

RANGER *in* TIME

Night of Soldiers and Spies



KATE MESSNER

illustrated by
KELLEY MCMORRIS

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Chapter 1



NO LIGHTS, NO SOUND

Isaac Pope held the flat-bottomed boat steady while soldiers waded into the river and loaded supplies.

“Quickly!” an officer whispered through the pounding rain. “We must have every man across before dawn!”

Isaac nodded but didn’t answer aloud. No lights. No sound. That was the order. This mission had to be silent and secret. Anything else would mean disaster.

The boat sank lower in the water until Isaac signaled that it was full. He and the other

sailors of the Fourteenth Continental Regiment used poles to push off from shore. It was their second trip of the night.

Their task felt impossible: Ferry nine thousand troops across the mile-long stretch of river between Long Island and New York. Horses and supplies had to be moved, too. All before the sun came up and British troops realized the American Rebels were fleeing. Anyone left behind would be taken prisoner.

For two days, General George Washington's Continental Army had battled British soldiers in the rain. But then the Rebels found themselves surrounded. All day, British troops had ventured closer, digging ditches so they could advance without being exposed to gunfire. In another day, they'd be within musket range, and Washington's army would have to surrender. The revolution would be over almost as



soon as it began. Crossing the East River in darkness was their only hope.

Isaac pulled harder on his oar. His head had been pounding all day. His muscles were aching even before he'd started rowing. Now they burned with every stroke.

But if anyone could get this job done, it was the men of the Fourteenth Continental Regiment. Most had been sailors and fishermen together in Marblehead, Massachusetts, before they signed up for the Continental Army. When the British had closed the Grand Banks to fishing, Isaac and the other men were furious. How would they provide for their families? That was when many of Marblehead's fishermen made the decision to join the Patriot cause and fight for independence from Great Britain.

The commander of their regiment was Colonel John Glover, who took pride in his

fishermen's determination and bravery. They had faced long journeys at sea together. They had weathered the wild storms of the Grand Banks. Now General Washington was trusting them with his entire army.

When the New York shore was near and the water shallow enough, the soldiers piled out. Isaac shivered and headed back for another trip. His whole body shook with chills. He was weak with hunger. The driving rain and wind had made it nearly impossible to light fires for cooking. He'd eaten nothing but raw pork and rock-hard biscuits for two days. And there were still so many troops to move.

When Isaac's boat made it back to Brooklyn Heights, the men were fretting and whispering. One of the soldiers leaned in to him. "The tide's turning," he hissed. "Between that and the wind, we can't navigate the sloops anymore. We won't make it."

Isaac looked at his flat-bottomed boat, already filling with anxious men. Without the larger sloops helping to move men, they'd never get everyone across the river before dawn.

Isaac felt dizzy. He imagined the Redcoats waking at first light to find hundreds of Continental soldiers trapped in Brooklyn. Isaac's ears still rang from the gunfire of the day before. He had crouched behind a stone wall, his heart pounding against the musket he'd held tight to his chest.

They'd fought bravely, but how long could they go on? George Washington's troops were beaten down. They'd held out for two days against an army twice their size. But now they were surrounded.

Could they possibly escape before dawn?