



ABOUT A SOLDIER'S LIFE

Colonial Militia

At the beginning of the war, the American colonies had no regular army or navy. Each colony had a militia, a group of citizen-soldiers who were ready to fight for their colony. They could be called up for a few days or a few months. The militiamen were called into action at the beginning of the war and continued to fight throughout the American Revolution.

Continental Army Formed

A regular army was established in 1775. When George Washington took over as commander, he doubted that part-time militias could defeat the powerful British army. Washington worked to build an army made up of disciplined soldiers who had enlisted for several years. It was hard to recruit soldiers for the newly-formed Continental army. Most citizens preferred to serve in local militias and help the army when a battle was near their homes.

Washington's Forces

Washington commanded as many as 15,000 soldiers at a time. Soldiers often went without pay, food, and proper uniforms. Many poorer soldiers stayed in the army because they had been promised free land after the war. Others stayed in because they believed in the Patriot cause and they trusted Washington's leadership.

About 5,000 blacks fought on the Patriot side. Many were slaves who were promised

freedom in exchange for military service. Women also became soldiers, but they had to disguise themselves as men to serve.

France became an ally for the Americans and sent money, soldiers, and ships to help defeat the British. The French ships battled British warships up and down the eastern coast. The Continental navy was established, and its 13 ships fought valiantly against the supreme British navy.

The British Side

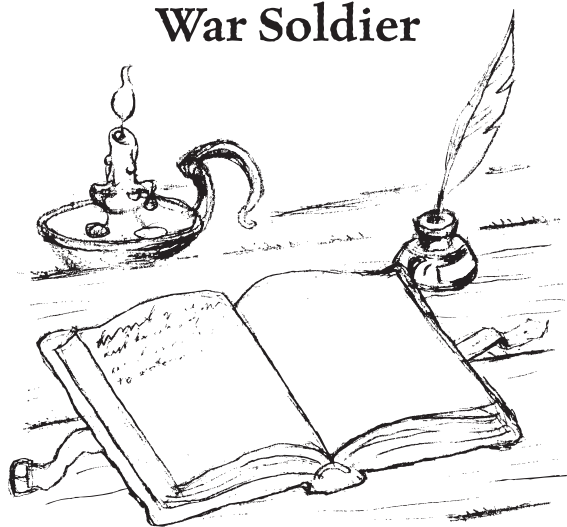
By contrast, the British army was large and well-equipped. At its peak, the British forces in North America numbered 50,000. Loyalists in the colonies fought with the British. Many Native Americans, including the Iroquois and Seneca nations, joined the British side. They believed if the British won, they would keep the Americans off their lands. Thousands of black slaves fought for the British. The British gave them their freedom in return for their help. Soldiers from Germany called Hessians were paid by the British to fight.

Losses on Both Sides

Soldiers on both sides suffered losses. Military deaths numbered about 25,000 for the Americans. The British lost 10,000 soldiers. In the end, it was the small, rag-tag army of colonists who defeated the mighty British.



Diary of a Revolutionary War Soldier



Excerpts from the diary of Joseph Plumb Martin

About Joseph Plumb Martin

Joseph Plumb Martin was born in 1760. He did not attend school, but from an early age, Martin had a gift for writing.

At age fifteen, Martin signed up to serve in the army for six months. Instead, Martin ended up serving seven long years. He kept a diary of his experiences the entire time. The young soldier saw action in the Battles of Brooklyn, White Plains, Germantown, Monmouth, and Fort Mifflin. He also spent a winter at Valley Forge and was present when the British army surrendered at Yorktown.

Long after the war ended, Martin published his diary entitled *Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*. Historians say that Martin's diary was the most complete firsthand account of life for a Continental soldier.

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This excerpt is from Martin's description of the Battle of Yorktown in 1781, where the Americans and their French allies defeated the British forces.

I do not remember, exactly, the number of days we were employed before we got our batteries in readiness to open upon the enemy, but think it was not more than two or three. The French, who were upon our left, had completed their batteries a few hours before us, but were not allowed to discharge their pieces till the American batteries were ready. Our commanding battery was on the near bank of the (York) river and

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contained ten heavy guns; the next was a bomb battery of three large mortars; and so on through the whole line. The whole number, American and French, was ninety-two cannons, mortars and howitzers. Our flagstaff was in the ten-gun battery, upon the right of the whole. I was in the trenches the day that the batteries were to be opened. All were upon the tiptoe of expectation and impatience to see the signal given to open the whole line of batteries, which was to be the hoisting of the American flag in the ten-gun battery. About noon the much-wished-for signal went up.

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DIARY OF A SOLDIER

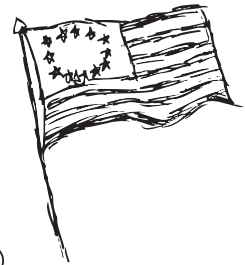


I confess I felt a secret pride swell my heart when I saw the “star-spangled banner” waving majestically in the very faces of our implacable adversaries. It appeared like an omen of success to our enterprise, and so it proved in reality. A simultaneous discharge of all the guns in the line followed, the French troops accompanying it with “Huzza for the Americans!” It was said that the first shell sent from our batteries entered an elegant house formerly owned or occupied by the secretary of state under the British government, and burned directly over a table surrounded by a large party of British officers at dinner, killing and wounding a number of them. This was a warm day to the British.

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This next part of Martin’s account occurs following the storming and taking of a British redoubt, or fort.

All that were in the action of storming the redoubt were exempted from further duty that night. We laid down upon the ground and rested the remainder of the night as well as a constant discharge of grape and canister shot would permit us to do, while those who were on duty for the day completed the second parallel by including the captured redoubts within it.



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We returned to camp early in the morning, all safe and sound, except one of our lieutenants, who had received a slight wound on the top of the shoulder by a musket shot. Seven or eight men belonging to the infantry were killed, and a number wounded. We were on duty in the trenches twenty-four hours, and forty-eight hours in camp. The invalids did the camp duty, and we had nothing else to do but to attend morning and evening roll calls and recreate ourselves as we pleased the rest of the time, till we were called upon to take our turns on duty in the trenches again.

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The greatest inconvenience we felt was the want of good water, there being none near our camp but nasty frog ponds where all the horses in the neighborhood were watered, and we were forced to wade through the water in the skirts of the ponds, thick with mud and filth, to get at water in any wise fit for use, and that full of frogs. All the springs about the country, although they looked well, tasted like copperas water or like water that had been standing in iron or copper vessels.



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Soldier Journal Entry

Directions: Use what you have read and know about the time period to write a journal entry from the perspective of a soldier. Think about key details of their life and include those in your writing. Background information should be woven into your writing to help your reader understand the context. Don't forget to include the date and location during which the soldier is writing.