

1776 lives again

By MICHAEL J. HALL
 And MARC MORGENSTERN
 Staff Writers

WASHINGTON CROSSING — The only ice in sight was caked along the shoreline yesterday, as once again — 200 years later — the little boats bobbed across the Delaware, the tall, proud, blue-tuniced general in command.

St. John Terrell had played the role of General George Washington before — 23 times — but yesterday was special, the 200th anniversary of the original Christmas crossing which helped turn the tide of the Revolution.

TERRELL STEPPED OFF the first boat like a conquering hero, greeted on his arrival this year by a phalanx of television cameramen and photographers and

calls of "Give 'em Hell, George" from the crowds jamming the New Jersey shore.

Two hundred years before it had been different. The Continental Army crossed at night, the river choked with ice, the temperature below freezing, and the blowing snow biting into the faces of the haggard soldiers of 1776.

Yesterday, the more than 20,000 who watched the crossing from both sides of the Delaware and lined the bridge between the two shores were treated to a hazy Christmas, with temperatures in the low 40s.

IT TOOK EACH of the four 40 foot-long Durham boats about 10 minutes to make the trip from Pennsylvania to New Jersey, fighting a swift current.

Each boat made two trips, crammed to the gunwales with men in uniforms of the Revolutionary War, regular soldiers in blue with red trim, others in the greens

and whites of 18th century militiamen.

Many of the men, plus several hundred who joined those in the boats when they arrived on the Jersey side, will participate in today's march to Trenton and will reenact the First Battle of Trenton, beginning at 8 a.m. at the crossing site.

The crossing itself was only a small portion of the day's activities on both sides of the river. The rest was devoted to pomp and military ceremony, cannons and muskets roaring in salute.

ON THE PENNSYLVANIA shore, ceremonies began with Terrell and the men playing General Washington's staff assembling at 2 p.m. at the Old Ferry Inn, followed by a slow flag-lowering ceremony and the sound of military bugles.

The muskets roared, the strains of "Taps" were sounded to honor the dead, and Terrell and his staff moved slowly to the boats at the river bank.

Fifteen minutes later, he was ashore in New Jersey — albeit at a site 200 feet from the roped-off area where he was supposed to land — making his way through the jam of spectators to Johnson's ferry house, where pomp and ceremony resumed, as boats continued to play back and forth across the river.

Terrell was greeted by Gov. Brendan T. Byrne, who had arrived earlier, in time to review the assembled Continental troops. Both men made short speeches reminding the crowd of the significance of the original crossing to the new nation's hopes for survival.

"It symbolizes the need to keep up the fight for freedom everyday," said Byrne after handing Terrell a commission as an honorary colonel in the New Jersey State militia.

ONCE TERRELL'S speech was finished, so was his part in the ceremonies which followed later in the afternoon and which will continue for the next nine days.

The state Bicentennial Commission, in an effort to have its battle reenactments glorify the entire army instead of the personalities, has ruled out anyone playing the "role" of an actual historic figure during the coming reenactments.

H. David Earling, the commission's project officer for the "Festival of the Ten Crucial Days" military events, will "command" the Continental Army in its battles today and January 2nd and 3rd, but he will not be pretending to be any specific general.

Earling, wearing a sword originally worn by a Hessian officer at the Battle of Trenton, was one of the last to cross in the boats, and once he stepped on shore he busied himself forming up the troops, calling out "column left" and "present arms" with a command cadence of long practice.

LATER, AS HE marched at the head of a column of about 400 men from the crossing site to Sullivan's Grove in Washington Crossing State Park, he turned to joke to a reporter that, "St. John Terrell's back on the Pennsylvania side and now New Jersey is safe."

Earlier in the afternoon, as he was awaiting the first boat to finish its crossing, Gov. Byrne had reviewed the detachments waiting on the Jersey shore, stopping to talk with several of the soldiers.

Trying out a drum, to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," Byrne told the assembled men, "When those British come, I want you men to get out and fight."

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The shadows of midafternoon and the ripple of the current combine to make this perhaps one of the more authentic views of Washington's Christmas night crossing.

Staff photos by Herman Laesker, Greg Gendall and Cathy Lane. Aerial photo courtesy of Cherokee Air Service, Robbinsville Airport. Ed Eget, pilot.



Oars aloft, St. John Terrell prepares to embark on his 24th symbolic crossing of the Delaware River.



General Washington (St. John Terrell) lends a helping hand to aide Walter Powell before the two cross the Delaware.

'Something so historic'

Part of big show: people

By MARC MORGENSTERN
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WASHINGTON CROSSING — Mrs. Harry Kates watched with her dog. Seven-year-old Peter Zotos studied the ships through the Super Army Spy Scope that Santa left under his tree. Bob Bogvoki sold "Crossing Pendants."

They were some of the people that climbed trees, chartered helicopters, paddled kayaks and braved 20,000 other people to see Washington cross the Delaware again.

It had all been done before 24 times — once during a midnight blizzard in 1776 and 23 times in the light of day since 1953. But this time was different.

TV cameras whirled. Instamatics clicked. This was THE bicentennial event of bicentennial events. This, like the original, was history.

"It was something so historic that there was no way I was going to miss it," said Mick Cornforth of Langhorne.

MONDAY, he goes back to his bread route. But yesterday, wearing his Pepperidge Farms jacket, he smiled widely to the TV cameras that swept the crowd.

The smiles of the reenactment troops, decked out in cockades and tunics the same shades as the spectators' parkas, were more nervous than wide.

There were those boats to worry about, the muskets that misfire with the least bit of dampness, those heavy oars.

In their minds was the message from their General Washington, St. John Terrell. "If we shamefully fail we shall be infamous to the whole world."

When Washington performed the original exhibition, he didn't have the television networks, the wire service photographers and a presidential-sized pool to worry about.

But this time, it took Cronkite's constitution to put down your left foot in time when a cameraman, soundman and reporter lugged equipment two feet ahead.

Even the buglers cracked with the prime-time willies. And Terrell admitted, "It's an anachronism."

Still the performance went off without a hitch: the boats pushing off, coursing a lazy circle and then navigating to the other shore through a maze of motor launches.

THE ONLY indignity came at the end of the ride when the troops had to wade ashore on the Jersey side of the river and get their shoes and leggings wet.

The trip finished, the crowd applauded. Everyone except a Bellmawr kindergarten teacher named Jean Parks, who complained bitterly that she and her "Yankee Poodle History Pup" were not allowed to cross with the troops.

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Near memorial on Pennsylvania side, General George Washington gives a pep talk to his troops prior to leading them across the Delaware into New Jersey and victory at Trenton.



Staff photo by Cathy Lane

Teacher Jean Parks thought her stuffed Yankee Poodle History Pup should have been a passenger with Washington.