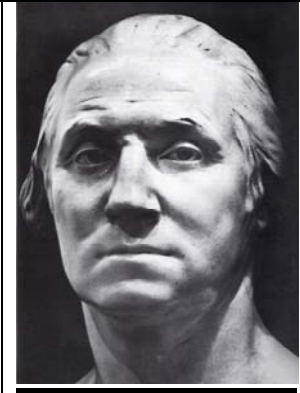




# GEORGE WASHINGTON: GOD'S MAN FOR AMERICA



*J. David Rogers*

## **ACCIDENTAL IMMIGRATION**

Our story begins with young man named John Washington, whose ship sank off the Virginia coast in 1657. John was the son of English clergyman Lawrence Washington, who was rector of Purleigh, in Northamptonshire (about 75 miles northwest of London). Lawrence was a Royalist who quickly fell out of favor when Oliver Cromwell's Parliament overthrew the king in 1656. Lawrence was expunged from his parish on a number of charges (many of which may not have been true) and his son John was forced to leave the home at age 25 by the pinch of poverty. He took the position of second mate on the ketch *Sea Horse of London*, sailing for Virginia on a commercial voyage. After making landfall in the Virginia, the *Sea Horse* stood out to sea for the homeward voyage and ran aground in foul weather and sank off the Virginia capes. Young John was lucky to have survived this peril and decided to make his fortune anew in the Virginia Colony.

A year later John met and married a young woman named Anne Pope, whose father gave him 700 acres of land. Their first son Lawrence was born in 1659 in Virginia. The Washingtons prospered and John received one office or appointment after another, from coroner to Justice of the County Court. Anne died in 1668, and John remarried: first to a twice-wed woman accused of running "a bawdy house"; then to her sister, a three-time widow, who had been accused of being the royal governor's mistress. As we shall see, women were hard to come by in the Colonies, as were long-lived husbands.

John inherited more property from his second wife and in 1674 he and Nicolas Spencer purchased 5000 acres along Little Hunting Creek on the south side of the Potomac River. In 1675 John received an appointment as a Colonel in the Virginia Militia during an Indian War. While serving along side a Maryland unit, a group of hostiles were cornered into a blockhouse. The Indians parleyed for peace under a flag of truce, but were put to death. News of this incident infuriated Lord Berkeley, royal governor of Virginia, who castigated Washington for such conduct, whereupon Washington alleged that it was the Maryland commander who gave the order, not he. Nevertheless, the public embarrassment created by the incident appears to have affected him, and he passed away 1-1/2 years later, at age 46. By this time (1677) John was firmly established as a member of Virginia's landed gentry, and his heirs were off to a respectable start in life.

## **RESPECTABLE PLANTATION OWNERS**

In the Colonies, land ownership was seen as the most secure means of privilege and future wealth, as emigration continued to grow each year. Land represented capital, currency and respect. Up until about 1680, most of the colonial landowners met their manual labor needs through the employment of indentured servants from England. After that date, an increasing portion of the manual labor was

carried out by African slaves. By 1700, most of the tidewater land in coastal Virginia was claimed and being cultivated in some manner or fashion.

John's principal heir was his eldest son Lawrence Washington (the first Lawrence). In keeping with the practice of that day for people of chosen estate, young Lawrence Washington was educated in England. Upon returning to his home he took a greater interest in law than land speculation. He married Mildred Warner (whose father had been speaker of Virginia's House of Burgesses), eventually becoming sheriff, justice and burgess. He died at age 38, leaving his estate to Mildred and his three children. John, his eldest, received the home tract and other lands; his second born, Augustine (George Washington's future father) received about 1100 acres. Little sister Mildred, then an infant, received about 2500 acres. All of this property evolved from the 5000 odd acres patented by the senior John Washington along the south side of the Potomac River.

Few eligible widows of child-bearing age remained available for long in colonial Virginia, and Mildred was no exception. She remarried and moved to England with her 3 children, who were sent to the Appleby School in Westmoreland. They remained enrolled there for four years until Mildred died. At that juncture young Augustine Washington returned to Virginia and lived with a cousin. A blond six-footer, Augustine was noted for his great physical strength and kindly disposition. Like his grandfather John, he was interested in acquiring land. He married Jane Butler, whose dowry with his inheritance set him up with 1,740 acres. On one of these tracts, near the mouth of Popes Creek and the Potomac he constructed a new home and mill. He purchased younger sister Mildred's 2500 acres, known as the "*Little Hunting Creek Tract*".

#### **THE 4<sup>th</sup> GENERATION OF WASHINGTONS**

While Augustine was away on a trip to England his first wife died, leaving three small children: Lawrence, Augustine, Jr., and Jane. In 1731 the senior Augustine remarried a woman named Mary Ball, who came to the union with 400 acres of land near the falls of the Rappahannock, three slaves and 15 head of cattle. She was 23 and known to be an extremely self-willed woman. Mary joined Augustine's household on the bank of Pope's Creek, and at 10 AM on February 22, 1732 gave birth to her first-born, who was christened George some 6 weeks later.

Three years later the Augustine Washingtons moved to the 2500 acre tract on Little Hunting Creek, 40 miles up the Potomac from Pope's Creek. A house site was chosen on a near level bluff where the Potomac sweeps around a broad turn, about 10 miles below the head of navigation (in vicinity of today's Georgetown). Here the river was a mile wide and the Indian village of Piscataway lay across the river. The new home was called Epewasson. The home was 1-1/2 stories high, flanked by cabins for the African-American slaves and a new mill on Dogue Run.

Augustine's daughter from his first marriage, Jane, died in 1735. But, Mary Ball Washington gave birth to George (1732), Betty (1733), Samuel (1734), John Augustine (1736), Charles (1737) and Mildred (1739). Young George's closest companion was John Augustine, whom they called "*Jack*", and whom the future president would describe as "*the companion of my youth*". But, it was George's elder half-brother Lawrence whom he regarded with a mixture of awe and admiration.

Young George Washington thirsted to be schooled in England, as had been all his male forebears, but it was not to be. He was largely self-taught. He acquired a knowledge of arithmetic and penmanship, of which, some record still survives. Most of his training was of a practical nature, gained near the frontier. His favorite subjects appear to have been geography, astronomy, composition and deportment. His penmanship was exceptional, but his training in "the classics" was scant, and a subject about which he was to draw considerable criticism from those more fortunate to have received such.

## INFLUENCE OF LAWRENCE WASHINGTON

The telling event in young George's life was his older brother Lawrence's foreign military service. Upon his return from formal academic training at the Appleby School in England, Lawrence had enlisted a commission as Captain in a Virginia Regiment raised to supplement the British Army in their war with Spain. In the fall of 1740 (when George was an impressionable 8 years old) 400 Virginian soldiers sailed away to join the English naval squadron commanded by the venerable Admiral Edward Vernon, for an assault on Spanish-held Cartagena in the Caribbean. Lawrence wrote eloquent letters home, where he described his admiration for Admiral Vernon and his contempt for Royal Army Brigadier General Thomas Wentworth. Wentworth had little regard for the fighting ability of his colonial troops, so he kept them sequestered to the ships, while he engaged in an assault on the Spanish forces that was thoroughly repulsed (losing 600 men to combat and many more to yellow fever). It was two long years before Lawrence returned home, filled with tales of far-off campaigns that captivated young George.

A year after Lawrence's return (1643) Augustine Washington died, leaving his estate to be divided up between the 8 surviving children and his widow. As the eldest, Lawrence received the Lion's share, 10,000 acres including the Little Hunting Creek land, Epsewasson, 49 slaves and an iron mine. Augustine Jr. received the lands in Westmoreland County, 25 cattle and 4 slaves. Lawrence renamed the estate "Mount Vernon" in honor of Admiral Vernon, under whom he had served in the Caribbean. Young George (only 11 years old) received Ferry Farm, half of a 4,300 acre tract of rather poor land, 10 slaves, 3 lots in newly found Fredericksburg and a share of the other property left to Mary Ball Washington and his younger siblings. But, Augustine's will provided that Mary would administer all the property left to his minor children until they "*came of age*", and in this regard, she proved to be extremely stingy, unwilling to part with any portion of the estate that fell within her purview. To her credit Mary Ball Washington did an admirable job of managing her husband's estate and George did not take possession of Ferry Farm for another 30 years, after his mother had grown weary of managing it!

The passing of Augustine Washington dashed any hopes George retained that he would be schooled in England like his older half-brothers. George sat on Ferry Farm and dreamed of striking out on his own. In this regard he appears to have received considerable counsel and encouragement from Lawrence. At age 14, George requested that he be granted leave to "*go to sea*". His bags were all packed, but at the last possible moment his mother flatly refused him, and her brother living in England concurred, writing that George would be better off "being apprenticed to a tinker than going to sea". In those days a seafaring career for a gentleman required some manner of influence upon the powers that be in the naval service, and his uncle was earnest in admitting "no such connections".

## PATRONAGE OF THE FAIRFAXES

When Lawrence Washington assumed the Mount Vernon estate on Little Hunting Creek in 1643, he married Anne Fairfax, daughter of Colonel William Fairfax, the cousin and agent of Lord Thomas Fairfax, sole owner of the 1.5 million acres of land known as the "Northern Neck of Virginia", between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. With Anne came substantial dowry of 4000 acres and an alliance with the most powerful and influential family in northern Virginia, based in what is now Belvoir, Virginia, a short distance upstream of Mt. Vernon. Lawrence's connections to the Fairfax family were to loom large in the development of George Washington as one of the great personages of history.

The Fairfaxes had come into possession of their land through a grant of King Charles II in 1649. But it wasn't until 1747 that Thomas, the 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Fairfax, actually arrived in the Colonies to take personal charge of his great estate. Lord Fairfax decided to have his land surveyed with the intention of selling farm-size lots in the fertile Shenandoah Valley, across the Piedmont and within the unsettled frontier.

16-year old George Washington was able to accompany young George William Fairfax, the son of Colonel Fairfax and a somewhat timid man seven years older than he. They accompanied a professional surveyor as they crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains in March 1748 and headed into the unsettled lands of the Shenandoah Valley. They spent a month surveying, camping, hunting wild turkeys, cooking over open fires and observing Indian war dances. For a young man with an overbearing mother, the taste of the raw frontier was the galvanizing experience of his young life and it shaped his destiny.

The following year, at age 17, young George obtained his first paying job: assisting a surveyor laying out the new town of Alexandria, Virginia. Following this success, he was appointed official surveyor of Culpepper County in July 1749. Between 1749-51 he made numerous surveys of the northwest frontier of Virginia for Lord Fairfax. He also surveyed the undeveloped lands west of the Allegheny Mountains for The Ohio Company, a consortium formed by his brother Lawrence, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie, some of their Northern Neck neighbors and several influential English businessmen. The consortium was given a grant for 200,000 acres and young George was paid one pound English sterling per day to survey the land. By the spring of 1750, 18-year old George had saved enough to purchase 1,459 acres along Bullskin Creek, a tributary of the Shenandoah River, over the Blue Ridge Mountains.

During this same period George became captivated with the young bride of his wealthy neighbor and camp mate, George William Fairfax. Just after their return from the reconnaissance of the Shenandoah Valley in 1748, George William married Sarah (Sally) Carey, an attractive, vivacious and high-spirited woman two years older than Washington. Though nothing disrespectful ever came from the relationship, letters from Washington to Sally between 1758 and 1798 reveal his admiration and love for her between the time he was 16 and 26 years old. Washington's ability to maintain control, in the most difficult of human circumstances, remains a testament to his exceptional qualities of moral and physical willpower.

### **THE YOUNG ENGINEER**

Young Washington poured himself into his work, and developed his pathfinding and navigating skills on his surveying forays into the untamed western frontier. Thomas Jefferson once described him as "*the best horseman of his age and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback*". By this time George had matured into an adult of imposing physique, standing 6 feet 2 inches tall, with light grey-blue eyes and auburn colored hair. He possessed the largest hands and feet in the area, and local legend says that he could crush walnuts with his bare hands (try it if this sounds easy to you), and throw a spear or ball further than any other man in Virginia.

In September 1751 George made his only trip abroad, to Barbados and Bermuda with Lawrence, who had contracted tuberculosis in the spring of 1749 while serving as a member of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. George accompanied Lawrence until January 1752, when he returned to Virginia and his surveying business. He purchased additional lands adjacent to Bullskin Creek and propositioned Betsy Flauntleroy, the daughter of a wealthy Richmond County planter. But, her father turned him down on account that "he was not suitably positioned in life to deserve her". That would all soon change, but in the interim, Betsy was betrothed to another.

### **INHERITANCE AND A MILITARY CAREER**

Lawrence Washington died in July 1752, leaving 3 lots in Fredericksburg to George. Although Lawrence willed his Mt. Vernon estate to his widow Anne and their daughter, he added a provision that was to profoundly effect American history: that being if George survived Anne, and if Lawrence's daughter "died without issue" (or, without any heirs), then George was to receive Mt. Vernon and its adjacent lands. As was the custom of the era, six months after Lawrence's death his

widow remarried Colonel George Lee in January 1753. Lawrence's only child Sarah Washington died in 1754 and in December of that year her mother Anne offered to lease Mt. Vernon for the balance of her life to George. When she passed away in 1761, he inherited the estate in full.

Among the positions Lawrence held was that of Adjutant General of the Virginia Militia. When George learned that the office of Adjutant was being divided into four districts, he wrote to Lt Governor Dinwiddie to apply for an appointment as adjutant to one of the districts. In December 1752, George was made Adjutant of the Southern District, which carried with it the rank of Major and a salary of 100 pounds per annum. George's connections and work experience for the Ohio Company, of which Dinwiddie was part, undoubtedly set the stage for such an appointment at the tender age of 20, but such were the ways of the untamed and unforgiving frontier. Men willing to take risks were often accorded considerable trust.

In those days the French and the English had a long-standing enmity that evolved into countless wars, between the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and Waterloo in 1814. France and England enjoyed 30 years of peace before again declaring war on one another in 1744, which lasted 4 years. In 1749 French fur traders based out of Quebec crossed into the headwaters of the Ohio Basin and began laying claim to the lands west of the Allegheny Mountains (they were burying lead plates and nailing tin plaques to trees as part of their claim). Word of these claims began to filter back to coastal Virginia, whose territorial claims extended west to the Mississippi River. For the landed gentry, predisposed to land speculation, the nuisance turned serious in 1753 when word of French Forts along the principal rivers of the upper Ohio Basin reached Lt. Governor Dinwiddie, threatening his Ohio Company's claims to these same lands.

In October 1753 Dinwiddie, one of the crown's official overseers in the colonies, received word from King George II to proceed with building English forts on the Ohio River and to send a mission to determine whether the French were intruding on English soil. He was further advised that such emissaries should "*require the French to peaceably depart*", and that if they refused, "*We do strictly command you to drive them out by force of arms*". Hearing of these developments from his friend Colonel Fairfax, who was on the Governor's Council, Major Washington (now 21 years old) volunteered to be the messenger to visit upon the French in the Valley of the Ohio River. Years later, Washington wrote of this: "*It was deemed by some an extraordinary circumstance that so young and inexperienced a person should have been employed on a negotiation with which the subjects of the greatest importance were involved*". But, Dinwiddie would have been hard-pressed to find a better man for the job, because the task entailed great hardships and an acute ability to traverse and navigate a wide expanse of unexplored country, in the dead of winter. It was a difficult journey by anyone's standards.

With the help of Ohio Valley explorer William Gist, Washington made it to the Forks of the Ohio, where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers converge to form the Ohio River, at what is now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There Washington built a small fort, then parlayed with Indians to explore the whereabouts of the nearest French outpost, Fort LeBoeuf, on French Creek near present day Waterford, PA. Washington's party reached Fort LeBoeuf on December 12<sup>th</sup>. Washington presented Governor Dinwiddie's demand for Marquis Duquesne, the French Governor of Canada. The Fort's commander said he would forward the message to his superiors and pen a reply for young Washington to take back to Governor Dinwiddie in Williamsburg. 10 days later Washington was given a sealed envelope with the French response, which Washington did not open, but delivered to Williamsburg. In his response the French commander politely refused to the English request to retire from the region, given his superior strength in numbers. Washington's real mission was that of gathering intelligence on the French dispositions in the region, which he did admirably well.

Washington experienced many hardships in retracing his steps back across the Alleghenies during the winter, it snowing almost the entire time. He and William Gist were ambushed by an Indian guide,

but managed to make it to John Frazier's trading post by New Years Day 1754, and he continued on to report back to the Colonial government in Williamsburg on January 16<sup>th</sup>, after spending a day paying his respects to George and Sally Fairfax at Belvoir, along the way. Washington wrote an official report of his mission in just 24 hours from the "rough minutes he kept on the trip", complete with a detailed map. This was soon published as "*The Journal of Major George Washington*" in the colonies and reprinted in the *London Magazine* in June 1754, an event which placed young Washington in a position of considerable notoriety on both sides of the Atlantic. Washington would make three more trips across the Alleghenies over the course of the next four years, with much less notable results.

#### AT THE CENTER OF AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT

Washington headed west again in April 1754, newly promoted to Lieutenant Colonel of the Virginia Militia and in command of 140 men. A smaller group had been dispatched ahead to build an English fort at the Forks of the Ohio, but had been chased away by a superior French force. Washington cut a road to the Ohio Company's storehouse at the mouth of Redstone Creek on the Monongahela River, about 37 miles upstream of The Forks of the Ohio. They were constructing the first road west of the Allegheny Mountains. Upon hearing of Washington's advance, the superior French force of 800 men sent a diplomatic mission headed by Ensign Joseph de Jumonville with 33 men and an interpreter to find out what the English were doing and ask them to depart. Washington was warned of the French party's approach, and not knowing their intention was simply to parley with him, he assumed them to be an attack party. The French were ambushed and ten Frenchmen, including Jumonville, were killed (Jumonville was actually executed with a hatchet by one of the Indian scouts after having surrendered to Washington).

After the dust died down Washington realized what had occurred and recognized that the superior French forces would hear of what happened and be obliged to respond; preying destruction on his smaller intruding force. Washington's theoretical superior, an elder member of the Virginia House of Burgesses named Colonel Joshua Fry, had died while en route behind the main force. Upon the death of Fry, Lt. Governor Dinwiddie promoted Washington to full Colonelcy. Washington ordered the construction of an emergency stockade around their camp at the Great Meadows and christened it "Fort Necessity". Unfortunately, it lay below the surrounding terrain, a fatal error in military engineering. He then advised Lt Governor Dinwiddie that their force might soon be annihilated by the French, but promised that the Virginians would stand their ground and do their duty, whatever fate pressed upon them.

On the morning of July 3, 1754 Washington's garrison came under a withering fire surrounding all points of their small stockade. Men began dropping everywhere, unable to effectively return the incoming fire, for the attackers were concealed in the woods surrounding the meadows, and the fort was situated below the level of the forest. It was a poor place to build a fort unless attacking troops were slowly advancing in smart orderly rows. But, that wasn't how trappers and Indians fought on the frontier. Several hours into the fire-fight it began raining hard, and the Virginian's powder became useless, so they were obliged to avail themselves to surrender. Unfortunately for Washington, the French commander was Coulon de Villiers, elder brother of the slain Jumonville. All he required of Washington was for him to sign a surrender document, march out of their fort with the honors of war, carry off their wounded, and return to Virginia. Washington was embarrassed to admit that he could not read French, so he signed the surrender document and began the long trip back across the Alleghenies with 70 wounded and the remainder of his battered force.

When Washington returned to Williamsburg he was dealt an even harsher blow. The document he had signed was written in French, a language he did not understand, but every regular English officer would have, French being taught in all the formal schools of England. De Villiers had cleverly used the word "*l'assassinat*" to describe the death of his brother Jumonville, so Washington had signed a

legal document admitting he, on then behalf of England, had murdered a French officer serving as a diplomat, an unlawful act. It was the source of great embarrassment for Lt. Governor Dinwiddie, who was obliged to issue a written criticism of Washington's "*late action with the French*" in which Dinwiddie said Washington "*were by no means to attack the enemy till all of the forces were joined.*" To this local humiliation was added more grave admonitions emanating from London and Paris. The English Ambassador to France, General Lord Ablemarle, declared that "*Washington and many Such may have courage and resolution, but they have no Knowledge or Experience in our Profession: consequently there can be no dependence on them. Officers, & good ones must be sent to Discipline the Militia [colonial forces], and to Lead them on*".

So ended the meteoric rise of one 22-year old colonial Colonel from Virginia. It also dashed any hope Washington had of ever receiving a regular commission in the Royal Army, his major goal in life at that time. On the heels of this fiasco came the mobilization of state militias called by the governors of Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina to combine their forces under the Maryland Governor. This had the effect of breaking the Virginia Regiment into individual companies, commanded by captains. Since Washington would be demoted three ranks, he resigned from the Virginia Militia and again took up residence at Mt. Vernon.

### SEEKING KNOWLEDGE IN THE MILITARY ART

In February 1755 King George II dispatched Major General Edward Braddock to Virginia with two regiments of regulars. Braddock had served 45 years in the Royal Army, 40 of those with the crack Coldstream Guards. He was being charged with removing the offending French presence from the upper Ohio Basin. While Washington could not bring himself to request an appointment of a lower rank than Colonel with Braddock, he did, nevertheless, write to Braddock congratulating him on his arrival and assert that "*I wish for nothing more earnestly than to attain a small degree of knowledge in the military art*". In March 1755 he received a reply from Braddock's aide-de-camp informing him that it was the General's desire to "*join Braddock's entourage*", without official rank. Braddock's staff had been impressed by what they had learned of Washington in Williamsburg, and knew they could benefit from his navigational skills and experience in reaching the Forks of the Ohio. In late March Braddock's force assembled at Alexandria and Washington was offered a brevet captaincy in the English Army, but politely refused, preferring to serve as a volunteer and hoping that if he proved indispensable, something more rewarding might be in the offing (such as a commission in the regular Royal Army).

It was at this juncture that we gain a glimpse of Washington's long suffering under the interminable complaints of his mother, Mary Ball Washington. She unexpectedly appeared in Alexandria from Ferry Farm and announced that she "*was alarmed at the report*" that George planned to accompany Braddock into the field and that she had come to prevent his impending departure. Now 23, this must have been an embarrassing scene for the ambitious military leader, arguing with his mother in a village small enough for every word to be heard and spread with lightning speed. A long argument ensued, she complaining he was neglecting his duty to her, he protesting that it was service to King and Country that called, that he was too much a part of the entire episode with the French in the Ohio Valley to just walk away now. Finally, Washington rode away to join Braddock's force in Frederick, leaving his younger brother Jack in charge at Mt. Vernon. George's mother would continue to be a thorn in his side for the balance of her life, and she would complain bitterly of his lack of attention to her throughout the War of Independence, when he served as Commander in Chief and was obliged to ignore his own family and estate as well. His mother never saw beyond her own selfish desires to appreciate the stature of her son's place in history, and her "*raw connections*" (her mother was illiterate) remained a constant source of parlor room gossip by properly pedigreed English society, throughout Washington's lifetime. She did manage to live long enough to see him inaugurated at the fledgling nation's first president in 1789, and died later that year at the age of 81.

## BRADDOCK'S EXPEDITION TO THE FORKS OF THE OHIO

Washington became a central figure in what became the official prelude to the French & Indian War. On Braddock's Expedition he met a number of influential people that he remained in contact with the remainder of his life, including: British Lieutenant Charles Lee, Captain Horatio Gates and Major Thomas Gage. Gage would subsequently be given command of all British forces in America when the Revolutionary War erupted in 1775. The ambitious Charles Lee became an American general, who was captured by the British in December 1776, repatriated in the spring of 1778, and relieved of his command by Washington for cowardice at the Battle of Monmouth. Horatio Gates also became a leading American general, besting the British at Saratoga, and becoming the only serious challenger to Washington's command during the Revolutionary War. Other notables with whom he forged lifelong relationships included: Daniel Boone, Christopher Gist, Daniel Morgan, Captain Roger Morris, George Croghan, Adam Stephen and Dr. James Craik, who would attend Washington's bedside when he died in December 1799. Stephen also served as an American General in the War of Independence.

Like many Royal Army officers, General Braddock refused the advice of a colonial officer, bluntly informing Washington that when the time came for battle, his regular forces would show the colonials a thing or two about military discipline and deportment. Instead of heeding Washington's advice to dispense with wagons, Braddock set about to pull everything he was accustomed to carrying through the unblazed wilderness. His force was only gaining a few miles a day and soon became badly dispersed over a distance of almost 20 miles! Washington continued advising against using wagons, but Braddock refused his every suggestion. Discouraged, Washington contracted a severe case of dysentery and was obliged to ride in a wagon in the rear of the traveling force. Braddock eventually relented and adopted Washington's suggestion to take an advance force of 1200 men forward without wagons, leaving Washington behind. But, the advance force was badgered by marauding Indians, who delighted in taking scalps, a practice which terrified the British regulars.

Washington regained sufficient strength to rejoin the advancing Braddock on July 8<sup>th</sup>, along the Monongahela River about 12 miles upstream of The Forks of the Ohio. The English force was spread out over a mile-long track and were hoping to ford the Monongahela twice on July 9<sup>th</sup>, while sending Major Gage forward with an advance force to protect the fords from ambush. Around 2:30 PM Gage's troops were ambushed and the terrified redcoats broke ranks and ran in retreat, causing mass confusion. Braddock and the other officers tried to calm the terrified men, but to no avail. The redcoated British made fine targets, especially their mounted officers, all of whom, except for Washington, were either wounded or killed in this engagement. The colonial troops, realizing that their best bet was to get into the woods and fight the French on their own terms, were instead fired upon by their British allies, who seeing them in the brush mistook them for the enemy.

The defeat was one of the worst in British colonial history. Washington played the significant role in saving what was left of the beaten expedition, burying Braddock in the road at night and running wagons over the grave to conceal it (it has never been found). Indians fighting along side the French would later testify that "*Washington was bullet proof*", that they had repeatedly tried to shoot him, but all attempts being unsuccessful. In 1932 a tourist visiting the battlefield area unearthed an indented silver button with the inscription "GW". It had been squarely hit by a musket ball and torn from the wearer's uniform. Historians have concluded that it belonged to Washington. Washington had two horses shot out from under him during the engagement, his hat was shot off, and his coat was pierced by four bullet holes. Of the force of 1,459 men, 914 men and 63 officers had been killed or wounded, and Washington was Braddock's only aide to escape unscathed. The 23-year old Washington was lauded as the real hero of an otherwise disastrous expedition.



## COLONEL WASHINGTON

Upon their return to Virginia Washington learned that he was once again the subject of considerable acclaim. Braddock's own aide-de-camp, Major Orme described him as an example of "*the greatest courage and resolution*". This reversal of fortune was confirmed when Lt Governor Dinwiddie again established the Virginia Regiment and named young Washington as its Colonel. During 1755-56 Washington was once again engaged in the effort to secure Virginia's western frontiers by establishing a chain of far-flung outposts. In May 1756 the English declared war on France and in the colonies this became known as the "French & Indian War", whereupon the French Province of Canada fell to the English. All the while Washington hoped his efforts would secure for him a respectable commission in the regular British Army, but this was never to be. He lacked a suitably influential patron, had little actual experience under command of regular forces, and lacked the 2000 pounds sterling needed to secure a commission of a major. Washington made numerous appeals to the English military leadership in Philadelphia, was always rebuffed. Years later, many English officers assumed this was Washington's motivation for commanding the insurgent colonial forces.

Between August 1757 and April 1758 he again contracted dysentery and a high fever, and for a time was unable to walk or ride his horse. He was forced to convalesce at Mt. Vernon before returning to duty just in time for the last British expedition to the Forks of the Ohio (his 4<sup>th</sup> trip). The English were mounting an all-out three-pronged offensive, one of which was aimed at Fort Duquesne, at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers (in present day Pittsburgh). To Washington's delight, the English had finally decided to recognize the rank precedence of colonial field officers in comparison to regular officers, a first. This meant that Washington, as a Colonel, outranked regular British officers of Lt. Colonel and below. Washington was encouraged by this development, which brought him considerable respect, at least in theory. Of course, regular British officers didn't care for the new policy.

Washington was placed under the command of British Brigadier General John Forbes, leading the expedition to Duquesne. Like Braddock, Forbes declined advice from colonial officers. Forbes and his second in command had a long-standing dispute with Washington that persisted throughout the expedition and was to embitter Washington for many years. Forbes decided to use Philadelphia as a base of operations instead of Alexandria, and began constructing a new road to the Forks of the Ohio. While his men cut the new "*Great Road*" into the Ohio Valley, Forbes contracted an illness to which he would succumb. The British slogged on, Forbes being determined to carry out his orders, no matter the cost. His stubbornness proved worthy when the French became convinced he would not be in a position to strike before winter set in, so the French commander sent most of his men back to Canada for the winter. When the arrival of Forbes numerically superior force appeared imminent in late November 1758, the French destroyed their cannon and evacuated Fort Duquesne, leaving the English to their prize.

So the English expedition succeeded by default. On Christmas morning 1758 Washington viewed the spot where the French fort was being transformed into Fort Pitt. It was a sour note upon which to end the five years of seeking to secure the Forks of the Ohio. There would be no avenging of the disastrous engagements of the past, the war in the west was now concluded. The site of Fort Pitt would prove especially advantageous to the British, who soon discovered coal beds at the base of the cliffs across the Monangahela from the fort. This coal figured prominently in the production of gun powder as well as providing a source of fossil fuel on the extreme frontier, which could be mined and taken back up the Monongahela and over the Alleghenies into the developed colonies.

## MARRIAGE AND LIFE AS A VIRGINIA PLANTER

Washington disappointed his Virginia Regiment by announcing his intention to resign and return to Mt Vernon in early 1759. All 27 officers of the regiment drafted a written appeal asking him to

reconsider, but he was determined to bid his leave. He would eventually receive a grant of 15,000 acres of land in the Ohio Valley as a military bounty for his war service. Even so, he purchased as much land from his fellow officers over the next few years. He returned to Mt Vernon to marry Martha Dandridge Custis, a wealthy young widow, one year his senior. She was by all accounts, one of the wealthiest women in the Tidewater, her marriage contract attesting to an estate in excess of 20,000 pounds and 17,438 acres of land; a startling sum in those days. She had married Daniel Parke Custis, 20 years her senior, when she was 18 (1749), and had borne him 4 children before Mr. Custis passed away in 1757. Only two of the 4 children survived; John Parke (Jacky) Custis was 5 and Martha Parke (Patsy) Custis was 3 when Martha married George. Martha described herself as “a fine healthy girl”, slightly plump, with dark hair, hazel eyes and fine teeth, with a quiet gentle nature and an instinct for getting along with people. George called on her in March 1758 and sent to Philadelphia for a ring in early May, but the Fort Dusquene expedition interrupted any plans of marriage. He continued to correspond with Sally Fairfax, openly stating his affection for her, but recognizing the realities of the situation. Sally’s husband was then in England settling his late Father’s estate. The Fairfaxes moved to England permanently in 1773, two years before the Revolutionary War broke out. Their correspondence continued up through 1798, about a year before Washington died.

George and Martha were married on January 6, 1759, shortly after his return from Fort Pitt. Washington was consistent in describing his marriage as one not based on “enamoured love”, but on friendship. By all accounts, he shared a great deal of intimate communication with Martha and they remained the “best of friends” as few couples ever achieve. She seemed comfortable with their situation, and George provided stability, protection and honor upon their household. Martha never conceived any additional children. Their parenting occurred over two generations, and included many heartfelt tragedies (discussed later).

Patsy Custis was discovered to be epileptic at age 12 when she cried and fell from a horse. She was then treated as a quasi-invalid and in June 1773 was suddenly stricken with a fatal seizure and died at the tender age of 17. The Washingtons provided a live-in tutor for young Jacky Custis between the ages of 7 and 13, then sent him to a private school run by the Reverend Jonathan Boucher, who complained to Washington of the lad’s laziness and propensity to the opposite sex. In 1773 Jack suddenly announced his engagement to Nellie Calvert, the daughter of an illegitimate son of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Baltimore. This was not taken kindly, and George wrote to Nellie’s father informing him that Jack should complete college before getting married, and George hurried his step son off to King’s College (later renamed Columbia University) in far-away New York City. While in New York City, George called upon his old acquaintance Thomas Gage, now serving as commander-in-chief of the British Army in North America, with whom he had served on General Braddock’s staff almost 20 years earlier. Jacky cut a wide swath at King’s College, married at 19, and spent the next seven years as a wealthy idler. He died of “camp fever” in 1781 shortly after the Battle of Yorktown, where he was serving his step father as an aide.

## **RECALLED TO DUTY**

In addition to his surveying, military and gentleman planter careers, Washington also dabbled in politics. He was first elected to Virginia’s House of Burgesses in 1758, while stationed at Fort Cumberland on the frontier. He continued to serve in the House of Burgesses and was one of the Virginia representatives to the First Continental Congress of 1774 at Carpenter’s Hall in Philadelphia. That Washington had some inkling of what might occur might be revealed in the fact that he wore his old uniform, that of a Colonel in the Virginia Militia, to the Congress. He was the only delegate in 1774 or 1775 thereby marked as a former “military man”, and most everyone in the Colonies was familiar with his exploits in the French & Indian War.

At the Second Continental Congress in 1775 John Adams nominated Washington to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the ragtag American Army fighting the British Army, then the most powerful military machine in the world. Being a Virginian, his selection was politically orchestrated by Adams to forge a compromise between the southern colonies and those of New England, who were the only ones that had openly taken up arms against the British at that point in the Revolution. They badly sought the military help of the other colonies. By accepting the position Washington was risking everything he had accumulated up to that point in his life. If captured, he would be tried for treason, executed, and his estate would have been taken, leaving his family destitute. His selection as overall military Commander-in-Chief and later, for President, came through universal respect for his abilities and experience as a field commander, outstanding horseman and unquestioned ability to survive in the rugged wilderness, where the rabble Continental Army would be spending most of its time, while the British regulars were quartered in established cities.

### **WASHINGTON TAKES COMMAND**

George Washington took field command of the 17,000 man Continental Army in Boston on July 3, 1775, two weeks after the Battle of [Breed's] Bunker Hill. On March 4-17, 1776 American forces captured Dorchester Heights which overlooks Boston Harbor. Captured British artillery from Fort Ticonderoga is placed on the heights to enforce the siege against the British in Boston. The British evacuate Boston and set sail for Halifax, Nova Scotia. Though seen as a major victory and rout of the imperious British forces, Washington knew that the Colonists were far from achieving any meaningful strategic victory. Washington rushed his Army to New York to set up defenses, correctly anticipating the British plan to next invade New York City.

The British retooled their strategy for the next round of fighting. This time they would attempt to divide the New England Colonies from the remaining southern Colonies by advancing simultaneous attacks from the sea at New York proceeding up the Hudson River (under General William Howe) with that of an equally imposing force marching down the Hudson River Valley from Canada, commanded by general John Burgoyne. This British scheme was successfully stopped through Colonial victories at Saratoga and Oriskany, where Burgoyne was soundly defeated by Nathaniel Greene Gates.

### **BROOKLYN HEIGHTS – PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE**

On August 22, 1776 the British landed on Long Island and British General William Howe defeated General Charles Lee at the Battle of Long Island. The British lost 63 killed and 337 wounded and missing, while the Americans lost about 970 men killed, wounded or missing, and 1,079 taken captive. The Continental Army had lost almost a quarter of his entire strength.

On August 26, General Charles Lee retreated to Brooklyn Heights. The Americans were outnumbered three-to-one. General Howe wanted to avoid another Bunker (Breed's) Hill, so instead of storming the American positions he ordered his men to dig in and bring the guns into range. When Washington arrived on August 27, he remained cool and confident, overseeing the construction of new fortifications on Brooklyn Heights. A serendipitous downpour made further British attacks unlikely. American troops found it hard to cook their food or to keep their powder dry. On August 28, additional troops arrived to boost the number of men under his command to 9,000.

At this juncture Washington realized that he had put himself in a trap. He had split his troops between Manhattan and Long Island, with the Hudson River, the East River, and Long Island Sound controlled by British warships. Admiral Richard Howe, the brother of General Howe, could cut off Washington's forces if he moved his ships from the New Jersey Shore to the East River. Washington prayed for deliverance, and the weather turned sour. Unfavorable northeast winds prevented Admiral Howe from

moving his ships into New York Bay into the mouth of the East River. This mile wide channel was Washington's only possible path of retreat.

Rain continued intermittently throughout August 29th. The poor weather forestalled Howe's onslaught and the British ships failed to position themselves between Brooklyn Heights and Manhattan. That night it began to rain, but with an unusual northeast breeze. Washington turned to the seagoing soldiers of John Glover's Marblehead Massachusetts Regiment to ferry the American troops across the East River to Manhattan that evening, and the exodus began at 9 PM. The wind ceased at Midnight, and Glover's men muffled their oarlocks. After an hour of calmness a gentle southwesterly breeze erupted, which allowed the Marblehead men to hoist sails, allowing transport of 4 times as many troops per hour. By this time the sky had cleared and the moon was shining brightly. British forces were close enough to see that all the American defenders, but none of the British sentries noticed! God had intervened, blinding sentry's eyes and muffling their ears.

When first light appeared, the evacuation of 9,000 American troops was far from complete, the oarsmen needed at least three more hours. The soldiers occupying the front line trenches huddled along the beach worried that they would be spotted or left behind. Then, rising out of the wet ground and off the East River came a dense fog, and the fog covered the entire river. When the sun rose the miraculous fog did not lift! The entire Army was extracted, except for the heaviest caliber canon. Just as the last boat pulled into the channel with General Washington aboard, the fog began to lift and dissipate. It was seen as a miracle by the troops and providential by Washington. 9000 men had been saved from certain capture or destruction, and the American cause preserved.

When the British advanced on the American positions around 11 AM they could hardly believe their eyes. There in the brilliant sunlight was the abandoned American fortifications and camp – totally deserted! Some of the British soldiers ran down to the shore and shot at the last of the departing boats, but the Americans were safely out of range. Washington's army had escaped their grasps to fight another day. God used darkness, fog, unusual wind, and bad weather to immobilize Admiral Howe's fleet and blind the British sentries. Washington's cool and firm command exacted superb discipline from green troops, who remained quiet throughout the ordeal. That 9000 men departed without so much as a sound was simply providential.

Without the aid of a forceful navy, Washington's forces were soon driven from Manhattan and up the Hudson River, where a string of Colonial Forts along the lower Hudson River fell to the advancing British forces during the balance of 1776. The tide of southern advance up the Hudson was eventually stopped at West Point, 50 miles upstream of New York. Here Washington gave Polish General Thaddeus Kosciusko a free hand in designing and constructing a series of fortifications on both sides of the Hudson River, where it makes a sweeping S-shaped curve beneath imposing cliffs, rising 1800 feet above the river. Kosciusko mounted canon on both sides of the river and fabricated a floating chain that would block advancing warships, subjecting them to withering cross fire, should they attempt to sever the chain at mid-stream. The defensive works at West Point represented the zenith of American combat engineering prowess during the Revolution, and were never tested.

### **THE TIMES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS**

Perhaps Washington's greatest moment as a leader occurred in December 1776, when the Continental Army under his command had been hastened and chased through a series of humiliating defeats, the latest being general Howe's capture of Fort Mifflin near then north end of Manhattan. Washington had crossed the Hudson over to New Jersey, as 8000 British and Hessian troops advanced on the fort. General Howe was materially assisted by the treason of one of the American officers, William Redbank, who on November 2nd, deserted and furnished Howe with detailed plans of the American works. The fort fell to the British on November 16<sup>th</sup>, with the loss of 53 killed and 96 wounded, to the British toll of 132 killed and 374 wounded. But 2,818 American soldiers were taken

prisoner, making it the worst day of the War up to that point in time. Most of these prisoners died aboard prison ships anchored in New York Harbor over the succeeding months.

With Fort Washington secured, Howe took up winter quarters in New York and dispatched Hessian Colonel Johannes Rall with 1400 men to occupy Trenton, New Jersey. The weather was frigid, spirits were low, and desertions were becoming common. Washington devised a plan to attack the Hessians, crossing the near frozen Delaware River nine miles upriver of the Hessian outpost, marching through cover of darkness to strike them at dawn.

Sensing the low spirits of his men, Washington gathered his forces at quarters for an important address. He read from a pamphlet titled "The Crisis" by Thomas Paine. It began "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, sink from the service of their country..." Washington's words pierced the hearts of his weary soldiers and filled them with overpowering conviction. They could do it...they would do it...by the Lord's grace they did do it! Paine's short treatise did what no man, no gun, and even no sword could do; it inspired defeated soldiers to reach down within themselves and summon a kind of courage that only emanates from heartfelt conviction. Those in attendance would forever recite the stirring words that motivated them, and would assert that this single event was the turning point in the Revolution, when each man gave up any hope they retained for their own safety and welfare, and decided to give a good accounting of themselves, even if it were to cost them their lives.

Washington had command of about 2400 troops. They broke camp at 2:00 PM on Christmas Day and marched to the point of crossing the Delaware River, which they hoped to complete by midnight. A storm overtook the area around 11 PM which delayed completion of their crossing until 3 AM on December 26th. The planned predawn attack was delayed until 8 AM, with the storm still raging. By 9:30 the Americans had won the day, with Johannes Rall mortally wounded. The Hessians lost 114 men and 900 captured, while the Americans lost only two, with a handful of wounded.

By noon, Washington's attackers recrossed the Delaware back into Pennsylvania, taking their prisoners and captured supplies with them. The victory gave the Continental Congress renewed confidence that their military forces could stand up to regular forces and it had a markedly positive impact on re-enlistments in the Continental Army.

An interesting note is that while only four Americans were wounded, all of these came during the rush to capture the Hessian artillery park, preventing the guns from being used. Two of these wounded were officers: William Washington (the General's cousin), who was badly wounded in both hands, and young Lieutenant James Monroe, the future 5<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, who was carried from the field bleeding badly after an artery was severed by a musket ball. Doctor John Riker clamped the future President's artery, keeping him from bleeding to death. Washington's forces wintered over 1776-77 in Morristown, New Jersey.

## **BATTLES AROUND PHILADELPHIA - 1777**

The next year saw British military strength increase well beyond anything the Colonial Army could hope to defeat. By May 1777 Sir William Howe amassed 18,000 British troops, which were encamped at New Brunswick and Amboy. In May Washington broke camp and began moving towards New Brunswick with 7300 men, including regulars and militia forces. In June the British force moved onto Staten Island while Washington remained at Middlebrook. On July 23<sup>rd</sup> the British Fleet sailed from New York with the entire British Army, stopping at the Delaware Capes, while Washington moved his forces to Neshaminy Creek, 90 miles north of Philadelphia, to await the next move by the British.

On August 20<sup>th</sup> the British fleet anchored in Chesapeake Bay, disembarking their forces at Elk River, 54 miles southwest of Philadelphia. As soon as he received this news (some three days later)

Washington broke camp and dashed his forces southward, through Philadelphia and on to Wilmington. On September 11<sup>th</sup> Washington's forces were soundly defeated at the Battle of Brandywine in Pennsylvania. Washington withdrew his force of 11,000 men to Chester, Philadelphia, and then Germantown.

In September Washington advanced on Warren tavern, but was turned back by a heavy storm that ruined his force's ammunition. He retreats across the Schuylkill River, with the pursuing British 6 days behind him. On September 26<sup>th</sup> the British marched into Philadelphia, leaving a strong garrison at Germantown, which Washington attacks on October 4<sup>th</sup>. The American forces are beaten back and retreat to a position about 6 miles north of Chesnut Hill. In early November the Royal Navy fortifies first along the Delaware River downstream of Philadelphia and the Battle of Red Bank occurs between Hessian troops and American forces. After a grueling march from Whitemarsh through Gulf Mills, Washington's troops arrive at Valley Forge on December 19<sup>th</sup>. Within four days nearly 3,000 men of this force were too sick or poorly equipped to fight.

### **BIVOUACK AT VALLEY FORGE**

Reeling from defeats by the British at Brandywine and Germantown, the struggling Continental Army gave up the defense of the Colonial capitol at Philadelphia and made their winter bivouack at Valley Forge, along the Schuylkill River about 20 miles north of the city. They made camp here on December 1777, closing the heights bounded by the river's gorge as a good defensive position. They needn't have worried though, as the British forces were content to lay over the harsh winter in the warmth and comfort of established homes in Philadelphia, which they confiscated without remuneration. The American army was weak, poorly supplied, and ill. An estimated 2,500 men out of 10,000 that trudged to Valley Forge would die that winter.

The winter at Valley Forge was one of the darkest chapters in the war of Independence. The soldiers suffered grievously in the bitter cold for lack of food, clothing, and supplies. Much of the Continental Army's ordeal at Valley Forge came from a lack of provisions, due to mismanagement of resources by the Continental Congress, and the local indifference to the Army's plight. Most Pennsylvania farmers believed that the British would prevail in the conflict and the British paid cash for their produce, so they chose to sell food stuffs to the British in deference to the Colonial forces.

Washington used the time at Valley Forge to give cheer to his weary men and hold his forces together, which were close to crumbling. Washington's greatest skill was his ability to communicate confidence and good cheer in his troops, having survived countless privations and close encounters with death on the western frontier as a young officer. The troops all knew this, and Washington's physical abilities, such as horse riding, throwing heavy weights and balls, were legion among his troops. As the winter drew towards a close Washington used the time to reorganize and re-train his forces, under the direction of ex-Prussian officer Baron von Steuben, who arrived at the end of February 1778. The Continental Army departed Valley Forge on June 19, 1778.

### **JOCKYING FOR ADVANTAGE 1778-81**

An alliance with France came about in May 1778 after Horatio Gates defeated the British at Saratoga the previous October. In June 1778 Howe resigned his command and sailed for England, being replaced by Sir Henry Clinton. Clinton opposed Howe's decision to split his massive forces and on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1778 he abandoned Philadelphia. The move caught Washington by surprise, but he saw an opportunity to strike a blow at Clinton's forces strung out over a distance of nearly 18 miles. Washington caught up with the British at Monmouth on June 28<sup>th</sup>, but what should have been American rout was compromised by insubordinate behavior of American general Charles Lee, who

was relived by Washington and later dropped from the Continental Army. The British Army escaped and similar opportunity would not occur for another three years.

In 1779 Washington's only opportunity for attack came at Stony Point on the Hudson, where he directed Anthony Wayne to attack the British positions using fixed bayonets. Though a minor victory, it demonstrated the ability of the Americans to take on fixed entrenched position occupied by British regulars. The following winter at Morristown was the worst of the war, seeing deep snows, lack of food and record levels of sickness, death and desertion. The resources of Congress were all but non-existent after five years of continuous conflict.

The following spring of 1780 saw the return of the Marquis de Lafayette after a 1-1/2 year absence. The British expeditionary forces in America were now split in two major components in the American colonies: General Clinton in New York and General Cornwallis in the Carolinas. From the south came word of the worst American defeat yet, the fall of Charleston, with the loss of 5500 men under the command of General Benjamin Lincoln. August 1780 witnessed the rout of Horatio Gates' forces at Camden, South Carolina, where Gates was reported to have fled the battlefield for his life, running for three days. In September, Washington rode to Hartford to discuss strategy with French General Rochambeau, stopping briefly at West Point to confer with General Benedict Arnold, who was absent. It was soon revealed that Arnold, long recognized as one of the best combat officers in the Continental Army, had been guilty of treason, providing secrets not only of West Point's fortifications, but turning over confidential reports on the war written by Washington himself to the British. The go-between was Clinton's talented adjutant John André, and he was arrested as a spy, tried and convicted. By Washington's command, André was hanged on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, shocking those on both sides of the conflict, who argued for leniency, based on André's friendly personality and cooperation after being captured. To Washington, André's actions were a clear violation of the Articles of War, and he saw no room for misinterpretation or leniency, given the gravity of the offense. Whatever Arnold's reasons were for betraying his country, Washington would always maintain that such were incomprehensible to him. Benedict's treachery secured him a commission as a British Brigadier General, but this appointment was revoked after the war ended and Arnold died in penniless obscurity in England.

In the winter of 1780-81 discontent of the troops reached new lows when members of a Pennsylvania unit marched themselves (absent any of their officers) to Philadelphia to demand the redress of grievances. Later that same month a members of a New Jersey unit mutinied. Washington made no attempt to hold onto those troops whose enlistments had expired that winter, so short were his forces on foodstuffs. He did order the mutinous New Jersey troops rounded up and two ring leaders executed by firing squad. In the spring of 1781 the 13 states at last ratified the Articles of Confederation originally prepared by Richard Henry Lee in July 1776. The Second Continental Congress ceased to exist as such, being replaced by The United States in Congress Assembled, suggesting some measure of permanence.

## **THE ROAD TO YORKTOWN**

In the south Nathaniel Greene was now in command of American forces. Greene handled his small army so effectively that he confounded Lord Cornwallis and his lieutenants repeatedly, forcing them out of Georgia and the Carolinas. In the spring of 1781 the British suffered a stinging defeat at Cowpens and losing a fourth of their army at Guilford Court House. Cornwallis resolved to depart the south and take the battle into Virginia, sending a string detachment into the state under renegade Brigadier Benedict Arnold. Washington dispatched Lafayette south with a force of 1200 men to meet Arnold, and hopefully, capture him.

In May 1781, French Admiral Comte de Barras made landfall at Newport, Rhode Island with the long-awaited news that the French fleet would render assistance to the American cause later that summer.

Their fleet under the command of Admiral Comte de Grasse, was en route to the West Indies and would then turn north towards the East Coast of the United States. De Barras, lacking sufficient strength to confront the British fleets then anchored in New York, took temporary refuge in Boston Harbor.

By May 1781 British forces were pouring into Virginia from three directions, bringing their manpower to 7200 men. Outnumbered, Lafayette retreated to the interior. By June American forces were also being dispatched to Virginia, and the French Army in Connecticut was instructed to rendezvous with Washington's forces at North Castle, near the Hudson. Orders were sent to the French West Indies Fleet under Admiral De Grasse, asking him to sail north for a joint attack on Clinton's forces in New York. By the third week of August French and American forces were crossing the Hudson River and began marching to Virginia. The American and French alliance was sending every available soldier southward, to Williamsburg.

On September 10 Washington stopped at Mt. Vernon for the first time in six years, spending a few days and picking up his step son Jacky Custis as one of his aide-de-camps. Everyone sensed that the climatic battle of the long war was just ahead, and that it was going to be an historic occasion. Between September 14 and 24<sup>th</sup> the French and American contingents began arriving in vicinity of Yorktown, which Cornwallis had selected as his base of operations on the York River Estuary. They American/French force now comprised 16,500 troops, which was forming a huge semi-circle around Cornwallis' 8,000 troops, with their back against the York Sound. It was the first time that the British were ever out-manned and out-gunned by so severe a margin.

#### **DE GRASSE'S NAVAL BLOCKADE**

The opportunity to encircle Cornwallis came about as the result of a crucial sea battle between De Grasse and the British fleet under Admirals Graves and Hood in early September. De Grasse's French squadron arrived at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay on August 28th with 24 ships carrying 1,700 guns and 3,000 soldiers. The land forces were put ashore several days later and joined the detachment commanded by the Marquis de Lafayette. The English fleet was a combined force commanded by Admirals Sir Samuel Graves and Thomas Graves, with of 29 ships. They departed New York to intercept the French squadron at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, but did not arrive until September 5<sup>th</sup>, when they were stunned to learn that De Grasse had beat them to their goal.

De Grasse realized that he was at a disadvantage to conduct a sea battle within Chesapeake Bay's narrow confines, so he sailed into the Atlantic waters off the Virginia coast. Had Graves struck as the French fleet past by single file into open waters he may have easily defeated the French; instead he allowed them to form a battle line. The two-hour Battle of the Capes ended in a draw, with the British sustaining serious damage to six ships, one of which was later scuttled, while suffering 300 casualties. Four of the French ships were significantly damaged, and they sustained more than 200 casualties. For the next few days, the two fleets drifted south in sight of one another, but did not renew hostilities. Although he did not strike a knock-out blow to the British fleet, De Grasse succeeded in sealing off the mouth of Chesapeake Bay and denying Cornwallis opportunities for reinforcement or evacuation.

While Graves and de Grasse drifted down the Virginia coast, the smaller French fleet of Admiral de Barras arrived from Newport carrying Rochambeau's supplies and cannon, and sailed uncontested into Chesapeake Bay. On September 10, Graves broke contact with the French and headed his battered fleet back to New York for repairs, leaving the French in control of Chesapeake Bay and sealing Cornwallis's fate.



## **SIEGE OF YORKTOWN - 1781**

Cornwallis had occupied Yorktown and Gloucester Point with 7,900 soldiers. By September 14<sup>th</sup> the French and Colonial Army emplaces 16,500 men around Yorktown. This was an unprecedented Colonial force. General Clinton assures Cornwallis that 5,000 reinforcements can be sent to Yorktown by October 9<sup>th</sup>, lulling Cornwallis into a false sense of security (he never contemplates that a French blockade could be successful in preventing re-supply or retreat). Clinton also orders Cornwallis to hold onto the port. In the face of such superior enemy forces Cornwallis retreated from the outer fortifications consolidating his troops in the center of Yorktown. Politics, poor weather, British bureaucracy and the French naval blockade prevented the promised British reinforcements from reaching Cornwallis. Trapped and encircled, a smallpox outbreak also becomes a factor.

Rochambeau and Washington lead their respective forces to the outskirts of Yorktown from Williamsburg on September 28<sup>th</sup>. Rochambeau occupies the Western half of the siege line around Yorktown, while Washington's forces occupy the southern and eastern half of the siege line around Yorktown. After dueling with the British fleet, Admiral DeGrasse agreed to remain in the Chesapeake Bay until November 1st. However, western winds prevented him from pursuing British transports or bringing effective fire on Yorktown by maneuvering up the York River. French siege artillery was given priority of support for transportation to the front lines.

Washington contracted the sappers and miners to ensure the siege plan would succeed by November 1st. For the first time in the war the British were outnumbered by more than 2 to 1. The success of the American siege would depend on the enemy's surrender of Yorktown or force them into open battle. On October 6<sup>th</sup> American and French sappers and miners constructed the first parallel entrenchment. On October 8<sup>th</sup> heavy artillery begins shelling Yorktown. On October 11<sup>th</sup> sappers and miners construct a second parallel within 400 feet of British fortifications. On October 14<sup>th</sup> two British Redoubts are captured. On October 15<sup>th</sup> the second parallel is completed. On the 16<sup>th</sup> the British launch a spoiling attack and attempt a breakout north to Gloucester Point, across the estuary, where LCOL Bannistar Tarelton is holding out with 700 troops. This fails and on October 17, 1781 Lord Cornwallis requests surrender negotiations. The British surrendered the following day.

At the surrender ceremony, Cornwallis' second-in-command, Charles O'Hara, attempted to deliver Cornwallis's sword to French General Comte de Rochambeau. But, Rochambeau directed O'Hara to George Washington, who coolly steered the British executive officer to Washington's own second in command, Major General Benjamin Lincoln, who accepted the sword. Cornwallis was thoroughly humiliated to be surrendering to Washington.

The colonist's alliance with the French secured the victory. Washington was aided on land by French General Rochambeau's 6,000 regulars, while French Admiral de Grasse's fleet raced north from the West Indies to block any hope Cornwallis had for retreat or reinforcement via the Chesapeake Bay. Without the French Naval Blockade, the British would have extracted themselves and the war would most certainly have dragged on. It was the greatest American triumph during a long and bitter war.

## **CONCLUSION OF THE CONFLICT**

Within 10 days of the surrender 40 British ships and 14,000 reinforcements arrived in Chesapeake Bay, but these reinforcements arrived too late to change the course of history. Two years went by with few skirmishes and Clinton holding on to New York until the Paris Peace Treaty of 1783 could be agreed upon, which ended the Revolutionary War. The British sent new politicians to parliament that chose to negotiate with the colonials and discontinue the effort to put down the rebellion of the American colonies.

Even though the English were tired of the 6-1/2 year conflict, it took another two years to hammer out the Treaty of Paris, which was not signed until September 3, 1783, a date that should be a national holiday. America's negotiators were Benjamin Franklin, John Jay and John Adams. Even though the war cost Americans less than the British in terms of money; many states, such as Connecticut, were devastated by the British occupation because of their systematic destruction of colonist's farms and crops to deprive the Continental Army of food. Those people and those veterans believed to have sacrificed most were later accorded the most favorable land grants in the western frontier. For example, the "Western Reserve", prime farm land in the Cayuga Valley surrounding what is now Cleveland, was ceded to families from Connecticut who had lost their farms to the British torch during the War of Independence.

### **WASHINGTON'S ROLE IN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**

Washington suffered grievously throughout the Revolutionary War, seldom besting his enemies as did several of his lieutenants, such as General Nathaniel Greene at Oriskany and Cowpens. His command was challenged by advocates for Horatio Gates, who had been victorious at Saratoga whilst Washington survived a string of embarrassing defeats during the same period (1776-77). Gates may well have succeeded Washington, but his reputation was dimmed because his supporters tried to usurp Washington while the Continental Army was bivouacked at Valley Forge during the severe winter of 1777-78. Washington was eventually given the three star rank of Lieutenant General, a title that would not be equaled until Ulysses S. Grant was given command of the Union Army early in 1864 (Washington's uniform is on display at the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC).

Over the past 225 years the military world has expended considerable energy studying the American War of Independence because a tiny upstart insurgency succeeded in defeating the largest army in the world. Early on Washington recognized that his task was simply to "remain in the field", denying the British the opportunity for any sort of crushing military defeat of the Continental forces. In doing so he prevented an English victory. At times throughout the war English forces held all the major cities: Boston, Philadelphia, New York and Charleston. But, these strategic holdings were incapable of putting down the rebellion. To do that, the British Army was forced to take to the field, find the insurgent forces, surround them, then crush them decisively. Their task was easier acknowledged than accomplished. Their biggest problem seemed to be in positioning themselves for decisive battles. When facing annihilation, the American forces exhibited a remarkable ability to outmaneuver their foes, and escape the traps that were being set for them. *"The only battle a insurrectionist needs to win is the last one."* Washington achieved the pivotal victory at Yorktown, and would go down in history at "the American Caesar", a title that rankled his British military peers. Nonetheless, it is Washington's bronze statue that today graces London's Trafalgar Square, and he is seen as one of the great personages in Anglo-American history.

### **SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI**

The General Society of the Cincinnati was founded in May 1783 in Fishkill, New York, by Continental Army officers who fought in the American Revolution. This was before the Treaty of Peace was signed and before the British had evacuated New York. The Honorable Major General Baron von Steuben, being the senior officer, presided at the organizational meetings. Within 12 months, Constituent Societies were established in the 13 original states and in France under the auspices of the General Society of the Cincinnati. Of the 5,500 officers who were eligible to join, about 2,150 did so. George Washington was elected the first President General of the Society in December 1783 until his death in 1799. He was succeeded by Alexander Hamilton.

The Society is named for Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, a Roman farmer of the Fifth Century B.C, who, like Washington, was called from his fields to lead his country's army in battle. Cincinnatus, as did Washington, returned from war a triumphant leader, declined honors, and went back to his farm.

Washington, as did Cincinnatus, lived up to the Society's Motto: "*He gave up everything to serve the republic.*"

## **A SECOND CHANCE AT PARENTING**

Jacky Custis fathered four children during the Revolutionary War. Towards the end he availed himself to be one of his step father's aides. During the siege of Yorktown, Jack contracted "camp fever" and died. With Jack's death George and Martha adopted Jack's two youngest children (their mother keeping the eldest two), George Washington Parke Custis (just 6 months old) and Eleanor Parke Custis (age 3), whom they adopted and raised as their own children, enjoying this pair more than Jacky and Patsy. "Washington" Custis was the younger of the pair and the pet of the family. In 1804 he married Mary Lee Fitzhugh, and their daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis (born in 1808), would marry Robert E. Lee in 1831! Washington Custis provided American history with some of the most tender insights about his step grandfather George Washington, who raised him as a son. Nellie Custis married Washington's nephew and aide-de-camp, Lawrence Lewis on Washington's birthday (February 22<sup>nd</sup>) in 1799. Gracefully, the years 1782 through 1789 were the most peaceful at Mt. Vernon, but the young nation agitated for what lay ahead. France erupted into a bloody revolution in July 1789, during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Thomas Jefferson was the Ambassador to France at this time.

## **CONSENSUS CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT**

Five and a half years after the Revolutionary War concluded at Yorktown, Washington was summoned to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, where he was unanimously elected Chairman. The Constitution was drafted at this meeting, but it took another year to be ratified by each of the 13 states. The new constitution included provisions for a chief executive, a congress made up of senators and congressmen, and a supreme judiciary. On February 4, 1789 electoral representatives from each state cast their ballots for a chief executive and all 69 cast their vote for Washington. It was the first and last unanimous vote for President in American history.

Washington was notified of his unanimous selection at Mt. Vernon on April 14<sup>th</sup> by Charles Thomson, secretary of the Continental Congress since 1774. Two days later, accompanied by Thomson and David Humphreys, a wartime aide then engaged in writing a biography of Washington, they stepped into Washington's personal coach and departed Mt. Vernon for a new life in New York City, the temporary capitol of the new nation. Along their route towns turned out en masse to greet the new President, and parades, dinners, fireworks, speeches and fetes of every description were accorded him along his path. He arrived in New York by barge on April 23, 1789, and was inaugurated in New York's Federal Hall six days later.

Immediately following his inauguration, Washington walked to St. Paul's Chapel, where the Episcopal Bishop of New York offered his prayers for divine guidance. Washington worshiped consistently at St. Paul's until the capitol was moved to Philadelphia the following year (1790). Built in 1766, much of the ornamentation in St. Paul's was the work of Major Pierre L'Enfant, the French war hero, architect and engineer who Washington soon chose to design the "*Federal City on the Potomac*".

Washington took tours of New England in the fall of 1789 and the southern states in 1791. His cabinet consisted of only four men: Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State, Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury; Henry Knox as Secretary of War, and Edmund Randolph as Attorney General. Hamilton had been Washington's personal secretary for four years of the Revolutionary War, as well as his aide-de-camp. Jefferson was never aligned with Washington and Hamilton's political philosophies, and almost from the outset, Hamilton and Jefferson became engaged in a bitter rivalry that was the bane of Washington's two terms as President. Hamilton favored the

encouragement of industry, commerce, finance and a strong central government dominated by propertied men. Only men who owned property could vote in those days; the logic being these were the fellows who paid the taxes, so they should be the only ones who had any say in the affairs of government! This was the Federalist point-of-view. Jefferson represented the Antifederalists, or Republicans, who believed in a decentralized government, which held that the young nation's future lay in agricultural exploitation of the tremendous expanse of land that lay to the west. The Antifederalists feared that Washington and Hamilton were leading the nation towards a monarchy. On the Federalist side, Hamilton and his followers worried that Jefferson would turn the nation over to the rabble, following France's recent example, which Jefferson had personally witnessed. Jefferson broke ranks with President Washington in 1793 and Alexander Hamilton resigned in 1795.

George Washington served his Country faithfully through a most troubled Presidency. He repeated as a consensus candidate in 1792, when his old ally, the Marquis de Lafayette was being imprisoned in a France run amok with revolution. He decided to step down in 1796 after serving his second four-year term and thereby provide an example for succeeding Presidents, so the new nation would not be tempted towards monarchy. His most fervent desire was to return to the genteel life of Mt. Vernon, where he and Martha received many visitors during his last three years.

### WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

There are few documents in American history that contain as much wisdom and insight as that of Washington's Farewell Address to the People of the United States in September 1796 (reprinted as an appendix). Washington spent 45 years of his life in public service, including his tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and two terms as President. During his presidency, he called for and oversaw the formation of the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

In his address, Washington warned that a society's security was founded upon its morality and faith in God. He wrote:

“27. Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, **Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness**, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

God, duty, honor, and Country seem today like faded clichés, but it is the moral underpinning of a society that, inevitably, allows honesty to triumph over evil, and offer a level playing field for all people to pursue their own happiness. Washington was a very moral man, a man of enormous spiritual conviction, who viewed right and wrong as something black and white; as simply stated as The Ten Commandments. Several decisions he made provide insight into the Code of Conduct with which he believed all honorable men must conduct their affairs in this life. The first was his decision to risk everything he had in the cause for freedom from the tyranny of King George II. The second was his long suffering through the Revolutionary War, experiencing much privation and six long years without seeing his home. The third was his swift execution of Benedict Arnold conspirator John André, a professional soldier. And fourth, was his decision not to run for a third term as president, to set an example for those who followed. He could easily have claimed the kingship of America, but,

like his Roman citizen-soldier hero, Cincinnatus, never gave a hint of any desire to do so. George Washington feared God more than man; there is no better epitaph than that.

### **DEATH ON THE EVE OF THE CENTURY**

After leaving the presidency, it became his custom to ride the boundaries of his property in the early hours of each morning, to check in on the various activities of the estate. This was the same activity his father had engaged upon when he caught a fever and died, back in 1743. During his morning ride on December 12, 1799 Washington encountered a storm which began to snow, then suddenly turned into a settled cold rain, which soaked him. Unperturbed, he failed to change from his cold damp clothes and the following day brought a deep cold with hoarseness, which settled in his throat. On the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> he was seized by a chill, followed by a violent attack, and rapidly sank, just before midnight on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Martha and his old friend Dr. James Craik were in attendance. Dr. Craik, Dr. Elisha Dick and Dr. Gustavius Brown persisted in blood letting, over Dick's objections (they later apologized). The president grew increasingly weak throughout the 14<sup>th</sup>, and late in the evening he thanked all in attendance for their kind attentions, then said: "*Let me go off quietly; I cannot last long*". Near midnight he murmured "*I am just going, Have me decently buried, and do not let my body be put into the vault in less than 3 days after I am dead*". His last words were "*Tis well*". And with that, the most prominent figure in American history, God's man for a new nation and a new form of government, slipped away with the Century of which he was inextricably part. He was two months shy of his 68<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### **A NATION PAYS ITS RESPECTS**

A soldier's funeral was held at Mt. Vernon on December 18, 1799. Family members, the Alexandria Militia, a band of military musicians, and four clergymen conducted the ceremony. A schooner on the Potomac River fired its canon throughout the day. Washington's body was placed in a mahogany coffin, born by four Army lieutenants and six pall bearers, it was placed in the crypt Washington had designed and constructed on the hillside just south of the mansion. The following day President John Adams announced that all military personnel would wear black crepe on their arm for the next six months and that naval vessels would hoist their colors at half mast for one week.

The state funeral for the nation's Commander-in-Chief was held the day after Christmas in Philadelphia, still the nation's capitol. The Official eulogy was written by Chief Justice John Marshall, but delivered by Major General Richard Henry Lee (1756-1818), Robert E. Lee's father at Philadelphia's German Lutheran Church, the largest church in the city, while 4000 spectators listened intently. Lee gave a stirring account of Washington's life, beginning on the banks of the Monongahela River in 1753, and reviewing the countless sufferings and travails he experienced in 45 years of public service.

"First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in humble and enduring scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding; his example was as edifying to all around him as were the effects of that example lasting.... Correct throughout, vice shuddered in his presence and virtue always felt his fostering hand. The purity of his private character gave effulgence to his public virtues.... Such was the man for whom our nation mourns."

Martha died in 1802, and much to Washington Custis' dismay, the estate fell to the President's nephew, Bushrod Washington (Bushrod's father, John Augustine Washington, had cared for the estate all the years that Washington had been away, fighting the British and ruling the new nation). Custis took all those personal effects willed to him by his grandmother; then purchased as much of the estate as he could afford (many said more than he could afford) during auctions held at Mt. Vernon in 1802 and 1803. In the end he owed \$4,545, a princely sum in those days, but he retained the greatest

collection of George Washington memorabilia, which Americans can view today at Mt Vernon and at the Lee-Custis Mansion in Arlington.

## EPILOGUE

His Vice President, John Adams, would occasionally complain about Washington's lack of formal educational training and was greatly perplexed by the "*worshipful manner*" in which Washington was openly revered by the common populace wherever he traveled. Nobody seemed to remember it was Adams who had nominated Washington for the position of military commander back in 1776! Adams would get his chance as President in 1796, with Thomas Jefferson serving as his Vice President. He served one term and was narrowly defeated by the Antifederalist ticket of Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, only a month after moving into the new presidential mansion in Washington, D.C (in November 1800). The Electoral College voted 36 times before Jefferson won out over Burr to become the nation's third President! Jefferson would serve two terms as President and usher in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 before turning over the reins of leadership to his arch-rival, James Madison. Bitter political enemies during the second presidency, Adams and Jefferson later became friends through the bond of shared experiences in the Continental Congress, Washington's cabinet, and as popular Presidents toppled by their critics. Both men died on the same poignant day 1000 miles apart: the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1826. At the time Adam's son, John Quincy, was serving as the new nation's 6<sup>th</sup> President.

George Washington led an amazing life, filled with exploration, unbridled opportunity and unequalled responsibility, beginning at age 14. He was God's man for a specific cause at a particular time in history; and his life was filled with increasing responsibilities, disappointments and tragedies. He was blessed with the character quality of *long suffering*, patiently awaiting new opportunities after seemingly being blasted into oblivion, time after time. It is very similar to the long suffering experienced by David in the Old Testament, where he always sought to do what was right and honorable before the Lord, regardless of his superior's refusal to accept his sage advice.

In spite of the many disappointments, at every turn in his life he behaved with the utmost character and dignity, openly displaying the tenants of God's holy commandments. He faced great temptations, but was able to recognize his own failings and temptations, and consistently refrained from giving up or compromising on matters of principle. His personal journals state a strong belief in doing what he knew was right before God; even when it meant the denial of his personal happiness and security. For this example, we should all be grateful. Through his countless sacrifices he helped to establish a new form of government and a new kind of nation; one founded on the eternal principles of a living God; whose central premise is that all men were created equal and were endowed by their creator with certain inevitable rights.

My favorite quote from George Washington was penned by him on June 20, 1788. It reads:

"The good opinion of honest men, friends to freedom and well wishers to mankind, wherever they may happen to be born or reside, is the only kind of reputation a wise man would ever desire."

This summarizes the manner by which Washington conducted his affairs throughout his life. He was concerned with what his peers thought of him, that the test of any man's character was what others thought of him. A good reputation could not be purchased, it must be earned. As a leader, Washington consistently exemplified the character traits expected from one in responsible charge; from control of emotions to appropriateness of dress. He never asked anything of his subordinates that they knew he could not do himself. His endurance in the face of overwhelming odds, year after year, in struggle after countless struggle, have been an inspiration to all those who have studied his life. George Washington was God's man for America and an example we might do well to emulate.



A native Californian, Dr. J. David Rogers is the Richard H. Jahns Distinguished Lecturer in Engineering Geology at the University of California, Berkeley. His interest in the Washington, D.C. area and its history was nurtured while serving as a naval intelligence officer at the Naval and Maritime Intelligence Center in Suitland, Maryland, inside the DC beltway. He has served as a consultant to American Christian Tours (ACT) since 1997 and has co-taught Christian heritage programs with historian Marshall Foster in California. This is an excerpt from some of the lectures he prepared for ACT's docent training symposia, held in Rice Lake, Wisconsin in January 1999. Dr. Rogers and his wife Katrinka homeschool their children Beckie, Christie, Jonathan and Julie in Pleasant Hill, California.