

August 29, 1776

The Night Washington Saved the Continental Army

Tonight I want to take us back **250 years to August 29, 1776**, to one of those moments in the American Revolution when everything could have ended very differently.

The Declaration of Independence was less than two months old, and already the new nation was facing a crisis.

Just two days earlier, on August 27, the Continental Army had suffered a devastating defeat at the **Battle of Long Island**. British forces had overwhelmed the Americans, forcing them back to their defenses at Brooklyn Heights.

George Washington now faced a terrible situation.

His army was trapped. The British were in front of him, and the East River was behind him. If the British broke through—or if their navy moved into position to block the river—thousands of American soldiers could be captured.

And remember, this was 1776. There was no established United States Army waiting somewhere else to replace them.

This was the army.

If Washington lost it, the Revolution itself could have been in jeopardy.

So Washington made a decision that doesn't always receive the attention of his great battlefield victories.

He decided to retreat.

And sometimes knowing when to retreat requires just as much courage as knowing when to fight.

On the evening of **August 29, 1776**, Washington began secretly moving approximately 9,000 soldiers across the East River from Brooklyn to Manhattan.

This had to be accomplished without the British realizing what was happening.

One of the heroes of the evacuation was **Colonel John Glover and his Marblehead regiment from Massachusetts**. Many of these men were experienced sailors and fishermen. Using available boats, they began ferrying soldiers, horses, artillery, and supplies across the river.

Hour after hour, throughout the night, the evacuation continued.

But dawn was approaching, and there were still American soldiers waiting to cross.

Then something remarkable happened.

A heavy fog settled over Brooklyn.

The fog helped conceal the remaining American troops from the British while the evacuation continued into the morning of August 30.

When the fog finally lifted, the British discovered what had happened.

Washington's army was gone.

What could have become a catastrophic defeat had instead become one of the most remarkable escapes of the Revolutionary War.

Washington had not won the Battle of Long Island.

But he had preserved the Continental Army.

And because the army survived, **the cause of American independence survived with it.**

There is something important about remembering moments like this during America250.

We naturally celebrate victories. We remember the Declaration of Independence, Yorktown, and the great triumphs of the Revolution.

But the road to independence was also filled with defeats, uncertainty, difficult decisions, and moments when the entire cause seemed almost lost.

On **August 29, 1776**, George Washington could not change the battle that had already been lost.

What he could do was protect what remained and prepare to fight another day.

Perhaps that is one of the lessons this moment still offers us 250 years later:

Not every setback is the end of the story.

Sometimes courage means standing and fighting.

And sometimes courage means having the wisdom to preserve what matters so that the fight can continue.

Because Washington saved his army that night, the American Revolution continued.

And seven years later, the independence that seemed so uncertain on that dark August night would finally be secured.