

Life of a Soldier

Document A

Joseph Plumb Martin was an enlistee at age 15, first joining the Connecticut militia and later Washington's Continental Army.

Almost everyone has heard of the soldiers of the Revolution being tracked by the blood of their feet on the frozen ground. This is literally true; and the thousandth part of their suffering has not, nor ever will be told... a fourth part of the troops had no scrip of any thing but their ragged shirt-flaps to cover their nakedness, and were obliged to remain so long after. I had picked up a few articles of light clothing during the past winter. While among the Pennsylvania farmers, or I should have been in the same predicament...

As to provisions of victuals (foods), I have said a great deal already; but ten times as much might be said and not get to the end of the chapter. When we were engaged in the service we were promised... rations ...But we never received what was allowed us. Often time have I gone one, two, three, and even four days without a morsel, unless the fields or forest might chance to afford enough to prevent absolute starvation.

The poor soldiers had hardships enough to endure, without having to starve; the least that could be done was to give them something to eat.

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Document B

Joseph Wood was an enlistee at age 14, Wood was one of the few survivors of the Battle of Groton Heights (Connecticut) in September 1781

At the time when the fort was taken, there were in the fort as I understood about seventy-five. I made my escape from the fort...but all who did not make their escape were put to death.

When Colonel Ledyard found that he was not able to withstand the attack upon the fort, he opened the gate to surrender. As he did so, the British commander asked, "Who commands this fort?" Colonel Ledyard answered, "I did, but you do now," and presented to the British commander his sword. The British commander took the sword and thrust it through Colonel Ledyard. This I heard and saw. I then leaped the walls and made my escape....

I stayed in New London [Conn.] overnight, and on the next morning I crossed over the river in a ferryboat and went to Fort Griswold. The dead were still lying in and about the fort, and the people were just then coming in to bury the dead..... I did not then look about to ascertain whether I knew any of the dead. I felt much too sorrowful and gloomy to do so then.

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Document C

Eyewitness account of The Chevalier de Pontgibaud, a French Volunteer in the Continental Army. He arrived at Valley Forge in December 1777 and published his observations after the war.

Soon I came in sight of the camp. My imagination had pictured an army with uniforms, the flutter of arms, standards, etc. in short, military pomp of all sorts; Instead of the imposing spectacle I expected, I saw, grouped together standing alone, a few militiamen, poorly clad, and for the most part without any shoes- many of them badly armed, but all well supplied with provisions, and I noticed that tea and sugar formed part of their rations. I did not then know that this was not unusual, and I laughed...Here the soldiers had tea and sugar.

In passing through the camp I also noticed soldiers wearing cotton nightcaps under their hats, and some having for cloaks or greatcoats coarse woolen blankets, exactly like those provided for the patients in our French hospitals. I learned afterwards that these were the officers and generals.

Such, in strict truth, was, at the time I came amongst them, the appearance of this armed mob, the leader of whom was the man who has rendered the name of Washington famous; such were the colonists—unskilled warriors who learned in a few years how to conquer the finest troops that England could send against them. Such also, at the beginning of the War of Independence, was the state of want in the insurgent army, and such was the scarcity of money, and the poverty of that government, now so rich, powerful, and prosperous, that its notes, called Continental paper money, were nearly valueless.

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Document D

A letter from General George Washington to George Clinton, governor of New York
(July 30, 1777–June 30, 1795; July 1, 1801–June 30, 1804)

To Governor George Clinton
Head Quarters, Valley Forge, February 16, 1778

Dear Sir: It is with great reluctance, I trouble you on a subject, which does not fall within your province; but it is a subject that occasions me more distress, than I have felt, since the commencement of the war; and which loudly demands the most zealous exertions of every person of weight and authority, who is interested in the success of our affairs. I mean the present dreadful situation of the army for want of provisions, and the miserable prospects before us, with respect to futurity. It is more alarming than you will probably conceive, for, to form a just idea, it were necessary to be on the spot. For some days past, there has been little less, than a famine in camp. A part of the army has been a week, without any kind of flesh, and the rest for three or four days. Naked and starving as they are, we cannot enough admire the incomparable patience and fidelity of the soldiery, that they have not been ere this excited by their sufferings, to a general mutiny or dispersion. Strong symptoms, however, discontent have appeared in particular instances; and nothing but the most active efforts every where can long avert so shocking a catastrophe.

Life as a Soldier: Think-Tac-Toe

Directions:

1. Choose three activities in a row tic-tac-toe style (across, down, or diagonal). The activity choices must be consecutive squares and include the middle square—the **Big Question**.
2. Draw a line on the row you choose.
3. Complete the activities in any order.

Summarize: From the perspective of a Continental soldier, write a brief letter to the Continental Congress informing them of your conditions.

Hypothesize: Explain how the conditions described in your document could have affected the outcome of the war.

Making inferences: Infer why these were the conditions facing the Continental soldiers.

Using evidence: Select one sentence from the text that best supports your answer to the BIG QUESTION.

BIG QUESTION: What was life like for the Continental soldiers during the Revolutionary War?

Multiple perspectives: From the perspective of a Loyalist, explain why the Continental Army should stop fighting against the British (be sure to use details from your document).

Synthesize: Imagine you are a Continental soldier; write a journal poem using the following format:

I'm feeling _____

I'm thinking _____

I'm wanting _____

I'm fearing _____

I'm hoping _____

Questioning: Write three questions you would ask a fellow soldier before deciding to join the Continental Army.

Visualize: Draw an illustration of a Continental soldier facing these conditions. Annotate the drawing by labeling and describing the most important aspects.