

As he positioned his forces for winter quarters in November 1780, Gen. George Washington concentrated on preparing the Continental Army to defend the Hudson Highlands. The commander in chief realized that Benedict Arnold's treasonous plot to hand over West Point — "the key to America" — had been a near disaster for the American cause and Washington's own personal safety. He also recognized that the threat to the Hudson Highlands would not disappear until winter's ice and snow made major



operations up the Hudson River nearly impossible. He increased the forces at Fortress West Point as he awaited British Gen. Sir Henry Clinton's next move.

Washington positioned many of his major units to protect West Point. Some 3,763 infantrymen and artillerymen from the Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire Lines, along with Col. Moses Hazen's 2nd Canadian Regiment, garrisoned the Highlands. The Massachusetts troops manned West Point itself, while the rest protected the Hudson's eastern shore. They lived in huts in cantonments with distinct identities, such as Connecticut Village, Robinson's Mill, and Soldiers' Fortune. Men of the 2nd and 3rd Continental Artillery regiments formed the artillery park at New Windsor (site of the later New Windsor Cantonment). You can learn about their winter training, which prepared them for the critical role they'd play in 1781 at the siege of Yorktown, by visiting the display "Cast for War: Artillery of the 18th Century" at New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site. Washington's own headquarters were located at the Thomas Ellison House in New Windsor (a state historical marker just off Route 9W marks the site).

Even as Washington bolstered the Highland's defenses, he took steps to stamp out any treasonous

embers. Courts of inquiry were conducted to determine if Arnold had had co-conspirators. Joshua Hett Smith's trial for treason resulted in an acquittal; however, Washington had him confined at West Point until New York authorities could determine if he was a Loyalist. Smith escaped his captors and fled to England (he returned to New York after the war). Lt. Col. Richard Varick and Maj. David Franks, Arnold's aides, were both exonerated. Franks' court concluded "That every part of Major David S.

Franks's conduct was not only unexceptionable but reflects the highest Honor on him as an officer, distinguishes him as a Zealous Friend to the Independence of America and justly entitles him to the Attention and Confidence of his Countrymen."

Two weeks after British Maj. John André's execution, the Continental Congress — still reeling from the implications of Arnold's treachery — set aside Thursday, December 7, as a day of "public thanksgiving and prayer." It offered its own praise for "the late remarkable interposition of his watchful providence, in rescuing the person of our Commander in Chief and the army from imminent dangers, at the moment when treason was ripened for execution." And it asked the country's citizens to pray for God to "lead our forces, by land and sea, to victory" and for "the establishment of speedy and permanent peace."

We ask the same blessings for our armed forces 225 years later. Happy Thanksgiving.

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