

Military Life

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from Resources from the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute



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By: Teresa Potter

Background Information: When the Declaration was signed in July of 1776, the Revolutionary War had been going on for over a year. American colonists were tired of Great Britain's attempts at bullying and raising taxes and were fighting to defend their country and their freedoms.

Thousands of men joined the Continental Army to fight under General George Washington. Most of the men were from the lower and middle classes, and they joined as army privates. Blacks, both free and enslaved, enlisted in the army.

Although patriotism is what brought most of the men to the Continental army, others joined for a steady income to support the family and still others for adventure.

Officers were usually men from the upper class. Very few men earned a position as officer from rising from the lower ranks. Most upper class fought to keep control of their land and colony and in honor of the cause.

All men who joined usually made a commitment to stay for at least one year until after 1779 when some joined to serve for the duration of the war.

In the army, soldiers were to receive a food ration, clothing, and a pension of \$6.67 per month. Food rations for a typical day would include one pound of beef, salt fish or pork, bread (or flour to make bread), a half pint of beans or peas, and occasionally rice, vegetables or milk. The soldiers were given rum or whiskey to drink. Journals and diaries often indicate that the soldiers did not receive their complete rations and sometimes nothing at all.

Pay and rations were agreed upon by Congress, and Congress was having a difficult time raising the money to support the soldiers. Because of this, the soldiers were not given adequate food or clothing. Their clothing was often torn and ragged, and many did not have shoes. Some soldiers reported not eating for days and often resorted to stealing to keep themselves alive.

Even in the army under these circumstances, stealing was a crime and punishable by humiliation and pain. Many times soldiers were whipped by the "cat-a-nine-tails" or be made to run through rows of soldiers while being whipped. Afterwards, the soldier was then forced to continue working. However, in extreme cases, soldiers were executed.

The camp surgeon was an important duty. The surgeon was needed when soldiers were wounded, punished or sick. Medical supplies were lacking and sometimes soldiers took advantage of the shortage of trained doctors to secure a job as a surgeon. Nine out of ten men in the army died from sickness and disease.

Colonial militia units were also called by Congress to help during the Revolutionary War in emergencies. Militia units were run by colonial governors, but received the same food rations and pay as the Continental soldiers. All able men between the ages of 16 and 60 were required to serve in the militia. Muster or training days were held and men were required to participate, as well as serve in battle. All were under the command of the Continental Army.

Women who traveled with the army were usually enlisted men's or officer's wives. Even Martha Washington spent a good deal of time traveling with her husband during the war. Some women were camp followers who had no income or home. They earned pay and half the rations allotted to the men for nursing the sick and wounded, cooking, mending clothing, supporting soldiers in battle and various other jobs. These women had to find their own shelter and traveled behind the supply wagons. Both men and women suffered many hardships during the War. Below is an account of the conditions at Valley Forge in 1777.

American Minute with Bill Federer
December 19th

Driven into Pennsylvania by the British, it was on this day, December 19, in the freezing winter of 1777 that the Continental Army set up camp at Valley Forge, just 25 miles from British occupied Philadelphia. Lacking food and supplies, soldiers died at the rate of twelve per day. Of 11,000 soldiers, 2,500 died of cold, hunger and disease. A Committee from Congress reported "feet and legs froze till they became black, and it was often necessary to amputate them."

Soldiers were there from every State in the new union, some as young as 12, others as old as 50, and though most were white, some were Black and American Indians.

Quaker farmer Isaac Potts observed General Washington kneeling in prayer in the snow.

Hessian Major Carl Leopold Baurmeister noted that the only thing that kept the American army from disintegrating was their "spirit of liberty."

In a letter written to John Banister, Washington recorded:

"To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lay on, without shoes, by which their marches might be traced by the blood from their feet...and at Christmas taking up their...quarters within a day's march of the enemy...is a mark of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be paralleled.

Even though suffering and hardship was much endured during the American Revolution, people continued to fight for liberty until the British surrendered at York Town on October 19, 1781. Finally, after years of fighting America gained their Independence after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in September, 1783.

From: www.historyisfun.org, "Life of a Private".

Directions: Teach the students how to line up in formation, turn, and march. Demonstrate loading and firing a musket. Use yardsticks, dowel rods or dummy muskets to simulate the manual exercise with your students. Dummy muskets can be ordered from the Cooperman Co.

The Manual Exercise

From: *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States, Part 1.*

- I. Poise---Firelock! Two motions.
1st With your left hand turn the firelock briskly, bringing the lock to the front. At the same instant, seize it with the right hand just below the lock, keeping the piece perpendicular.
2nd With a quick motion, bring up the firelock from the shoulder directly before the face, and seize it with the left hand just above the lock, so that the little finger may rest upon the feather spring, and the thumb lie on the stock; the left hand must be of an equal height with the eyes.
- II. Cock---Firelock! Two motions.
1st Turn the barrel opposite to your face, and place your thumb upon the cock, raising the elbow square at this motion.
2nd Cock the firelock by drawing down your elbow, immediately placing your thumb upon the breech-pin, and the fingers under the guard.
- III. Take Aim! One motion.
Step back about six inches with the right foot, bringing the left toe to the front; at the same time drop the muzzle, and bring up the butt-end of the firelock against your right shoulder; place the left hand forward on the swell of the stock, and the fore-finger of the right hand before the trigger; sinking the muzzle a little below a level, and with the right eye looking along the barrel.
- IV. Fire! One motion.
Pull the trigger briskly, and immediately after bringing up the right foot, come to the priming position, placing the heels even, with the right toe pointing to the right, the lock opposite the right breast, the muzzle directly to the front and as high as the hat, the left hand just forward of the feather-spring, holding the piece firm and steady; and at the same time seize the cock with the fore-finger and thumb of the right hand, the back of the hand turned up.
- V. Half-cock---Firelock! One motion.
Half bend the cock, briskly bringing down the elbow to the butt of the firelock.
- VI. Handle---Cartridge! One motion.
Bring your right hand short round to your pouch, slapping it hard, seize the cartridge, and bring it with a quick motion to your mouth, bite the top off down to

the powder, covering it instantly with your thumb, and bring the hand as low as the chin, with the elbow down.

VII. Prime! One motion.

Shake the powder into the pan, and covering the cartridge again, place the three last fingers behind the hammer, with the elbow up.

VIII. Shut---Pan! Two motions.

1st Shut your pan briskly, bringing down the elbow to the butt of the firelock, holding the cartridge fast in your hands.

2nd Turn the piece nimbly round before you, to the loading position, with the lock to the front, and the muzzle at the height of the chin, bringing the right hand up under the muzzle; both feet being kept fast in this motion.

IX. Charge with Cartridge! Two motions.

1st Turn up your hand and put the cartridge into the muzzle, shaking the powder into the barrel.

2nd Turning the stock a little towards you, place your right hand closed, with a quick and strong motion, upon the butt of the rammer, the thumb upwards, and elbow down.

X. Draw---Rammer! Two motions.

1st Draw your rammer with a quick half out, seizing it instantly at the muzzle backhanded.

2nd Draw it quite out, turn it, and enter it into the muzzle.

XI. Ram down---Cartridge! One motion.

Ram the cartridge well down the barrel, and instantly recovering and seizing the rammer back-handed by the middle, draw it quite out, turn it, and enter it as far as the lower pipe, placing at the same time the edge of the hand on the butt-end of the rammer, with the fingers extended.

XII. Return---Rammer! One motion.

Thrust the rammer home, and instantly bring up the piece with the left hand to the shoulder, seizing it at the same time with the right hand under the cock, keeping the left hand at the swell, and turning the body square to the front.

XIII. Shoulder---Firelock! Two motions.

1st Bring down the left hand, placing it strong upon the butt.

2nd With a quick motion bring the right hand down by your side.

