

The following report has been modified in accordance with the **Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act (AHPA)**. Certain details and images have been removed to protect the locations of archaeological resources for their future preservation.

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Abstract

During the American Revolution Patriots and Tories alike knew the Americans could not win the war without foreign aid. In 1776 Benjamin Franklin had been sent to France to negotiate a mutual defense treaty. In February 1778, the treaty was signed and Admiral d'Estaing and the Toulon fleet were dispatched to help the Patriot's. Plans were made for a campaign – comprised of 10,000 Americans under the command of Major General John Sullivan along with d'Estaing's squadron and 4,000 French troops - to retake Newport, Rhode Island, a significant port held by the British since 1776. It was the first joint military operation of the newly formed alliance.

Just as the allies took action, circumstances changed and a sudden and violent storm hit the area. The hurricane battered and badly damaged the French fleet, which had left Newport Harbor in pursuit of the British, causing d'Estaing to insist on retreating to Boston for repairs. Positioned initially at the top of the Aquidneck Island, following the storm, the Americans had marched to Middletown where both sides became entrenched in the Siege of Newport, cannonading one another for several days from fortified positions on opposing hills. In the wake of the French retreat, Sullivan chose to push on without help. Mired in with swampy terrain as a result of the storm, and anticipating a British landing, Sullivan pulled back to Portsmouth. On August 29 the two sides engaged in intense combat in the Battle of Rhode Island at the end of which Sullivan was able to successfully withdraw his forces.

In the end, both sides sought to claim victory. The British boasted of a successful defense and the Americans stressed their safe, orderly, withdrawal from the island. In reality, Sullivan was furious with the French, blaming d'Estaing for ruining an engagement that could have ended the war. This seriously strained on the Americans' relationship with their new ally, one Washington had to smooth over. However, the French were not solely responsible for the loss. This study delves into the more technical, often forgotten, aspects of the conflict. It pairs the historical record with scientific analysis of the artillery, fortifications, geography and unforeseen circumstances that had an impact on the outcome of the battle. In the end, although Sullivan wanted to lay blame on the French, there were many other elements that worked against the Americans in this campaign.

While much of the original earthen defense-works used during the Siege have been lost to progress, there are a small number of sites that still exist. This study also covers what sites remain, their condition and what could be done to preserve and commemorate these significant locations.