



Q&A: Who Was John Stark?

Fast facts about New Hampshire's Revolutionary War hero

Q: Did John Stark grow up in New Hampshire?

A: John Stark was born on August 28, 1728, in Londonderry, which at the time was called Nutfield. At that point, New Hampshire wasn't a state. It was a British colony, ruled by King George II.

Q: What kind of work did Stark do?

A: Stark's was a farmer. As he got older, he was able to buy a great deal of farm land around Derryfield (which we know today as Manchester), and he also owned several sawmills. His work as a soldier was a service he did in addition to his work as a farmer. Stark was also a skilled scout, who could find his way through New Hampshire's thick forests.

Q: Didn't Stark fight in the French and Indian War? Does that mean he supported the British?

A: As a young man, Stark had to support the British because the British ruled the colonies. In colonial New Hampshire, adult men were expected to join militias to defend the colonies. He was a talented soldier and a good leader.

Q: How did Stark end up fighting in the Revolutionary War?

A: As he got older, Stark chose to support a new cause: independence for the American colonies. In his town, he was well known as someone who believed the colonies should become their own country. When the Revolutionary War broke out in 1775, Stark quickly gathered a group of men to join the fight on the side of the Americans.

Q: What did Stark do during the Revolutionary War?

A: Stark led a regiment at the Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston, Massachusetts, in the early months of the war. Later, he served under George Washington at battles at Trenton and Princeton in New Jersey. Stark became most well-known during the Revolutionary War for his command of troops during the Battle of Bennington. In the summer of 1777, Vermont needed help to defend itself against the British. Stark and his New Hampshire troops came to Vermont's aid at a battle near Bennington, Vermont, where they defeated the British.

Q: Why do Stark's contributions to New Hampshire history matter to us today?

A: Stark's qualities as a stubborn and determined leader inspired the men who fought with him to make the colonies independent. In 1809, those who served under him at Bennington invited him to a special reunion. At 81 years old and in poor health, Stark was unable to attend the reunion and sent a letter to be read to his former soldiers. At the end of the letter he wrote "Live free or die, death is not the greatest of evils." Stark's words to his former soldiers became famous because they seemed to capture the spirit of the people of New Hampshire. In 1945 "Live Free or Die" officially became New Hampshire's state motto.