

Minutemen defeated at the Battle of Minisink, July 22, 1779

On this day in history, July 22, 1779, the Minutemen are defeated at the Battle of Minisink, one of the bloodiest battles per capita of the American Revolution. 1779 saw the launching of the Sullivan Expedition, an expedition led by General John Sullivan to defeat Loyalists and allied Iroquois Indians in western New York.

To try to stop the expedition, the British sent Joseph Brant, an English educated Iroquois, into the upper Delaware River valley. Brant's mission was to gather supplies for the British army and discourage the gathering Sullivan Expedition if possible. Joseph Brant was a Mohawk leader allied with the British who has been called one of the greatest generals on the British side during the war.

The upper Delaware River valley was a sparsely populated area consisting of southeastern New York and stretching down the border between New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The area was heavy in farming and grazing and was a chief place for raising supplies for the war. It was also the frontier of English settlement at the time. Most of the interior beyond this area was Iroquois territory.

On July 19, Brant and around 90 Indians and Loyalists began terrorizing the Neversink River valley. The Neversink is the main tributary into the Delaware River. They burned homes, a church and a school, and destroyed the towns of Peenpack and Mahackamack, which are now the city of Port Jervis, New York, along with Fort Decker.

Survivors fled to nearby towns and the militia quickly gathered in Goshen. Citizens wished to pursue Brant immediately, but the cautious Lieutenant Colonel, Benjamin Tusten, advised against it, thinking they were outnumbered by the Indians. The citizens, however, overruled him. Tusten marched out and met together with militia from other local

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counties. About 120 minutemen chased Brant up the Delaware til they arrived at Minisink Ford on the 22nd.

Brant's force was crossing the ford and the minutemen hoped to ambush him. When a soldier shot at an Indian scout, the surprise was ruined, however, and Brant quickly outflanked the minutemen. When the Indians attacked, many of the minutemen fled, while about 50, including Lt. Col. Tusten, rushed up a hill to get on better ground. The 50 men on the hill were quickly surrounded, but they held off their attackers for several hours. Eventually, the battle devolved into hand-to-hand combat and the outnumbered patriots were massacred. Only a handful escaped alive. Among the dead was the wary Lt. Col. Tusten. 48 patriots were killed out of 120, a 40% death rate, while the Indians lost less than 5 men.

In spite of the overwhelming Indian and British victory at the Battle of Minisink, the victory had little effect on the upcoming Sullivan Expedition. The expedition raised dozens of Iroquois villages loyal to the British and broke the back of Iroquois authority in the area once and for all. Many Iroquois starved or froze to death during the upcoming winter. When the American Revolution was finally won, many of the survivors fled the United States for British Canada, where their descendants live on reservations to this day.