



National Center for Constitutional Studies

"A primary object should be the education of our youth in the science of government. In a republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important? And what duty more pressing than communicating it to those who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of the country?"
-George Washington



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Dear Friends,

God's Hand Manifest

This is the third in a series, wherein we are recalling from pages of forgotten history the testimony of the colonists of the power of God extended to them for guidance and protection so that this nation could be formed according to His will and for His purposes. These are priceless stories from American history that should be told and retold in every American home today.

The War for American Independence started on April 18, 1775 at Lexington, Massachusetts and continued until September 3, 1783, when the Paris Peace Treaty was signed. During the eight years of war many inspiring events took place, which clearly reveal the hand of Providence.

Lost Testimony Number Eight: George Washington Cannot Be Killed

During July/August 1776 the British sailed some 450 warships and support ships into the New York Harbor to quell the rebellion in the Colonies. These ships contained some 32,000 troops (British and Hessians) as well as 10,000 seamen. This was one of the largest armadas ever assembled in the New World. This awesome sight caused alarm among the citizens of New York and the 20,000 rag-tag citizen army gathered to defend their freedoms.

"And there had been an incident that deeply troubled the German soldiers. On a hot August night, just before they went into action, hundreds of British and Germans had sat around an enormous bonfire, laughing and cheering while four rebel leaders were burned in effigy. The figures of John Witherspoon, President of the College at Princeton, and 'Generals Washington, Israel Putman, and Charles Lee had just been set afire when a wild thunderstorm suddenly interrupted the fun."

"The soldiers dashed for whatever shelter they could find, and after the rain had passed, some of the men returned to the vicinity of the bonfire to discover that three of the dummies had been consumed by the flames but the effigy of George Washington remained intact, as good as it ever was. The symbolism was not lost on the foreigners; as a British deserter relayed the story, the incident caused a great deal of fear among the Hessian troops, most of whom are very superstitious." (The Winter Soldiers, by Richard M. Ketchum, 1973, pp; 107-1 10)

Lost Testimony Number Nine: Americans Miraculously Escape New York

Within twenty-four hours of the bonfire incident, an attack was launched against Washington and his troops on Long Island. The results of which gave the Hessians even more to ponder. The British naval forces attempted to sail up the Long Island sound where they would unload some of their forces and then launch an attack on land, placing Washington and his forces in a pincer trap. However for 24 hours they were unable to sail their ships up the sound because of high winds and waves. Not to be deterred by this they went ahead and launched their land forces and started

their advance up Long Island confident that within several days "this ugly little conflict would be over." By dusk they had driven the Americans and beaten them to the point that the British Commander felt that, "On the morrow he would quickly and decisively end the conflict."

The British could hear the Americans digging their trenches and setting their camps since the prevailing wind was in their favor. However, later in the evening the winds reversed and allowed the Americans to hear the British. Then it started to rain and later that evening a dense fog settled over Long Island. (In August?) Washington had earlier recognized the potential dilemma and requested that boats be gathered in preparation for a retreat should it prove necessary. After the fog settled in, Washington's troops, animals and hardware were ferried across the sound to New York under the cover of the dense fog without being detected. This was done in spite of the fact that they were within shouting distance of the British and Hessians. Early the next morning the British started their advance, only to discover that the rebels had successfully moved out under cover of the fog and darkness. It is hard to imagine a more visible demonstration of Providence's hand than all the incidents surrounding this event.

Lost Testimony Number Ten: "These Are the Times that Try Men's Souls"

Subsequently, the American army was driven out of New York and across New Jersey to the banks of the Delaware, in the process suffering the worst defeat of the Revolutionary War. The loss of the two key forts overlooking the Hudson River, Fort Washington and Fort Lee, were both as a direct result of British Loyalists who were willing to sacrifice them to the British. Over a thousand lives were lost and over two thousand prisoners taken - - these were incarcerated in prison ships where most of them subsequently died. Yet even in the face of defeat, we again see the great influence of "men raised up" and on site at just exactly the right time required to support a righteous cause. Such a man was Thomas Paine. Mr. Paine arrived in America in late 1775 and joined the Army in July 1776. He was with Washington's troops as they were driven from New York and New Jersey:

Paine had left Fort Lee with General Greene and had endured all the hardships of the retreat. Both officers and men, "he related after-ward, though greatly harassed and fatigued, frequently without rest, covering, or provision ... bore it with a manly and martial spirit. All of their wishes were one, which was, that the Country would turn out and help them to drive the enemy back." Having seen and borne it all himself, Paine sensed that there was in this extraordinary exhibition of valor and fortitude a nobility and a source of inspiration for other Americans, if only they could hear about it, and when the army arrived in Newark and paused to draw breath, Paine sat before the campfire at night, peering into the flames and thinking over what had just happened to all of them, and before long he was setting down on paper what he thought the American people should know.

"These are the times that try men's souls," he began. "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis shrink from the service of his Country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated." (Ketchum, pp.209-21 1)

On December 25, 1776, as General Washington was preparing to attack Trenton, he had Mr. Paine's inspirational article read to all his troops. In spite of the fact that the attack was launched in very inclement weather and many of the troops were half naked and bare footed they attacked and won. They had been inspired by both Thomas Paine's writings and General Washington's example. Interestingly the password that evening was "victory or death" which certainly symbolizes the gravity of the situation. Over the next few months over 100,000 copies of Thomas Paine's article would be published - for which he was never remunerated.

Lost Testimony Number Eleven: Miraculous Escape on Frozen and Unknown Roads

On January 3, 1777, after the American victory at Trenton, a powerful British army again felt they had trapped Washington on the banks of the Assunpink River. But once again he and his men were under providential care. Washington's troops were camped on the opposite side of the river from Trenton. Their campfires stretched out along the river for three miles:

"All along the distance men were busily and nosily using their entrenching tools. The weather was again favoring Washington, coinciding with his flanking maneuver. Early in the evening his forces appeared to be trapped in a desperate position opposite a far stronger enemy. I Retreat across the clogged Delaware was out of the question and there were muddy roads on both flanks . . . As the night advanced, it became extremely cold ... The roads which the day before had been mud, snow, and water, were congealed now and had become hard as pavement and solid.

This byroad, which led to the Quaker Bridge Road, was not acknowledged on any map (and in later years would disappear), some stretches of it were mere shortcuts used by persons going from one neighborhood or farm to another. It was a narrow, rough route even in daylight and at some points it was all but impassable for horse drawn wagons and cannon moving through the night. If the sudden plummeting of the temperature had not occurred, passage over this route would have been next to impossible." (The Day is Ours, William M. Dwyer, 1933, pp 331,335).

As a result of the change in weather, Washington was able to bypass the British troops under the cover of darkness and nearly capture their treasury in Princeton before retiring to winter camp at Morristown.

Lost Testimony Number Twelve: British Orders to Kill Rescinded

Another remarkable incident happened that same year at Brandywine when Washington and his troops were trying to stop a British maneuver to capture Philadelphia. It, too, clearly reveals Providence's hand in protecting the life of Washington.

"On; September 10th (1777), he (Washington) had been reconnoitering with Lafayette and both were unconsciously in front of the American lines. Ferguson's rifle company was waiting in ambush and sighted the two enemy officers not 100 yards off. The British captain gave the order to fire, then immediately rescinded it for reasons he himself never clearly understood. Washington rode off untouched, and only after the battle did the riflemen learn the identity of the Americans they had had in their gun sight." (The Battle of Brandywine, sponsored by The Brandywine Battlefield Park Commission and The Chadds Ford Historical Society, 1977) Valley Forge - The Forge Of Tribulation.

Lost Testimony Number Thirteen: Prayer at Valley Forge

Although Valley Forge was not the coldest winter - Morristown was - it must have been one of the most difficult and challenging times for George Washington. Congress was not providing the resources needed, the commissary system had broke down, a majority of his men were sick and unfit for service, many lacked the most basic clothing and shoes and medical supplies were not available for the sick. They sometimes went for days without adequate food, and they were compelled to live in cold, damp, smoked filled and sub-standard log cabins. Most local citizens refused to provide or sell food to them because many were loyalists and because of the lack of value of the continental currency. They rather preferred to sell to the British living in Philadelphia who would pay them in gold. A cabal of military officers was attempting to remove Washington and was undermining his every effort. Many

enlistments were up and the soldiers simply walked away. Although Washington's army exceeded 17,000 men (Feb 1778) the effective rank and file amounted to only 5,012. This statement alone suggests volumes of misery, sickness, destitution, and suffering. In spite of these ugly conditions, Washington remained calm and dedicated to the cause of American Independence. Lesser men would have given up under a token of tribulations through which Washington suffered. One might logically ask, What sustained this great man? The answer is to be found in the Diary and Remembrances, written by the Reverend Nathaniel Randolph Snowden (1770 - 1851), an ordained Presbyterian minister and a graduate of Princeton. In his book he recounts an encounter with Isaac Potts, a Valley Forge resident who was 26 years old at the time of Washington's encampment there. Like most other Quakers, Potts was opposed to the war, but remained at Valley Forge during its occupation by the American forces, supervising the grinding of the grain that Washington ordered neighboring farmers to bring to his army.

"I was riding with him (Mr. Potts) in Montgomery County, Penn'a, near to the Valley Forge, where the Army lay during the war of ye Revolution. Mr. Potts was a Senator in our State & a Whig. I told him I was agreeably surprised to find him a friend to his country as the Quakers were mostly Tories. He said, "It was so and I was rank Tory once, for I never believed that America c'd proceed against Great Britain whose fleets and armies covered the land and ocean, but something very extraordinary converted me to the Good Faith.

"What was that," I inquired? "Do you see that woods, & that plain?" It was a quarter of a mile off from the place we were riding, as it happened. "There," said he, "laid the army of Washington. It was a most distressing time of ye war, and all were for giving up the Ship but that great and good man. In that woods, pointing to a close view, I heard a plaintive sound as, of a man at prayer. I tied my horse to a sapling & went quietly into the woods & to my astonishment I saw George Washington on his knees alone, with his sword on one side and his cocked hat on the other. He was at Prayer to the God of the Armies, beseeching to interpose with his Divine aid, as it was ye Crisis & the cause of the country, of humanity & of the world.

Such a prayer I never heard from the lips of man. I left him alone praying. I went home & told my wife. I saw a sight and heard today what I never saw or heard before, and just related to her what I had seen and heard & observed. We never thought a man c'd be a soldier & a Christian, but if there is one in the world, it is Washington. She also was astonished. We thought it was the cause of God, & America could prevail."

Other sources also record the sighting of Washington praying while at Valley Forge - and elsewhere as well. One such account was an article in The Aldine Press, which was based on the author's conversations with Revolutionary War veterans. In this account, Washington was seen kneeling at silent prayer in a barn where his white horse was kept.

Lost Testimony Number Fourteen: Food Miraculously Provided

It was prayer that sustained him during his darkest hours. The prayers of this great and noble man were not in vain. For example the food problem was eased by direct providential assistance. In the American Heritage Book of The Revolution, written by Bruce Lancaster and J.H. Plumb, first printed in 1963, page 202, we read: the food problem was providentially eased by an unusually early and heavy run of shad up the Schuylkill past Sullivan's lines. With the first warning ripples of crowded fins breaking the surface, men plunged into the river armed with pitchforks, shovels, baskets, and broken branches to heave the squirming fish onto the soggy banks. Other details rushed up barrel sand salt to store away the ever-increasing surplus. When it seemed likely that the run would sweep out of reach upstream, Major Henry Lee's Virginia dragoons charged into the river and milled their horses about. The rush was checked, and a long stretch of the Schuylkill became a seething mass of Shad, an inexhaustible supply depot that writhed and jumped and twisted. There were tons of fresh fish to eat, tons more

to be salted down against possible lean weeks ahead."

In his marvelous little book, *Being A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, of A Revolutionary Soldier* originally published in 1830, Joseph Plumb Martin, an enlisted man throughout most of the Revolutionary War records his experiences. It is perhaps one the most valuable diaries of the war. On the night December 18, 1777 Joseph marched into Valley Forge and afterward recorded of his experiences there:

"But we were now absolutely in danger of perishing, and that too, in the midst of a plentiful country. We then had but little and often nothing to eat for days together; but now we had nothing and saw no likelihood of any betterment of our condition. Had there fallen deep snows (and it was the time of year to expect them) or even heavy and long rainstorms, the whole army must inevitably have perished. Or had the enemy, strong and well provided as he was, thought fit to pursue us, our poor emaciate carcasses must have 'strewed the plain.' But a kind and holy Providence took more notice and better care of us than did the country in whose services we were wearing away our lives by piecemeal." (Ibid, pages 102 -103)

It was certainly true had they had snow and cold like at Morristown or had it rained excessively the death rates would have been much higher. It was also during this time that General Von Steuben arrived on the scene. He was instrumental in training the troops into an effective fighting force capable of dealing with the British and the Hessians. Also at that time, as a result of the efforts of Benjamin Franklin, the French agreed to join with us in the struggle against England. These two events proved to be significant during subsequent events. The furnace of affliction through which Washington and his army under went while at Valley Forge hardened and gave them new resolve. They marched out of Valley Forge a well-trained and disciplined army capable of defeating the greatest power in the world. Whereas disease and sickness thinned the Americans, indolence and luxury perhaps did no less injury to the British troops in Philadelphia. It is literally the contrast between virtue and vice. The final result shows that Providence in permitting the occupation of Philadelphia by the British army was really promoting the cause of human liberty.

Lost Testimony Number Fifteen: A Storm Prevents Escape of Cornwallis

The concluding scenes of the Revolutionary War provide another good example of providential assistance of the Americans. General Cornwallis had moved his army to Yorktown, Virginia. General Washington recognizing the opportunity to capture Cornwallis immediately departed for Virginia. In the battle of Yorktown, Washington and General Rochambeau mounted a land siege, which began on September 28. By October 16, Cornwallis recognized his only alternative was to retreat across the York River and escape up the coast.

In prosecution of this perilous enterprise the light infantry, most of the guards, and a part of the Twenty-third regiment embarked in boats, passed the river, and landed at Gloucester point before midnight. A storm then arose, which rendered the return of the boats and the transportation of the rest of the troops equally impractical. In that divided state of the British forces the morning of the 17th of October (1 78 1) dawned, when the batteries of the combined armies opened on the garrison at Yorktown. As the attempt to escape was entirely defeated by the storm, the troops that had been carried to Gloucester point were brought back in the course of the forenoon without much loss, though the passage was exposed to the artillery of the besiegers. The British works were in ruins, the garrison was weakened by disease and death, and exhausted by incessant fatigue. Every ray of hope was extinguished. It would have been madness any longer to attempt to defend the post and to expose the brave garrison to the danger of an assault, which would soon have been made on the place.

At 10 in the forenoon of the 17th Cornwallis sent a flag of truce with a letter to Washington, proposing a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours, in order to give time to adjust terms for the surrender of the forts at Yorktown and Gloucester point. To this letter Washington immediately returned an answer, expressing his

ardent desire to spare the further effusion of blood and his readiness to listen to such terms as Were admissible, but that he could not consent to lose time in fruitless negotiations (Lossing, Volume 3, pp. 1432-1433). Had the weather not changed, foreclosing General Cornwallis' fast exit, the war could have had an entirely different ending. The surrender of Cornwallis on October 19, 1781, effectively ended the shooting. Two years later, September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, formally ending the war.

"Proclaim Liberty Throughout All The Land"

Over the past three months we have attempted to share the testimonies of the Founding Fathers with you. The Founders are not here in our day, but have left some powerful written convictions concerning the hand of God in the founding of America. Can you not feel the power of their witnesses in these stories? Are these not the testimonies they would bear if they were here? Shall we not reacquaint ourselves and our children with these great stories? They will not get many of them in school.

Thank you for your support of NCCS and our mission to remind America of the real Root and Foundation of our great land.

Sincerely,

Earl Taylor, Jr.

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