

Nathan Hale decides to join the American Revolution, April 22, 1775

On this day in history, April 22, 1775, Nathan Hale decides to join the American Revolution. Hale was from a New England family that dated back to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He grew up in a large farming household in Coventry, Connecticut.

At the age of 14, he went to Yale College in New Haven, where he studied to be a school teacher. He took his first teaching job upon graduating in 1774 in East Haddam, but the following year took a job in New London at the age of 19. Hale was well-liked and known for his conscientiousness and, being college-educated, was held in high regard by the community. Nathan was the first schoolmaster in Connecticut to make regular classes for female students.

Nathan received word that the Revolution had broken out in Massachusetts at the school on April 22, 1775. That evening, the local townspeople had a meeting where Nathan asked to be let out of his contract because he considered it his duty to fight for his country. Hale received a lieutenant's commission in Connecticut's 7th Regiment, which left for Boston in September. There they joined the brigade of General John Sullivan and Hale was soon promoted to Captain of the regiment.

Hale saw no military action in Boston and, when the British abandoned the city, he went with the Continental Army to Long Island to defend New York City. Hale's regiment did not see action here either when the British attacked and took the island, much to Hale's disappointment. After George Washington moved his army back to Manhattan, the General devised a plan to place a spy within the British ranks on Long Island to find out when and where they would move against Manhattan.

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Nathan Hale volunteered for the mission, apparently because he felt that he hadn't done anything useful yet in the war. Hale was dropped off at Huntington, Long Island on September 12, 1776. Unbeknownst to him, the British would invade Manhattan and drive Washington out of New York on the 15th, making his mission unnecessary, but since Nathan didn't know it, he continued with his mission.

Nathan posed as a school teacher looking for work and gathered information on British troop movements and strength and eventually made his way back to Huntington where he was to be picked up. Accounts vary on how exactly Nathan was discovered by the British. Some accounts have a Tory relative, a local who recognized him or a British soldier who recognized him, giving him up. At some point, British Lieutenant Colonel Robert Rogers, knowing Hale was a spy, approached him at a tavern and pretended to be a patriot sympathetic to Hale's views. Hale told him his mission and Rogers captured him.

Hale was immediately sent to New York City and interrogated by General William Howe who, without trial or jury, sentenced him to death. On September 22nd, Hale was marched to a tree in an apple orchard in New York and given the opportunity to say some last words. History tells us Nathan's last words were, "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country." For his bravery and love for his country, he earned a well-deserved spot in America's pantheon of heroes from the Revolutionary War.