

Name _____

Washington's Crossing of the Delaware

Many people are aware of the historical event when General George Washington crossed the Delaware River, but few understand the difficulties involved before and after the attack.

The Continental Army soldiers were signed up for very limited amounts of time. Many of their enlistments were expiring, and many had deserted. Washington sent some men out into the area to recruit new soldiers. Normally that would have been hard to accomplish, but due to the harsh treatment of the people by British soldiers, many people wanted to fight against them.

Another concern was ice floating in the river, as well as the river itself freezing. Washington's spies had told him that when the Delaware froze over, the British were considering walking across and attacking him. Washington had to move both men and artillery across at night.

On Christmas night, 1776, Washington split his forces into three units, called columns, to cross the Delaware

at three different places. Each column had to move men as well as artillery. Only Washington was able to get both across in heavy sleet and snow. One other general managed to get his men across, but when unable to successfully transport his artillery, he returned with his men to the bank.

With fewer men and less artillery than he had hoped for, Washington still decided to attack. On December 26th, he divided his troops into two units and defeated the British. There were only nine American casualties. The British sustained 120 casualties and 1,000 men were captured. Washington ordered the British supplies to be plundered and their rum destroyed prior to the return trip across the Delaware.

This victory over the British raised the spirits of the American colonists and helped turn the tide in the Revolutionary War.

Text Questions

- Which of the following did not contribute to the difficulty of the crossing?
 - Washington had to move both men and artillery across at night.
 - There was ice floating in the river.
 - They crossed in heavy sleet and snow.
 - It was hard to recruit new soldiers.
- What does the word *casualties* mean as it is used in the text?
 - people who are hurt or killed in an accident
 - people in the military who are wounded or killed in active service
 - anything lost or destroyed by an unfortunate event
 - anyone who is a victim of a natural disaster
- What was the author's purpose in writing this passage?
 - to help readers understand the challenges Washington faced
 - to teach readers about river ice
 - to explain how an army plans an attack
 - to describe what happens after an attack
- Why did Washington have to move his forces at night?
 - The British treated their people harshly.
 - Washington wanted his men to cross the river at three different places.
 - Spies reported the British planned to walk across the frozen river to attack.
 - After the attack, the forces had to make the return crossing.
- Based on what you read in the text and your background knowledge, how did this historical event contribute to the development of the United States?
