

## A Soldier's Life

Directions: Use the article “A Soldier’s Life” to answer the following questions in **COMPLETE SENTENCES**:

5. How much food was rationed to a soldier for one day?

6. What were some ways the soldiers passed the time between battles?

7. What jobs did women do on or near the battlefield?

8. Why is Mary Ludwig Hays famous?

*What is the coldest you've ever been? Think about it for a moment. Now imagine yourself ten times colder, sleeping outside in the dead of winter. Can you see yourself taking a ten-mile hike with only rags wrapped around your feet, or firing a ten-ton cannon all day long in one-hundred-degree heat? All this was part of ...*

# A SOLDIER'S LIFE

**T**he soldiers who fought for America's freedom during the Revolution had it tough. They fought in blistering heat. They crossed chest-deep streams in howling blizzards, then kept on marching in freezing, wet uniforms. They frequently ran out of food and some tried to live on tree bark and shoe leather. As one officer put it, "Many a good lad with nothing to cover him from his hips to his toes save his blanket," kept on fighting. How did they do it?

## BOYS TO MEN

They came from the busy streets of Boston or the pastures of Pennsylvania. Some were barely sixteen. Others were grizzled old men nearer sixty. But America's men (and some women disguised as men) answered the call to fight for freedom.

Before war broke out, every colony had a militia—a kind of once-in-a-while army. But each militia had their own way of doing things. When a militia from Vermont got together with a group from New Jersey, no one knew what the other was doing. Confusion was costing lives. The first challenge George Washington faced as head of the Continental Army was blending all the different militias into one united fighting force. In 1776, after he begged for money from the Continental Congress, a real army was born. Every state had to send a large group of soldiers to help fight the war. Each soldier could be paid the grand sum of \$6.67 a month.

## WHAT TO WEAR

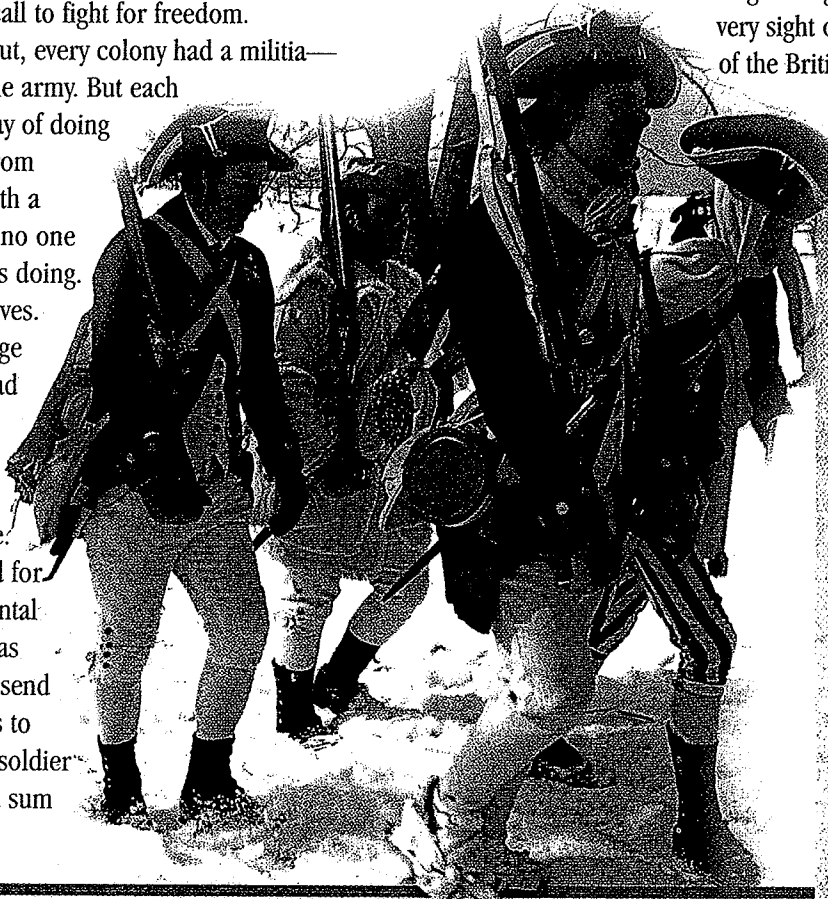
One of the first problems the new soldiers faced was what to wear. No one could decide on a color for the uniforms. The first soldiers were issued brown jackets, but soon a blue coat (trimmed in different colors depending on where the soldier came from) replaced it. Uniforms were expensive and wore out quickly. Something cheaper was needed. One answer came from a group of born-to-be-wild Pennsylvania riflemen. They wore rugged hunting shirts made from deerskin or homespun cloth.

The shirts were cheap to make, cool in the summer, and when pulled on over a couple of shirts, warm in the winter. That shirt became one of the new army's most useful bits of clothing. George Washington found out that the very sight of it struck terror into the hearts of the British who had had some fierce encounters with those wild riflemen in the past.

## SURPRISING HISTORY

When American soldiers weren't fighting the British, they sometimes ended up fighting each other. It was hard to maintain discipline in the army camps, so some pretty tough punishments were used.

One brutal punishment had the misbehaving soldier straddle a wooden sawhorse with two heavy muskets tied to each leg. This was painful after a few minutes—awful after an hour!



## MUSIC IN THE AIR



You may have seen pictures of drummer boys leading Revolutionary soldiers into battle. Those musicians weren't there for the troops' entertainment. There were seven different drumbeats used, each signaling a different action. One drumbeat woke sleeping soldiers at dawn; another signaled that it was time to get ready to march. A special beat was drummed at bedtime and another warned that an enemy was approaching. Soldiers quickly learned what each signal meant if they wanted to survive.

## YOU EXPECT ME TO EAT THAT?



Army food was flat-out awful. And that was on good days when there was actually food to eat! Groups of six soldiers shared provisions and a big heavy cast-iron kettle which they lugged from spot to spot. While on the march, each soldier got a mangy pound of beef and some flour. That was his ration

for the day. The meat was stuck on a stick and cooked over a fire. The flour was turned into firecakes, a much-hated food item. Flour was mixed with water on a cold rock, then pounded until it turned into a paste. The rock was then placed next to the fire. Burned on the outside, raw on the inside, you had to be really hungry to eat a firecake. Soldiers looked forward to longer encampments when the food was more varied and there was time to bake real bread.

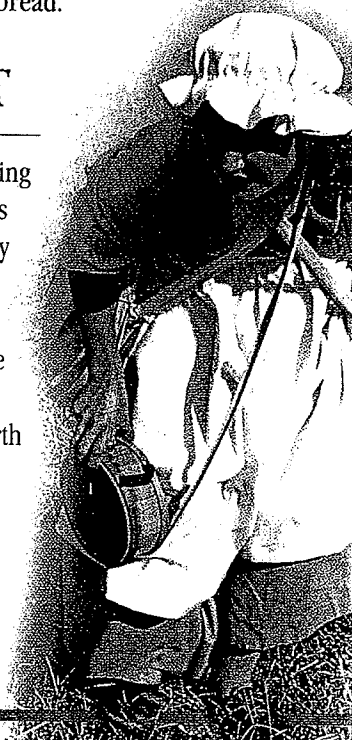


## TENT, SWEET TENT



During those long encampments, especially during the winter months, the men chopped down trees and built log huts. There were 900 built at Valley Forge. Morristown, in New Jersey, had almost 1,200. On short quick marches, soldiers pitched tents that slept six—as long as you were packed like sardines. Sometimes soldiers slept under the stars as they made their way from north to south.

To pass the time between battles, the men played dice and cards. They read tattered newspapers, some many months old, that were passed around like precious treasures. They also prayed for a fast and lasting peace.



*Colonial men in homespun hunting shirts fought side by side with men in fancier uniforms.*



## A WOMAN'S WAR

You might think of a battlefield as a place for men only. But many women stayed with their men during the American Revolution. Some even brought their children! Mostly the women cooked and mended torn uniforms. But some fought bravely in battle by pretending to be men. Others worked behind the scenes nursing the wounded and dying.

Mary Ludwig Hays was one of the most famous women of Revolutionary days. You may know her as Molly Pitcher. On a June afternoon in 1778, it was so brutally hot that soldiers were passing out. Molly (her nickname) grabbed a battered old pitcher and started running between the battlefield and a nearby stream. Parched men croaked out her name, "Molly! Pitcher!"

Molly was a dynamo. When her husband was hit by enemy fire, she helped carry him to the surgeon's tent, then ran back and started firing her husband's cannon. Through the whole of that blisteringly hot day, she stood her ground. Happily, when the battle ended, she found that her husband was okay.

There were hundreds of Molly Pitchers during the American Revolution and many a life was saved by these brave young women.