

LESSON 2

1775

1776

1778

1779

1781

1783

THE CONTINENTAL ARMY

READ ALOUD

In August 1776 Nathan Hale slipped into New York City. George Washington had asked the 21-year-old teacher from Connecticut to spy on the British. In September the British arrested Hale. They found maps he had drawn of British troop positions. On the early morning of September 22, before he was to be hanged, Captain Hale calmly said, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

THE BIG PICTURE

Nathan Hale's words touched Americans. At the time, things had not been going well for George Washington and the Continental Army. The British had hired German **mercenaries**. A mercenary is a soldier paid to fight for another country. In August 1776 these mercenaries helped the British capture Long Island, near New York City.

The British continued to gain territory in New York. In December Washington and his last 3,000 men retreated to Pennsylvania. "I think the game is pretty near up," the tired commander wrote.

Only a few thousand soldiers stood between the British and the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia. How would the Americans keep the British from crushing their revolution?

Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

How did the leadership of George Washington help the Continental Army?

VOCABULARY

mercenary

Loyalist

Patriot

PEOPLE

Nathan Hale

Martha Washington

John Burgoyne

Thaddeus Kosciuszko

Marquis de Lafayette

Friedrich von Steuben

PLACES

Mount Vernon

Trenton

Saratoga

Valley Forge

THE CONTINENTAL ARMY

The winter of 1776 was a sad time for the Continental Army. Winter winds chilled the soldiers to the bone. Food and ammunition were running low. Most soldiers joined the army for just a short time. They expected to leave as soon as their time was up. Thomas Paine wrote:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

Redcoats and Continentals

In contrast, British soldiers in their fancy red uniforms were well-supplied. Britain had the strongest navy in the world and money to hire mercenaries. But the Americans had some strengths. They were defending their homes and knew the land well.

Another advantage the Americans had was that it was slow and very expensive for Britain to send troops and supplies across the Atlantic. As the war dragged on, many British people began to wonder whether the war was worth it.

Patriots and Loyalists

Not all Americans supported the Revolution. About one-third of the colonists were **Loyalists**. These people remained loyal to Britain.



Washington takes command of the Continental Army. (below) The Patriot flag of Rhode Island (left) has 13 stars.



Another third supported the fight for independence. This group of Americans were known as **Patriots**. The remaining third of Americans did not take sides. This group of people included many Quakers, who oppose all wars.



GEORGE WASHINGTON TAKES COMMAND

- ① Another advantage the Patriots had was strong leadership. George Washington had been commander of the Virginia militia during the French and Indian War. Now he faced a much greater responsibility. Who was this man who was getting an untrained army ready to fight a major world power?

The Life of a Leader

- ② George Washington was born in 1732 in Virginia. His parents were landowners, but not wealthy. Washington was good at mathematics, but he never went to college.
- ③ At the age of 16, Washington was a surveyor. A surveyor is a person who measures land. In the middle of the 1700s, many colonists were moving west and needed his services. His work paid well.
- ④ In 1752 he joined the Virginia militia. He became angry when he

learned that soldiers from the colonies were paid less to fight for the British than British soldiers. During the French and Indian War, the British lowered Colonel Washington's rank. They did not want any colonist to rise above captain. Washington left the militia in protest. He returned when the governor gave back his rank.

In 1758, while still a soldier, Washington was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. There he met Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, and joined protests against the British.

In 1759 Washington left military life. That same year he married Martha Custis, a wealthy widow. George and **Martha Washington** moved to **Mount Vernon**, the plantation he owned on the Potomac River in Virginia. Martha

George Washington married Martha Custis in 1759 (left). They went to live on Washington's Virginia plantation, Mount Vernon (below).



Washington supported the Patriots. She helped her husband with paperwork. She also sewed socks and made soup for the soldiers.

Victory in Trenton

Things were going badly for the Continental Army at the end of 1776. Washington wrote, "Such is my situation that if I were to wish the bitterest curse to an enemy on this side of the grave, I should put him in my [place] with my feelings."

Certain of victory, General Howe decided to rest for the winter in New York City. Washington knew the British would not try to advance until spring. So he planned a

surprise attack on the 1,400 enemy troops in **Trenton**, New Jersey. His password was "Victory or Death!" After nightfall on Christmas Day, 1776, Washington and his troops crossed the Delaware River into New Jersey. The next morning, they surprised the enemy, who quickly surrendered. "This is a glorious day for our country," said Washington.

The Continental Army and Slavery

Among the troops with Washington were Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell. They were two of the many African Americans who fought with the Patriots.

Americans had debated in 1775 whether to allow enslaved men to be soldiers. Some thought that enslaved African Americans might rebel if they were given guns. Washington agreed not to allow any more African Americans to join the army.

But in 1776, Washington changed his mind. Britain had won the support of many enslaved people by promising them their freedom.

How could the colonies continue to enslave African Americans when they were willing to fight and die for the freedom of all Americans? In 1780 Pennsylvania adopted a plan for ending slavery. Many northern states followed. In other states, such as Virginia, enslaved men who fought with the Patriots were freed. One Patriot who freed his slaves was George Washington.