

TRUTHS AND FICTIONS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

George Washington - American General (1732-1799):

Despite his limited experience, Congress appointed Washington as Commander.

Throughout his life, Washington possessed physical and moral courage, virtue, honor, and character.

Thomas Jefferson said Washington was the most outstanding horseman of his age.

Washington was a truly unifying figure with a sense of his humanity and who knew his part in history.

Washington's greatest strength; he was a superb judge of men and with a unique capacity to spot talent.

Lacking an effective staff, Washington was often overwhelmed by the pressure of work.

Washington had a keen ability to see things as they were, not simply as he wished they were.

Washington never gave up. He attacked whenever tactically possible, often retreating to fight again, with experience his greatest teacher.

Washington accepted no pay and took no leave throughout the entire war.

Washington remained loyal and supportive of his generals and officers throughout the war.

Although under constant pressure by Congress to fight a more aggressive war, Washington adopted a war of attrition. He realized a more aggressive war could lead to utter disaster and defeat.

Washington showed a shrewd appreciation of strategic realities in handling the war that he pursued with great tenacity, determination, and willpower.

Despite horrendous errors, especially at the start of the war, he always learned from his mistakes with his performance steadily improving month by month.

Washington's unwillingness to "cave in" and give up had a very positive affect on the moral of his army which contributed to eventual victory.

Amazingly, despite his enormous responsibilities, Washington wrote over 900 quite revealing letters during the year 1776, plus hundreds of other letters, orders, and various communications throughout the war.

Washington proved to be a very insightful "political" general who understood that Congress was boss. He therefore made it a practice to keep Congress well informed throughout the war.

Washington enjoyed extraordinary good health throughout the entire war while many others succumbed to disease and sickness.

Staging a tactically brilliant retreat, Washington commented that “ the Finger of God” guided him in his army’s successful escape across the East River to New York Island at the Battle of Brooklyn, thus barely saving his army.

Washington voluntarily relinquished all of his power to Congress at the end of the war. This was an act by a leader virtually unheard of that astounded King George III and other world leaders.

Fictions and Misconceptions about the Revolutionary War:

“Mad King George III” lost the war.

British officers were incompetent.

All Continental soldiers were heroes.

Very few Continental soldiers deserted.

The Hessian soldiers were drunk at the Battle of Trenton.

Washington was a cold, arrogant, and unapproachable “marble man”.

More Truths and Insights about the Revolutionary War:

The first few years of the war was a bitter and constant struggle of bare survival for Continental Army.

Later Washington adopted a strategy of attrition forcing the British to hunt him down which gradually overstretched, frustrated, and exhausted their resources.

During the war, 25,000 Continental troops were killed - 1% of the total Colonial population making the War of Independence the bloodiest war in our entire history, except for the Civil War.

Today, 1% ‘killed in action would be equal to approximately 3 million US military deaths.

Many have asked why, in spite of so many defeats and setbacks, did so many soldiers remain loyal to Washington? The answer may be simple. Washington was considered by many in his army to be the richest man in the Colonies. Accordingly, his officers and men simply felt they could not desert a man who risked literally everything; his great wealth, his family, and his very life to defend his country.

The retrieval of artillery from Fort Ticonderoga was considered one of the greatest feats of warfare. Twenty five year old General Henry Knox transported 60 cannon and mortars over 300 miles in the dead of winter, forcing the British to flee Boston.

The Battle of Brooklyn was a disaster for the Continental Army. Washington was outfought, outflanked, and outgeneraled, resulting in a costly defeat. But the army somehow managed to escape across the East River without a loss of a single soldier. This battle is sometimes called the “Dunkirk of the Revolutionary War.”

The Battle of Fort Mifflin was one of the greatest defeats of war. The decimated Continental Army, had by now dwindled from 20,000 to only 3,000 soldiers. Washington’s remnant army was now forced to flee New York to New Jersey and escape southward to simply survive.

The long war for independence lasted 8.5 years. Except for the Vietnam War, this was the longest war in our history with more soldier's deaths resulting from disease and sickness than from battle wounds.

If today's negative media coverage was there to cover the War for Independence, many contemporaries believe the war would have been lost by the end of the very first year.

The victory at the Battle of Trenton transformed moral in the army and throughout the colonies, eventually leading to the birth of our Nation.

Historian David McCullough, author of book "1776", says "the more you study the Revolutionary War, the more you realize that it could easily have gone the other way. McCullough called the year 1776 "the darkest day in our history."