

An aerial photograph of a large, two-story brick building with a white roof and two chimneys. The building has numerous windows with blue shutters and a central blue door. To the right, there is a smaller log cabin with a gabled roof and a brick chimney. The buildings are situated on a green lawn with a winding concrete path. The background is filled with tall evergreen trees under a clear sky.

# Soldiers of the American Revolution

## What was the Continental Army?

The Continental Army was the army of the American colonies during the American Revolution. Each of the thirteen colonies (Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Virginia) was responsible for enlisting soldiers for the Continental Army to fight under the command of George Washington. Together, the 13 American colonies were united in fighting against the British army, so that they could free themselves from the rule of England and form the United States of America.

To enlist in the army means to sign up for, or join, for an agreed upon amount of time. It is a contract that the soldier signs. Once a soldier enlisted, he had to continue his service until his enlistment time was up, this was a period one to three years. In exchange, the soldier was given pay for their service, a food ration, and a uniform.

The soldiers in the Continental Army enlisted for many different reasons. Some enlisted because of the promise of pay, food, and clothing. Others enlisted because of their belief in the cause.

As the war went on, many soldiers found themselves without food or proper clothing, even though these things had been promised to them. Why do you think this happened? As you learn more about what it was like to be a soldier during the American Revolution, think about the difficulties these soldiers faced and how you would have felt if you had enlisted in the Continental Army.



## What was the Militia?

Before the American Revolution, and before the forming of the Continental Army, each of the American colonies had their own militia. The militia was made up of men between the ages of 16 and 45 who were to train together as soldiers for a few months out of every year so that they would be prepared to protect their local towns and villages from invasion. The commanders were usually local government officials or wealthy landowners. Since enlisting in the Continental Army was not a requirement, some men chose to continue to fight in their local militia instead of enlisting.

Militiamen were not paid for their service and they had to supply their own equipment including weapons, clothing, and even food.

The militia supported the Continental Army and played a very important role in the fight against the British Army.

Why do you think someone would choose to be a soldier in the militia over enlisting in the Continental Army?



## What did A Soldier in the American Revolution Look Like?



Why are they Dressed Differently?



## What did they wear?

Both the soldier in the militia and the soldier in the Continental Army would have worn a jacket, knee-breeches, socks, and shoes and all their clothing was made from linen, cotton, or wool. Both would have carried a lot of gear including their haversack and musket. The biggest difference between what they wore was the regimental jacket, the Continental Army's uniform coat of blue and red wool.



## What did they wear?

Using the vocabulary list located below, identify each of the items a soldier would have carried.

Think about carrying all these items as you marched across the colonies and fought in battle and how heavy it must have been. Soldiers carried as little as possible and kept their personal items, such as a journal, a bible, or letters from home to a minimum. In addition to the items necessary as a soldier, what personal items would you want to have with you? Remember, whatever you bring, you have to carry it!

## What did they carry?

Both Continental Soldiers and Militiamen carried bags called haversacks which held their cooking equipment and food. Typically, Militiamen had to provide their own haversacks and would use their own utensils while

Continental soldiers were provided haversacks. Here is an example of some of the items both a militiaman and a continental soldier would have carried.

What items do you see?

What do you think they are made from?

Are any of these like items you use today?

What makes them the same? What makes them different?

What do you think these items would have been used for?



## What did they eat?

A soldier in the militia was able to bring food from home or buy food from a nearby town to feed themselves. A soldier with the Continental Army on the other hand received a ration of food.

A typical ration, when times were good, consisted of 1lb. of beef, 1lb. of bread or flour and a few pints of peas, beans, or vegetables. With these ingredients, a soldier could make a healthy and hearty meal such as the stew pictured here.

There were times when food was scarce, and a soldier did not receive the rations listed above. Where do you think they would get their food? Soldiers would have to find their food in nature. What kinds of food do you think they ate?





## What did they eat?

Soldiers were very happy when they received a ration of beef. Take a look at the rations of beef pictured here, which one looks more appetizing to you? Why?

The ration of beef on the left has been boiled and the one on the right has been grilled. The soldiers preferred to grill their rations but were getting sick from not cooking the beef long enough. George Washington had to require that all beef be boiled instead of grilled to keep his soldiers from getting sick.

Despite the requirement, some soldiers continued to grill their ration of beef because it tasted better!



## What did they eat?

The American Revolution lasted for 7 years and during this time soldiers had their food rations cut because the Army was out of resources. Instead of getting beef and vegetables, the soldiers would have been given only flour. With the flour they would make their own bread and cakes but would not have any other ingredients to mix with it like eggs and sugar. What do you think they would mix the flour with to make breads and cakes? Sometimes the only other ingredient was water. This was much different than the hearty stew they were able to make with the other ingredients.

What do you think a mixture of flour and water tasted like? This was much different than the hearty stew they were able to make with the other ingredients.

How do you think the soldiers felt when they would only receive flour as a food ration?



## The Reality

A soldier would receive their coat, breeches, socks and shoes on the day of their enlistment but after about a year of wearing these items every day, fighting in battles, sleeping in tents, and marching through the colonies, the image to the right is what a typical soldier may have looked like.

It was very difficult to get new items such as socks and shoes, imagine how this soldier must have felt. Sometimes, soldiers would have to wrap their feet with scraps of clothing to keep from freezing in the winter until new shoes could be found. In the worst of times, soldiers might find themselves without enough clothing AND without enough food to eat.

Knowing how difficult it was for a soldier during the American Revolution, do you think you would have enlisted in George Washington's Continental Army, or do you think you would have fought with a militia? Why?

