bought back to white society for a ransom.

When the French and Indian War broke out, John served as a top lieutenant in the famed Rogers Rangers, an elite scouting and special missions force. In 1759, the Rangers were ordered to attack the Abenaki settlement where John's adopted Indian family lived. He refused to take part in the mission and returned to Derryfield to begin life with his new wife, Molly Page.

When the American Revolution broke out, John became colonel of the 1st New Hampshire Regiment, which marched straight to Boston after the Battles of Lexington and Concord. At the Battle of Bunker Hill, Stark's regiment, along with James Reed's 3rd New Hampshire Regiment, came to the rescue of American Colonel William Prescott when he called for reinforcements. They quickly formed a redoubt and repelled several British assaults, killing scores of British soldiers. When Prescott's men ran out of ammunition, the New Hampshire regiments laid down covering fire to let them escape.

For his heroism, Stark came to the attention of George Washington and his regiment was brought into the Continental Army. They helped in the defenses of New York before being ordered north to defend the

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retreating American army from the failed Siege of Quebec. After helping at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, Stark returned to New Hampshire to recruit more men. While there, he learned of the promotion of several others, who had less experience, to general over himself. He was offended and resigned his position, but declared he would still work for the defense of New Hampshire.

As the British began a major invasion from Canada in the summer of 1777, Stark took the position of Brigadier General of the New Hampshire militia, under the condition that he would not take orders from the Continental Army. In August, Stark learned the British had sent a large force to capture supplies at Bennington, Vermont. Stark took hundreds of men to defend the city and met the British at the Battle of Bennington on August 16. Aided by Seth Warner's Green Mountain Boys, Stark captured or killed nearly a thousand British soldiers, which won Stark widespread acclaim and helped secure the surrender of British General John Burgoyne's army several weeks later. For the victory, Stark received an offer to be a Brigadier General in the Continental Army, which he accepted. Stark would serve on and off as the commander of the Northern Department for the rest of the war.

After the war, Stark returned to farming in Derryfield, where he remained the rest of his life. In 1809, veterans from the Battle of Bennington asked for his presence at a ceremony remembering the battle. Being in ill health, Stark declined to attend, sending a letter instead. The letter closed with the statement, "Live free or die. Death is not the worst of evils." The phrase, "Live free or die," stuck in the minds of New Hampshire residents and became the official state motto in 1945. John Stark passed away at Derryfield in 1822 at the age of 93.