

Major General John Sullivan dies, January 23, 1795

On this day in history, January 23, 1795, Major General John Sullivan dies. Sullivan was a lawyer from Durham, New Hampshire, who, in his younger days, became a hated figure for filing lawsuits against his neighbors. As the years passed though, he regained his stature and became friends with Royal Governor John Wentworth. In 1772, he was appointed a major in the New Hampshire militia.

In 1774, Sullivan was elected to attend the first rebel Congress of New Hampshire, which elected him a delegate to the First Continental Congress. Sullivan returned to New Hampshire in the fall of 1794 and led a raid on Fort William and Mary in New Castle. The raid was successful in rescuing a large supply of guns and cannon.

Sullivan was re-elected to Congress in 1775. Congress quickly appointed him a Brigadier General and sent him to the Siege of Boston. After the siege was broken, he was sent to Canada to take over the failed mission there. He was eventually forced to retreat and for this he was highly criticized in Congress, but still received a promotion to Major General.

Next Sullivan was put in command of the American forces at Long Island. He fought valiantly, but was captured. British Admiral Richard Howe sent Sullivan with a peace proposal to Congress, but nothing came of it. After his release, Sullivan fought at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, his two major victories of the war.

In early 1777, Sullivan got into a fight with Congress for being overlooked for promotion. In August of that year, he failed to capture Staten Island, which led Congress to investigate his behavior, but he was exonerated. Sullivan commanded the right flank that collapsed at the Battle of Brandywine and he also performed poorly at the Battle of Germantown.

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Some in Congress wanted him to resign, but he still found favor with George Washington who sent him to retake Newport, Rhode Island. This mission failed when a storm damaged the French fleet. Sullivan was criticized again, but sent on another mission to western New York where he conducted a "scorched earth" campaign against British Loyalists and their Indian allies. After this, Sullivan resigned from the army due to ill-health and frustration with Congress for being overlooked for promotion.

After his resignation, Sullivan was re-elected to Congress in 1780, but he resigned the following year after being accused of being a French agent when he borrowed some money from the French ambassador. Back in New Hampshire, where Sullivan was considered a war hero, he became the attorney general for 4 years, served in the state assembly where he was elected Speaker of the House, served 3 years as president of the state (governor) and served at the Convention that created the New Hampshire Constitution. He served as President of the state convention that ratified the US Constitution and in 1789 was appointed as the first US District Judge of the Federal Court in New Hampshire by George Washington, a position which he held until his death in 1795.