

## This Day in History... October 15, 1817

### Death of General Thaddeus Kosciuszko

On October 15, 1817, Polish-Lithuanian General Thaddeus Kosciuszko died in Solothurn, Switzerland.

Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko was born in early February 1746 (sources generally say February 4 or 12), near Kosów, Lithuania (present-day Kosava, Belarus). The youngest son of a Polish-Lithuanian army officer, Kosciuszko came from a family with noble ancestry.

After his father's death, Kosciuszko joined Poland's Corps of Cadets in 1765 where he studied military tactics and liberal arts. He stayed as a student instructor after graduating and reached the rank of captain. Then in 1769, he traveled to France to study at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. While in Paris, he also audited lectures at the military academies.

After briefly returning home, Kosciuszko eventually made his way back to Paris, where he learned about the American Revolution. He strongly supported their cause and set sail for America in June 1776.



*Declaration of Independence stamps from the Bicentennial Series*

In August 1776, Kosciuszko was officially assigned to the Continental Army. Having gained significant engineering knowledge during his studies, Kosciuszko was tasked with building fortifications at Fort Mifflin in New Jersey, to protect the Delaware River from a British attack. The following year, he joined the Northern Army and reviewed the defenses of Fort Mifflin. His suggestions for improvements went unanswered, and the British ended up attacking just as he'd predicted. Kosciuszko was then tasked with delaying the enemy, which he did by felling trees, damming streams, and destroying bridges to slow the British and give the Americans time to withdraw.



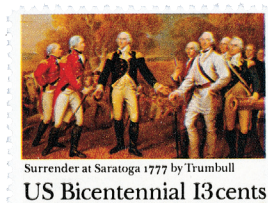
*5¢ Jefferson from the first series of perforated US stamps*

Kosciuszko Uprising to free Poland and Lithuania from Russian oppression in 1794. He was eventually captured but later pardoned. Kosciuszko returned to America. He spent time with Thomas Jefferson, and wrote a will leaving his American assets to the education and freedom of US slaves (though this was never carried out as he intended). He later went back to Europe and died in Switzerland on October 15, 1817.



*Stamp issued on the 150th anniversary of Kosciuszko's American citizenship.*

Shortly after arriving in Pennsylvania, Kosciuszko read Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. He was so moved by it, because it stood for everything he believed, he wanted to meet the author. A few months later, the two men met in Virginia and spent the day discussing philosophy and other shared beliefs. They soon became close friends, with Kosciuszko enjoying several prolonged visits to Jefferson's home at Monticello. Jefferson once called Kosciuszko "as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known."



*Stamp pictures the British surrender at Saratoga.*

After that success, Horatio Gates tasked Kosciuszko with finding the most defensible position for the Battle of Saratoga, which he found at Bemis Heights. Kosciuszko's strong defenses there helped the Continental Army claim victory and force the British surrender at Saratoga. In March 1778, Kosciuszko traveled to West Point, where he would spend two years improving the fortifications and defenses, and the results were seen as innovative.

After that, Kosciuszko asked for a combat position and was granted it, though he would continue to provide engineering expertise. He fought at the Second Battle of Camden, participated in the Siege of the Star Fort, and commanded troops at the last armed action of the war at James Island.

After the war ended, Kosciuszko went back to Poland where he was commissioned in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Army. Inspired by the American Revolution, he launched the

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After briefly returning home, Kosciuszko eventually made his way back to Paris, where he learned about the American Revolution. He strongly supported their cause and set sail for America in June 1776.

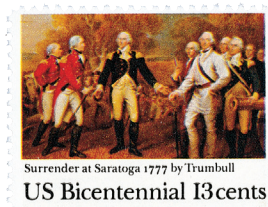
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After that, Kosciuszko asked for a combat position and was granted it, though he would continue to provide engineering expertise. He fought at the Second Battle of Camden, participated in the Siege of Fort Mifflin, and commanded troops at the last armed action of the war at Red Bank.

After the war ended, Kosciuszko went back to Poland where he was commissioned in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Army. Inspired by the American Revolution, he launched the Kosciuszko Uprising to free Poland and Lithuania from Russian oppression in 1794. He was eventually captured but later pardoned. Kosciuszko returned to America. He spent time with Thomas Jefferson, and wrote a will leaving his American assets to the education and freedom of US slaves (though this was never carried out as he intended). He later went back to Europe and died in Switzerland on October 15, 1817.