

WASHINGTON'S PENNSYLVANIA NAVY

Good day everyone ... it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

Washington's Crossing of the Delaware has been told in verse and story and painting, and it must be told as a Christmastime story, for it occurred on Christmas Night. But how to hang a new hat on an old story? Well, I think I've found one! When Washington wanted to pull that bold stroke early in the War, he needed boats and he turned for help to--this will come as a surprise--the Pennsylvania Navy. Pennsylvania had its own Navy before the Congress organized any naval forces. The first boat, named the "Experiment" was launched in Philadelphia and another, the "Bull Dog," in the same Kensington yards. Pennsylvania itself had 14 ships of war before Congress authorized any--and they helped protect the City of Philadelphia from attack by British warships. Shortly thereafter, the Marine Corps, as well as the U.S. Navy, were organized in Philadelphia. After Washington's retreat from Long Island, he was forced to come into Pennsylvania, as you know, and from the north, under General Howe, came the Hessian troops to occupy Trenton across the river. Washington put the Delaware between himself and the powerful foe. Excitement ran high in Eastern Pennsylvania, and militiamen, Associators, units of Bucks and Northampton County and others rallied to swell the ranks of Washington's smaller Army. But instead of waiting for the enemy to attack his headquarters at Newtown--where Colonially-dressed Pennsylvanians still celebrate Christmas Eve--Washington decided to attack Trenton. This bold

venture was undertaken on Christmas Night, 1776. It meant crossing the Delaware in boats which had to dodge between cakes of floating ice, and it meant every move had to be made in secret in order that the enemy might be taken by surprise. Three separate units of the Army were sent across the river at different points, but only one commanded by General Washington made the landing. Washington used some of the boats of the Pennsylvania Navy, small as they were, and was successful in the crossing. The Hessians, (in a traditional German Christmas celebration-- war or no war)--were taken by surprise, and Washington's men succeeded in capturing 1000 prisoners. The captured soldiers later were paraded through the streets of Philadelphia to hearten the citizenry at a Christmastime which ordinarily might have been one of the saddest in the continent's short history. Later, the Hessians were used as Ironmongers to assist in the manufacture of vital war materials. Thus did Washington at Christmastime cross the Delaware--Thomas Mifflin (later our first Governor) was with him in that night. Cross the Delaware, they did on the flotilla--long-boats they might only have been--of the Pennsylvania Navy--forerunner of the United States Navy as we know it today.

*A* That wasn't just an ordinary rowboat, citizen.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.