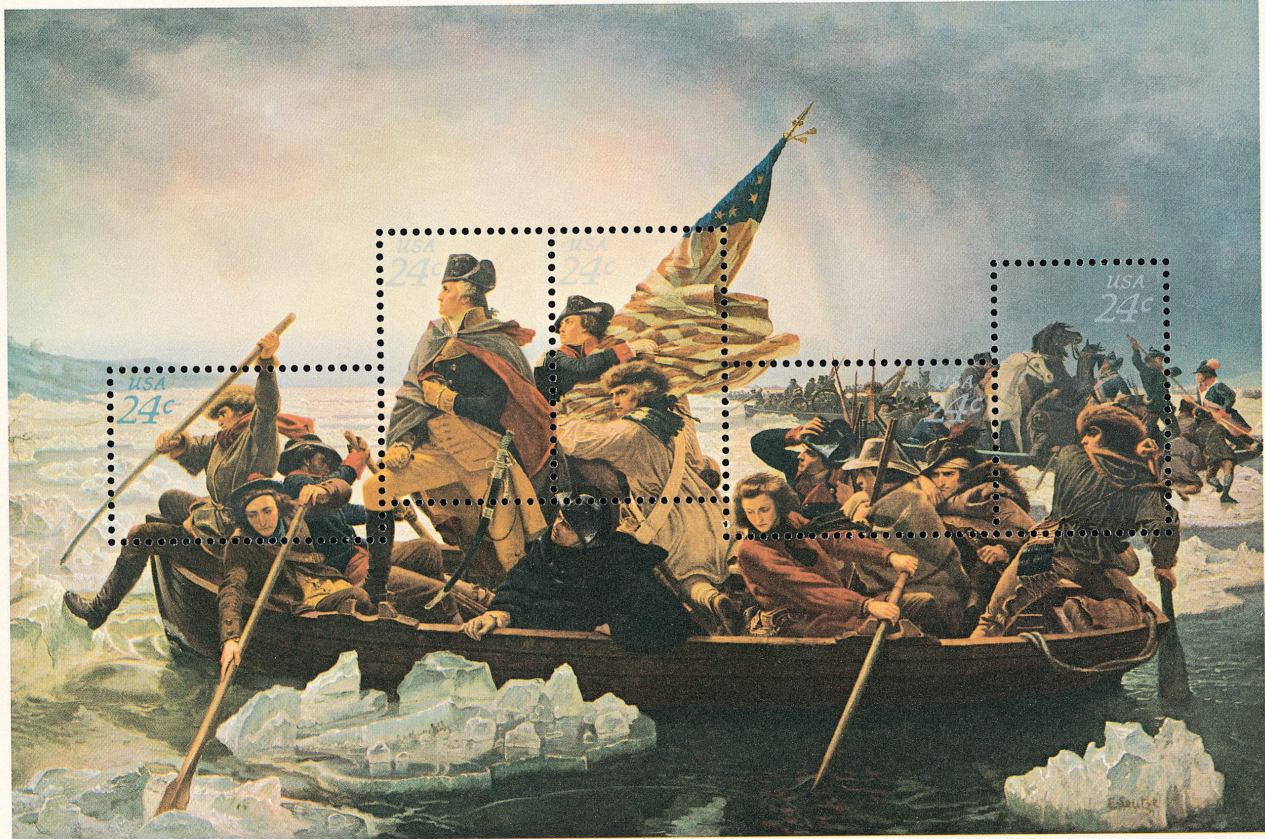


**This Day in History... December 25, 1776**

## **Washington Crosses the Delaware**



Washington Crossing the Delaware

From a Painting by Emanuel Leutze / Eastman Johnson



*Souvenir sheet pictures Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's dramatic portrayal of Washington's crossing.*

On the night of December 25, 1776, George Washington led his men across the Delaware River in a surprise attack on the British.

By early December 1776, things were bleak for the American patriots. They'd lost a string of battles and were pushed out of New York, through New Jersey, into Pennsylvania. Many soldiers had deserted, fearing that the cause for independence was lost. Even General Washington expressed his doubts when he wrote to his cousin, "I think the game is pretty near up."

However, there were those who never lost their faith. Political activist and founding

## This Day in History... December 25, 1776 continued

father Thomas Paine published a pamphlet called *The American Crisis* on December 19. In it he said, “These are the times that try men’s souls; the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”

Paine’s pamphlet moved many, including General Washington, who ordered it be read to all of his troops. He also began to develop a daring plan. Trenton, New Jersey, on the other side of the Delaware River, was occupied by a force of just 1,500 Hessians (troops rented out by German rulers, including the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, who fought for the British). In addition to only having a small force, their guard was down as they believed that no American attacks would be possible. Washington planned to lead his 2,400-man army across the Delaware while two other detachments would arrive from different directions, cutting off the Hessians’ escape routes.



*Paine later earned fame for his pamphlet, Common Sense.*

Planning and preparation lasted throughout December. By the morning of December 25, Washington ordered his men to pack three days’ worth of food and be fitted with fresh flints for their muskets. Washington was also concerned that the British were planning to cross the river once it was frozen, but he moved ahead with his plans. That evening, Washington and his men marched to their crossing point at McKonkey’s Ferry, but arrived late. Despite the delayed start, Washington pressed on and was among the first to cross the river. As the weather grew worse overnight, the rain turned to sleet and then snow, slowing their progress even further. They planned to reach the shore by midnight, but did not arrive until 3 a.m.

Once across the river, Washington led his men on the nine-mile march to Trenton. Around 8 a.m., they encountered a Hessian outpost, overtook it, and forced the Hessians to retreat back into Trenton. With his additional detachments unable to reach Trenton, Washington sent some of his men to block the escape routes while he found high ground to direct the attacks on the town’s two streets.

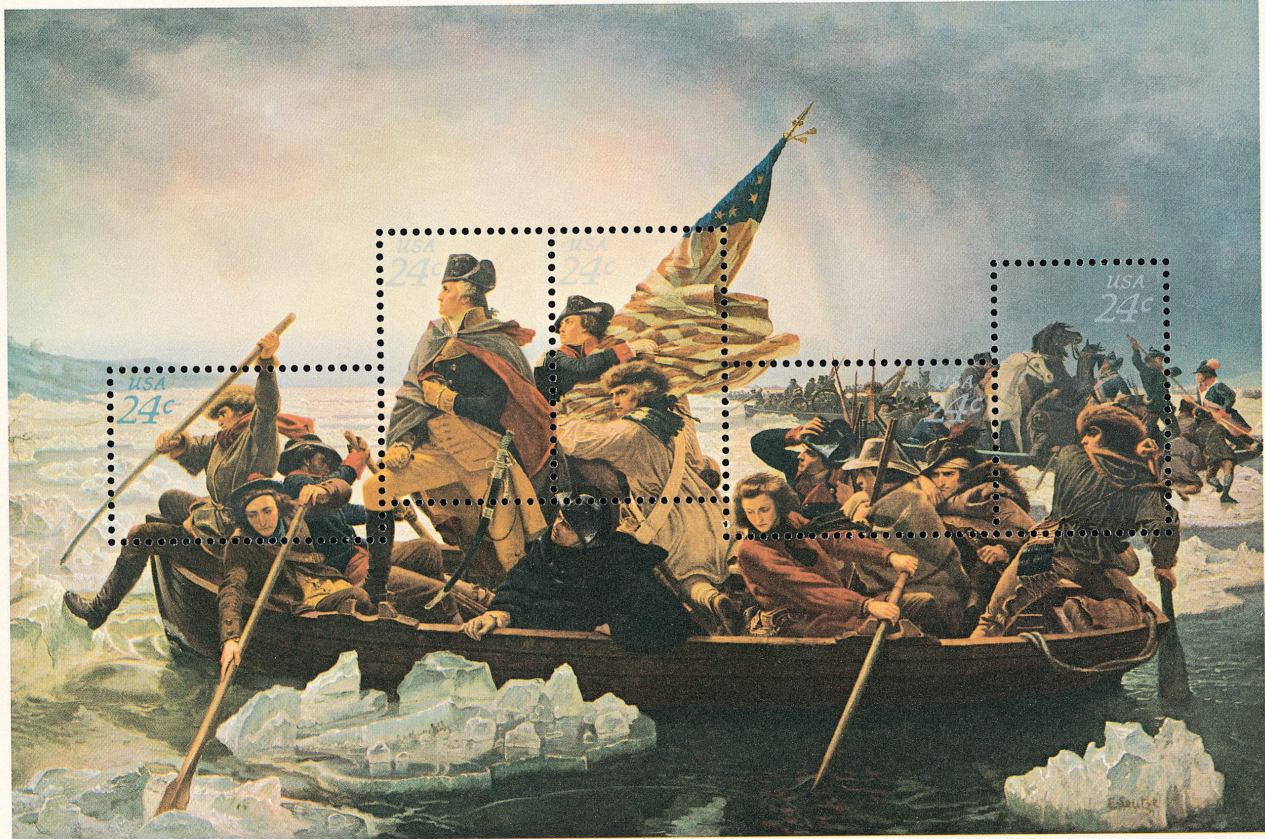
Around the same time, American artillery across the Delaware began firing on the Hessian positions. Soon, the Americans managed to drive the Hessians from the town. The German troops regrouped and made one final attempt at retaking the town, but were attacked from three directions and retreated to a nearby orchard, where they quickly surrendered. Another Hessian regiment had tried to escape across a nearby bridge but was also captured. In the end, the enemy force suffered 22 killed, 83 wounded, and 896 captured. The Americans had two dead and five wounded, including future President James Monroe, who was shot in the shoulder.

The Battle of Trenton was a significant morale booster – encouraging troops to reenlist and convincing new recruits to join the fight.



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