

The Affair at Little Egg Harbor, 1778

On this day in history, **October 15, 1778, the Affair at Little Egg Harbor is part of the only British attack on the shore of New Jersey south of the New York area during the American Revolution. Little Egg Harbor was a focal point of American privateering during the war.** American ships would scour the coast, capturing British mercantile and military ships. The captured ships were taken to ports where a court would distribute the goods and auction off the ship.

The small village of Chestnut Neck on the Little Egg Harbor River, and a small village called "The Forks," further up the river, were two such towns that handled confiscated ships. When captured ships were brought to these towns, the goods were shipped overland to George Washington at Valley Forge and the ships were added to the privateering fleet.

British General Henry Clinton was continually frustrated with the numbers of British ships being captured by the privateers. Between June and September of 1778 alone, 18 ships were captured by the privateers of Little Egg Harbor. Clinton decided to launch an expedition to "clean out that nest of Rebel Pirates." 15 ships carrying hundreds of sailors and soldiers left New York in late September and arrived at Little Egg Harbor on October 5.

The residents of the area were warned of the coming attack. Most of the residents of Chestnut Neck moved inland, carrying their personal household items and warehouses full of confiscated goods with them. When the attack came on October 7, the British burned homes, destroyed 10 captured ships in the river and destroyed whatever confiscated goods they could not carry off. By the next morning, the British were forced to leave after hearing that Count Casimir Pulaski and 250 men would soon arrive.

Pulaski's men camped at Tuckerton where they had a view of the British ships in the harbor and for a week the two sides faced one another. After a deserter informed British Captain Patrick Ferguson

The Affair at Little Egg Harbor, 1778

where the patriots were camped and told him they would not allow anyone they captured to live, an incensed Ferguson ordered an attack.

Early on the morning of October 15, 400 British soldiers stormed the beach and came across an outpost of 50 men. Ferguson's men attacked the outpost as they slept, killing nearly everyone with bayonets before withdrawing as Pulaski's main force was aroused.

The affair was called the Little Egg Harbor Massacre by the Americans because of the British brutality. The expedition was called back to New York, having failed to stop the privateering and failing to destroy certain targets in the area. The residents of Chestnut Neck never rebuilt, most moving to nearby Port Republic. Casimir Pulaski would be killed later in the war during the Siege of Savannah and Captain Ferguson would be killed at the Battle of Kings Mountain.