

Young Patriots

The British government established militias in the colonies after the French and Indian War to alleviate the need to garrison expensive regular soldiers in the colonies. All military aged males, aged 16 to 45, were required to serve in the militia and maintain the necessary arms and equipment for military service.

An enduring myth is that liberty-loving farmers, settlers, and shopkeepers banded together and defeated the British army through sheer determination during the Revolutionary War. Although citizen militias played an important role in the conflict, the fledgling nation fielded a formal military force known as the Continental Army.

Congress initially opposed a standing army. The First Continental Congress feared that a standing army could be used as an instrument of tyranny. This attitude changed after the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

The Continental Army was established by the Second Continental Congress after the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord and predates George Washington's assumption of command outside of Boston in July 1775. As important as the militiamen were, and though they were the most numerous American participants in the war, Continental forces were the backbone of the struggle almost from the beginning.

Prior to 1777, enlistment in the Continental Army was of various durations but generally for a year of service. After 1778, Congress changed the rules and men served for either three years or the duration of the war.

Private Joseph Plumb Martin of the Continental Army, wrote that though "on particular occasions" militia might serve well, "they would not have endured the sufferings the army did ... and when the hardships of fatigue, starvation, cold and nakedness ... begun to seize upon them ... they would have instantly quitted the service in disgust." (Geist, Colonial Williamsburg)

In some cases, bounties were paid to entice men to enlist or for men who chose to serve longer. Bounties could consist of additional money, additional clothing, or land west of the Ohio River, where many veterans would settle after the war.

Most men who served in the Continental Army were between the ages of 15 and 30. Those who served in the Army were merchants, mechanics, and farmers.

Life in the Continental Army was difficult I it as also monotonous and mundane. Generally, when not engaged in combat, soldiers in the Continental Army served three duties: fatigue or manual labor, such as digging vaults (latrines), clearing fields, or erecting fortifications. They also served on guard duty and drilled daily with their musket and in marching formations.

Reveille was typically at daybreak and soldiers cooked one meal per day, generally around 3 pm. Whatever food was left over from the meal, soldiers divided and placed in their haversacks to be consumed as needed.

Rations were determined by Congress. Each man received 1.5 pounds of meat per day, typically beef. Each hunk they received included not only the meat, but bone, fat, and gristle. They also received one pound of bread per day, which was baked daily inside the camp, or 1.5 pounds of flour to make firecakes.

(Firecakes were like pancakes. Soldiers heated a flat rock, then mixed the flour with water, meat, gristle, and poured the mixture on the heated rock, then would flip it over to cook the other side.) (Battlefields Trust)

Drummers were very important in the warfare of the Revolution. Their various beats gave the soldiers orders in camp, on the march and in a battle. An officer's voice often could not be heard above the booming muskets and cannon. Drumbeats ordered flank attacks, retreats and other maneuvers. The drummers were as exposed to the bullets that were flying from the enemy's guns as the soldiers. (Flemming, Journal of the American Revolution)



Over 230,000 soldiers served in the Continental Army during the American Revolution, although no more than 48,000 at any one time. The largest number of troops gathered in a single place for battle was 13,000.

Between 1775 and 1783, the Continental Army fought numerous skirmishes and minor engagements as well as more than a dozen major full-blown set-piece battles against British and Hessian forces.

The fledgling army won slightly more than half the battles ranging from South Carolina to upstate New York. Important victories include Saratoga, Trenton, Cowpens, and Yorktown.

The Continental Army was mustered out of service by early 1784. Only a small token of 80 soldiers remained on active duty. The following year, the First American Infantry Regiment was created. It consisted of eight infantry companies and two artillery batteries. This unit was enlarged a decade later and renamed the Legion of the United States.

The army accepted volunteers as young as 16. A 15-year-old could join with a parent's permission. Private Joseph Martin was fifteen when he enlisted, artilleryman Jeremiah Levering entered the service at twelve or thirteen, and hundreds more under the legal age of sixteen served in all services. Some notable younger Patriots (age at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776):

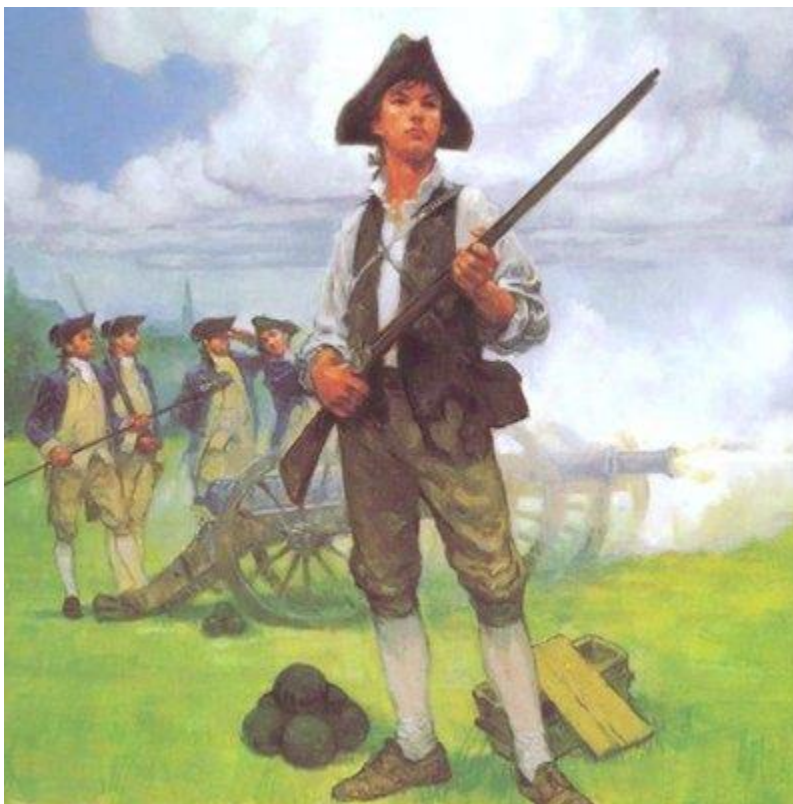
Boys:

Andrew Jackson (age 9) - While Andrew Jackson may have been too young to enlist when the Revolutionary War first began, when he was 13 years old, the future president of the United States served as a patriot courier in the Revolutionary War. He was captured by British soldiers. After the war he went on to become a hero in the War of 1812, a successful lawyer, and the seventh American President.

Ebenezer Fox (age 12) came from a poor family in Roxbury, Massachusetts. His parents had “bound him out” to work on a neighbor’s farm. He decided the Revolutionary excitement gave him a perfect excuse to run away and “set up a government of my own.” He and a friend headed for Providence, Rhode Island, where they were hired as sailors on an American ship.

Joseph Plumb Martin (age 15) persuaded his grand-parents, with whom he lived, to let him join the army in 1776. He fought in many notable battles, served in George Washington's Continental Army, and fought for the duration of the war.

James Armistead (age 15) was born a slave but worked as a spy under Marquis de Lafayette during the war. His important intel from General Cornwallis and Benedict Arnold led to an American victory at the Battle of Yorktown. Armistead successfully petitioned for his freedom in 1787, after the conclusion of the American Revolution.



William Diamond (age 15) signed up as drummer boy in the Lexington, Massachusetts, militia company. On April 19, 1775, William Diamond beat “to arms” on his brightly painted drum. That sound brought 70 militiamen to confront approaching British regulars. Young Diamond was in the ranks when the first shots of the war were fired.

Peter Salem, (age 16) was a Massachusetts slave who was freed in order to serve in the local militia. Soon thereafter, Salem enlisted in the Continental Army under George Washington and was named a hero in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

James Monroe was about 18 when the colonies declared independence. He dropped out of college in 1776 to join the Continental Army and fought alongside George Washington and Thomas Jefferson for American independence. After the war, he studied law under Thomas Jefferson; he later became the fifth President of the United States.

Charles Pinckney (age 18) fought in the American Revolution and was captured and held prisoner by the British. He repeatedly refused British demands to defect to the Loyalist cause and remained incarcerated until a prisoner exchange was arranged. After regaining his freedom, Pinkney practiced law, served in the Continental Congress, signed the US Constitution, and became governor of South Carolina.

Marquis de Lafayette (age 18) learned what was going on in the newly declared United States in 1777; he traveled from France to America to join the Revolution. He was commissioned as a Major General at age 19. Not only did the French general become an invaluable ally to the US, but he also fought alongside George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson to ensure a successful and fruitful American victory. Upon his return to France, Lafayette was nicknamed the “Hero of Two Worlds” for his valiant efforts abroad and at home.

Girls:

Deborah Sampson (age 15) disguised herself as a man so she could join the Massachusetts military. During her tenure in the Patriot forces she led dangerous expeditions, dug trenches, and helped capture 15 Loyalists. She kept her true identity hidden for two years until doctors caring for her discovered she was a woman. Soon thereafter Sampson was honorably discharged.

Sybil Ludington (age 15), the daughter of one of General George Washington's aids, successfully rode her horse for 40 miles to warn American soldiers of an impending British attack. The most popular account of her valor was written by Ludington's great-nephew in 1907. He says her father “bade her to take a horse, ride for the men, and tell them to be at his house by daybreak.” A commemorative statue of Ludington's ride was erected in Carmel, New York in 1961.



Information here is primarily from a listing by Todd Andrlik in Business Insider; Christopher Geist; Thomas Flemming in Journal of the American Revolution and background information from Battlefields Trust and Boston Tea Party Ship.

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young