



“Pure Son of Liberty”



Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial

Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the American Revolution

Polish-born Thaddeus Kosciuszko was a distinguished military man who traveled across Europe to the Americas to fight for independence. He served in the American Revolution continuously from 1776 to the war’s end in 1783 and operated not only as far north as Ticonderoga, Saratoga, and West Point, but became the Chief Engineer with the Southern Department of the Continental Army. Kosciuszko earned praise and thanks for his courageous war efforts and dedication to freedom from men like George Washington, Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, and Thomas Jefferson. A close friend, Thomas Jefferson, once wrote that Kosciuszko was “as pure a son of liberty, as I have ever known, and of that liberty which is to go to all, and not the few or rich alone.” Considered a contemporary hero of the American Revolution, Kosciuszko’s role is nearly forgotten in modern times. Kosciuszko’s skills and abilities used in America – and Ninety Six – mark him as a man to remember.

Freedom Fighter

Kosciuszko is acclaimed across the world as a courageous freedom fighter. Armed with a personal commitment to liberty, Kosciuszko left turmoil-ridden Poland. It was the “shot heard round the world” at Lexington and Concord that inspired him to join the cause for American independence. He arrived in Philadelphia in August 1776 and Kosciuszko offered his services to the Continental Congress. On October 18, 1776, Congress, “Resolved, that Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Esq., be appointed an engineer in the service of the United States... and the rank of colonel.”

Gentleman of Science and Merit

Kosciuszko was well-educated in military science completing schooling in Warsaw and Paris. George Washington said of Kosciuszko, he “is a gentleman of science and merit.” It was Kosciuszko’s classical warfare training that assisted him in his duties as chief engineer. Throughout the Revolution, Kosciuszko designed fortifications of strategic posts in the Northern and Southern Capaigns. He also directed the Siege of Ninety Six under General Nathanael Greene.

A Hero of Two Worlds

Kosciuszko was a distinctive soldier of the American Revolution. He didn’t seek fame or fortune. He came because of his personal commitment to freedom. He made a name for himself at places like Fort Ticonderoga, Saratoga, West Point, and Ninety Six. Kosciuszko eventually returned to his homeland in 1784– hoping to secure independence for Poland. He took with him ideals of freedom and liberty he longed his native country to experience. His involvement in the American Revolution became the foundation of his efforts in Poland.

While fighting for Polish independence, Kosciuszko was considered the hero of the 1794 Insurrection. Later he was wounded and taken prisoner. After his release, Kosciuszko returned to America in 1797. When Kosciuszko arrived in Philadelphia, he received a hero’s welcome. Kosciuszko was admired for his kindness, understanding and for his technical knowledge. Unfortunately, Kosciuszko, a dedicated champion of the poor and oppressed, never saw Poland achieve freedom.

He spent the last years of his life in Switzerland dying on October 15, 1817. He is buried among the Polish Kings, in Krakow, Poland. Kosciuszko’s memory has been kept alive – not truly forgotten – in the United States and Poland. There are many monuments dedicated to and towns named after Kosciuszko in America. See if you can discover some!

Left: Kosciuszko Statue in Philadelphia.

Right: Poland postage stamp (1938). Picturing Kosciuszko with saber on left, Thomas Paine in center, George Washington with flag. Also U.S. stamp (1933) of Kosciuszko Statue.





Mastermind behind the Siege of Ninety Six

Thaddeus Kosciuszko at Ninety Six by Robert Windsor Wilson



Thaddeus Kosciuszko at Ninety Six

When you think of Ninety Six, what names come to mind? Many probably think Nathanael Greene, Henry Lee, and Andrew Pickens but one name you may not hear often is Thaddeus Kosciuszko.

When General Nathanael Greene assumed command of the Southern Army, Kosciuszko was there to help. Kosciuszko was Greene's Chief Engineer who some consider the mastermind behind the Siege of Ninety Six. It didn't take long for Kosciuszko to become an important and faithful collaborator with Greene during the Southern Campaign.

"KOS CHOOS KO" might be hard to pronounce but he was well-known for his engineering skills and is commemorated across the world today.

Securing Ninety Six

As the chief engineer of the Southern Department of the Continental Army, Kosciuszko traveled with General Nathanael Greene's army. He scouted rivers and suitable areas to set up camps, built flat-bottomed boats, and constructed fortifications across the south. The American troops were successful in eliminating British outposts in Georgia and the Carolinas. Greene was ready to attack one of the last British strongholds – Ninety Six. During the siege of Ninety Six, Kosciuszko assisted Greene in scouting the enemy position. It appeared that the British position was strong. Kosciuszko recommended conducting the siege against the strongest component of the British defenses – the Star Fort. The Star Fort acted as the "command center" for fortified Ninety Six. Taking control of the heart, would force the weaker components to fall.

Soft Stone

Throughout the 28-day siege, Kosciuszko ordered construction of artillery batteries, saps, and parallels. Saps or approach trenches were zig-zag trenches that advanced towards the Star Fort and connected the parallels. Parallels were trenches that were parallel to the defenses. At Ninety Six, three parallels were constructed. Each parallel advanced the patriots closer and closer to the enemy garrisoned inside the Star Fort. For several weeks sappers began digging the trenches. The work went slowly because of the red clay. Kosciuszko described it as "soft stone." By mid-June, three parallel trenches were complete.

Kosciuszko Mine

Construction of a mine began and it was crucial to the success of the siege and was the brainchild of Kosciuszko. The mine would consist of two galleries of branches that forked from the mine shaft. The tunnels would advance towards the Star Fort. After reaching underneath the star fort walls, a chamber would be excavated in each gallery and a charge of explosives placed inside. Then, a fuse filled with black powder would run from the charge through the tunnels. The chambers would be tightly sealed. When ready, the charges would be detonated and the explosion would burst up and outward leaving a large hole in the walls of the Star Fort. This would destroy anything in the path of the explosion and create a diversion for Greene's soldiers to storm the fort.

One evening, the British command sent two small parties to scout the American lines. The scouts discovered the opening to the mine and passage. Several patriot soldiers were bayoneted. Attempting to escape the fray, Kosciuszko received a superficial wound to the buttocks. Kosciuszko didn't make note of his wound, however, a British observer satirically wrote, "never did luckless wit receive a more inglorious wound, upon any occasion, than Count Kosciuszko did on this – it was in that part which Hudibras has constituted the seat of honor, and was given just as this engineer was examining the mine which he had projected." Rather ironically, archeologists excavated a bayonet blade in the same area near where Kosciuszko was injured. The siege was lifted before the mine was completed.

Mastermind or Blunder?

Some consider Kosciuszko to be the mastermind behind the siege of Ninety Six. Others believe that Kosciuszko's design cost the patriots a victory at Ninety Six. Henry Lee criticized Kosciuszko's efforts at Ninety Six. Lee believed that Kosciuszko ignored the importance of the enemy's access to the water supply and focusing attention on the Star Fort cost the patriots a clear-cut victory. However, Greene weighed the options. It was assumed that each fortification had a well inside, so cutting the water supply wouldn't have been very effective. Additionally, without more troops and supplies, efforts needed to be focused on the command center. General Greene praised Kosciuszko stating, "The General presents his thanks to Colonel Kosciuszko chief engineer for his assiduity, perseverance and indefatigable exertions in planning and prosecuting the approaches which were judiciously designed and would have infallible gained success if time had admitted of their being completed." Take a tour of the park. What do you think? Was Kosciuszko a mastermind or did he blunder?