

## Remembering the Revolution

After Gen. George Washington arrived in White Plains in July 1778, he convened a Board of General Officers to consider “Whether we can make an attack upon the Enemy’s Posts” in New York. The answer from his key leaders was no. A key factor in the commander in chief’s decision to abandon an attack was that the French fleet could not get over the sandbars near Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Circumstances forced the general into the role of keeping Sir Henry Clinton’s army under observation from Westchester, and Rhode Island became the objective of the naval squadron of America’s new ally. On July 25, the general reported that the navy had left Sandy Hook to cooperate — unsuccessfully — with Maj. Gen. John Sullivan against a 3,000-man British garrison at Newport. Washington’s army would watch and wait.

In his “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment” of 1783, Washington called Fortress West Point “the key of America.” On May 3, 2003, a ceremony at West Point and Constitution Island marked the 225th anniversary of the engineering feat that was the centerpiece of the fortress: the Great Chain that stretched across the river. The Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, Hudson River Valley Institute, Constitution Island Association, Putnam County Historical Society and Foundry School Museum, West

Point Garrison Commander, and 5th New York Volunteer Infantry hosted the event, and spectators on both sides of the river watched as re-enactors worked on three replica rafts with 52 links of wooden chain. Soldiers of the 5th New York carried a fourth raft and its chain links to the water’s edge and floated them in the Hudson. The sloop *Clearwater* sailed through the river’s S curve to represent the workboats that would have helped with the formidable task of floating 12 tons of anchors and almost 700 chain links, clevises, and swivels that together weighed 150 tons. The day’s finale was a feu de joie that commemorated the ratification of the American-French Treaties of Alliance by the Continental

Congress on May 4, 1778. The alliance helped to seal Great Britain’s fate; from that point on, it had to fight a world war against an adversary that could challenge its naval supremacy. Since troops dubbed the river-blocking device “Washington’s Watch Chain,” the commander undoubtedly would have enjoyed the events.

To learn more about the 225th Anniversary of the Revolution, visit [www.hudsonrivervalley.net](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.net).

— JIM JOHNSON ■

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Re-enactors reassemble the Great Chain