

## Nathan Hale

Few people in history have become as well-known despite the uncertainty of whether they succeeded in their mission. However, when Nathan Hale was captured by the British for espionage, that is exactly what happened.

Nathan Hale was born into a prominent family in Coventry, Connecticut. Although little is known about his early childhood, he attended Yale at age fourteen and befriended future Culper Ring leader Benjamin Tallmadge. When he graduated with honors, he decided to settle for a simple life and became a school teacher in Connecticut.

In 1775, when the Revolutionary War began, Hale joined a militia unit but was inactive, likely due to his active contract as a schoolteacher. Later that year, Benjamin Tallmadge personally sent a letter to Hale convincing him to accept his post as first lieutenant of the 7th Connecticut Regiment. At the very same time, Hale also became a member of Knowlton's Rangers, which was the first intelligence agency in the U.S.

In September 1776, Hale was defending in the Battle of Long Island. The battle ended in crushing defeat for the Continental Army, and the Americans were looking for any advantage they could get. Knowlton gathered his Rangers and proposed staying behind in New York as spies, working in the occupied area. All of Hale's peers in the Rangers were willing to die for their country, but they would not do so in a manner that would be considered dishonorable, such as espionage. In that time, spies were considered illegal combatants which was an offense that was commonly punishable by death, as well as the disgrace of committing such an act.

Nevertheless, Hale, without regard to his status, accepted the mission and saw it as a way he could make an impact in the war.

Hale had decided to use his real name as a spy and disguised himself as a man looking to be a teacher. Despite his tactics, he was apprehended by the British in less than a week, likely either due to a loyalist relative or by a counter-intelligence scheme. Little is known about the success of his mission, but he likely drew a map marking British fortifications and military units, yet it is unclear if this was used or even delivered to American headquarters.

On September 22, 1776, Nathan Hale was brought to the gallows to be executed. Although there are no official military records of his last words, several British officers have written down personal notes of Hale's behavior during the execution. An account from British officer, Frederick MacKensie reports that: "He behaved with great composure and resolution, saying he thought it the duty of every good Officer, to obey any orders given him by his Commander-in-Chief; and desired the Spectators to be at all times prepared to meet death in whatever shape it might appear" (Seymour, 1941, p.292).

Hale's most famous line "I only regret, that I have but one life to lose for my country,"(Seymour, 1941, p.310). is of questionable historical accuracy as it originates from an account of fellow American, William Hull, who was not present at the execution. Even with this in mind, Hale's final words are debatably the most famous historical aspect of his life. The imagery of a well-educated, formal, and polite man giving inspiring last words to his countrymen brought fervor for the rebels in America as well as resentment for the British for executing someone so noble. The words themselves allude to a play, "Cato, a Tragedy," which is also a source of the famous rallying cry "Give me liberty or give me death" and was a major influence of the war overall.

Hale is also renowned for being among the first spies of the United States, as well as being one of the early executions dealt out by the British. His impact on the CIA is evident, with a statue of his likeness being displayed at CIA headquarters, and the CIA having an article displaying details

about his life. The piece depicts Hale, being marched off to be martyred, with his hands and feet bound, with a purposeful expression and eyes off to the horizon. The statue captures the impact of Hale, a young man who should have his life ahead of him, who is called to action and loses everything but his dignity and patriotism. To this day the CIA's agents place either seventy-six cents, representing the year of his execution, or a face-up quarter in front of the statue as a part of a superstition for good luck.

Nathan Hale's impact can be seen today as a representation of all the men and women who sacrificed their lives to a failed mission. Sometimes as a country, we forget that a large portion of people who have given their lives in service to this country did so in aid to a lost cause. These men and women gave their lives to a cause not for the glory of success, but to a bitter sacrifice in an operation, that in hindsight, we would have been better off without. However, these veterans deserve to be decorated despite this, and Nathan Hale embodies this sentiment perfectly. He is not widely influential because of his impact on the war but for his sacrifice and his impact on the other men and women who strive to make this country as exceptional as it is today.

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