

USA

The United States' Semi Quincentennial — its 250th birthday — is upon us. Most people, if asked what happened on July 4th, 1776, would say independence was declared. The truth is a little more interesting. The vote for independence actually occurred on July 2nd. July 4th was the day the wording of the document was approved. The first signatures on parchment didn't begin until August 2nd. King George didn't receive it until August 10th — and didn't publicly acknowledge it until October 31st.

July 4th? Document approval. A committee agreed on the wording.

But for a date worth celebrating, August 29th, 1776 gets my vote. Because if what happened that night goes differently, the American experiment is over before it begins.

In late August 1776, the largest military force ever assembled in the New World had Washington's troops pinned against the East River. Tens of thousands of British regulars and Hessian mercenaries had crushed his army in Brooklyn. He had virtually every man he commanded crammed onto a peninsula with no way out — the British fleet offshore, trying to push up the river and seal the trap completely.

If those ships got through, our chance for independence would likely end there.

For days, a wind out of the northeast had been blowing. It was the wrong direction for the fleet to advance. The ships sat idle, held back by weather, while Washington planned.

The retreat began at 8pm on August 29th. Wagon wheels were muffled. No speaking above a whisper. No lanterns. Nine thousand men moving in silence toward the water.

But the wind out of the northeast that had stalled the fleet was now too strong for the boats to cross. The small sailboats were nearly swept downstream — directly into the waiting British ships. General McDougall told Washington plainly: it was impossible to get everyone across before dawn.

At 11pm exactly — witnesses described it as happening "as if by design" — the wind died. Then it shifted out of the southwest. The water went smooth as glass.

John Glover's regiment of Massachusetts fishermen and sailors — the Marblehead Mariners — rowed through the night. Men, horses, cannons, supplies, everything. By first light the evacuation still wasn't finished. They needed three more hours, in full daylight, fully exposed on open water.

Then a dense fog rose off the river. So thick, witnesses said, you couldn't see five feet. It did not lift.

It held until the last boat — carrying Washington himself — cleared the channel. Then, within minutes, it was gone.

The British woke to an empty camp. Nine thousand men had crossed without a single life lost.

Those present called it 'manifestly providential.' A peculiar and unrepeatable occurrence. An American fog. Washington was not a superstitious man, and he knew what he had witnessed. It is hard to argue with them.

This country has been through things that should have ended it.

The British burned the White House in 1812. We survived. We fought ourselves in the bloodiest war in our history and somehow held together. We buried Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Kennedy. We endured a Depression that left a generation permanently changed in how they thought about tomorrow. We fought two world wars. We came home

and built the largest economy the world had ever seen, then watched parts of it collapse and built it again. We stared down a forty-year standoff with a nuclear power and outlasted it.

We have had great presidents and poor ones. Moments of breathtaking courage and moments of profound failure.

We have stumbled. We have retreated. We have crossed rivers in the dark and the fog. We have put a man on the moon — and we are going back. We have set our sights on Mars. We have eradicated diseases, connected the world, and built the most innovative economy in human history. And we are not finished.

Do not bet against 250 years of that.

Happy 250th birthday to the greatest nation on earth. Far from perfect. Far from finished. But there is no better place — with the freedom to declare and design our own future.

Have a Happy July 2nd, 4th, August 2nd, and 29th.

My Very Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JG' with a stylized flourish.

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