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Revolutionary War 1778–1783: Pensions

By Jeannette Austin

The American Revolutionary War began in Massachusetts on April 19, 1775. The date of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia was July 4, 1775.

General Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia on October 19, 1781, with the peace treaty being signed in 1783.

After the war ended, provisions for benefits to veterans were established, in 1789. Many of the first applications, however, were destroyed by fire in 1800 and again in 1814. A partial record of earlier pensioners does exist for 1792, 1794 and 1795, in Reports to Congress. Here is how the pensions went:

1. Invalid pensioners who were disabled prior to 8/26/1776 (and since 4/19/1775). The Act of 1782 extending the provisions found that there were 1500 (invalid) pensioners on the rolls.
2. Half–pay for life went to officers, and widows of those officers. This began in 1780; then in 1788 Congress granted seven years half–pay to officers who served at the end of the war.
3. 2,480 officers received Commutation Certificates, however, delayed payments existed.
4. The Law of 1818 provided that every indigent person who had served to the war's close, or for nine months or longer, would receive a pensions. When the law was rewritten in 1820, many names were removed from the pension rolls because they were not indigent.
5. In 1832 most of the benefits were stripped.

By 1867 most of the pensioners on the rolls were dead, even though two names went on the rolls thereafter. The last old soldier to die was Daniel F. Bakeman, who died 4/15/1869, at the age of 109 years. In 1869, there were 887 widows on the rolls. And, believe it or not, in 1906, there was still one widow on the pension list. She was Esther S. Damon, who died 11/11/1906.

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Estimates are that 20,485 soldiers were granted pensions in 1818, and 1,200 in 1828, and 33,425 in 1832.

In 1789 the Federal Government assumed responsibility of the State's invalid pensions for soldiers on the Continental Line, and in 1804 they assumed all S. C. Invalid pensions, Continental Line.

Sources of Research at Family History Centers:

Family History Centers have on microfilm "Miscellaneous Numbered Records (the Manuscript File) of the Revolutionary War. This includes 35,000 documents such as letters, pay accounts, oaths of allegiance, pensions, and enlisted papers. 125 reels of microfilm. The index is on 39 reels of microfilm. American Prisoners of the Revolution by Dandridge, film #0844970

Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers Who Served During the Revolutionary War in

Organizations from the State of North Carolina, A–Q, film #0821595. R–Z, film #0821596

Index to the Names of the Braunschweig Corps Who Remained in America, 1776–1783, film #1036138

Index to the Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789, by John P. Buter, Vol. 1–3, film #1035704. Vol. 4–5, film #1035705.

Pension Books at most Archives:

The Pension Index, alphabetical by surname, lists State, pension no., etc. If the soldier applied and receive a pension his pension number was prefixed by "S". If his widow received his pension, prefix was "W", and if the pension was rejected, prefix was "R". It is worthwhile reading the rejected pensions, because this provides genealogical data, as well as all the applications.

Pensions are great sources of information – they contain

1. Soldier's name, rank, where enlisted, battles fought in, etc.
2. Wife's name (or widow), date and place of marriage.
3. Bible records of family members, as sometimes indigent "children" took up the pension.
4. Place of residence of soldier, when enlisting, when applying, and other family members.
5. Date of death of soldier (widow's pension).

All of the Revolutionary War Pensions have been abstracted and are at most Archives. These are large books and include a number of volumes. Also, the Federal Archives have the original pensions on microfilm....reading these (as opposed to the abstracts) is quite interesting, because of details of exciting battles, and personal information.

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I have traced personal genealogies for over 40 years, mostly on those ancestors from Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. As a result, huge databases emerged. Additionally, in order to share the information, I have written over 75 books pertaining to family genealogies and research. These books may be found in regional libraries and State Archives in the United States. My current websites also house tons of genealogical data.

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Jeannette Holland Austin

A Lasting Leadership Lesson: George Washington's Greatest Leadership Talk

By Brent Filson

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Summary: The most important victory of the Revolutionary War was not achieved at Saratoga or Yorktown, but in a log hut in 1783 when George Washington put an end to a rebellion by his troops by giving a soft-spoken "Leadership Talk".

A Lasting Leadership Lesson: How One Leadership Talk By George Washington Saved The Revolution (And Our Fledgling Nation) From Catastrophe.

By Brent Filson

Leadership lessons come in many guises. One unforgettable lesson comes from George Washington and his contribution to the most important victory of the Revolutionary War.

That victory occurred neither at Saratoga or Yorktown but in a log hut in 1783 with a few heartfelt words that literally changed the world. And it's not just a history lesson, it's a leadership lesson — for all leaders.

To realize what took place in that hut and its historical importance, we must understand what a Leadership Talk is and what was at stake at that moment in 1783 for America?

As to the Leadership Talk: There's a big difference between speeches/presentations on one hand and Leadership Talks on the other. Whereas a speech or a presentation communicates information, Leadership Talks do something more: It establishes a deep, human, emotional connection with the audience.

The Leadership Talk is a much more effective means of leadership communication. If Washington hadn't given a Leadership Talk in the log hut with this assembled officers, who were on the verge of revolt, the Revolution would have ended right then and there; and the history of America would have been far different.

As to what was at stake at that moment in history: This occurred a year and a half after the battle of Yorktown. Popular misconception has the Revolutionary War ending at that battle. However, in reality, the War continued to drag on; and as it did, the Continental Army became increasingly rebellious. Most of the troops hadn't been paid in at least two years. Their promised pensions were not forthcoming. Popular sentiment in the army was gathering to overthrow the Continental Congress and install a military government.

On the ides of March in 1783, dozens of officers, representing every company in the army, met in a log hut to vote on taking this action when George Washington suddenly and unexpectedly walked in. He gave a speech denouncing the rebellious course they were on. But it wasn't the speech that carried the day; it was the Leadership Talk at the end of the speech. Witnesses report that Washington's speech left many officers unconvinced, and when he was finished, there was much angry muttering among them. To bolster his case, the general pulled out a letter he recently received from a member of the Continental Congress. As he began reading, his usual confident air gave way to hesitancy.

Then, unexpectedly, he drew out a spectacle case from his pocket. Few officers had ever seen him put on spectacles. Usually a severely formal man, he said in a voice softened with apology: "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.

The deep, human, emotional power of that moment can hardly be described. It electrified the officers.

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Here was their commander who had never taken a furlough during his eight years of command, who had faced storms of musketry fire, who through his daring and intelligence had kept the Army in tact in what most of the world thought was a lost cause, here was George Washington modestly asking his officers to bear with him in an all-too-human failing. It was an astonishing turning point.

As Maj. Samuel Shaw, who was present, wrote in his journal, "There was something so natural, so unaffected in this appeal as rendered it superior to the most studied oratory. It forced its way to the heart, and you might see sensibility moisten every eye."

After Washington left the hut, the officers unanimously voted to "continue to have unshaken confidence in the justice of the Congress and their country" The result was that the Continental Army disbanded without incident after the War formally ended a few months later and thereby set in motion the peaceful events that led to the creation of the Constitution.

Without Washington's intervention, America may very well have become a kind of banana republic, at the mercy of thousands of armed and angry soldiers and their officers. And it wasn't his speech that did it, it was a Leadership Talk.

Washington's Talk is a lesson for all leaders: The best way to communicate an idea is to bundle it in a human being. If you can't feel it, you can't lead it, and they won't do it.

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The author of 23 books, Brent Filson's recent books are, **THE LEADERSHIP TALK: THE GREATEST LEADERSHIP TOOL** and **101 WAYS TO GIVE GREAT LEADERSHIP TALKS**. He is founder and president of The Filson Leadership Group, Inc. has been helping leaders of top companies worldwide get audacious results. Sign up for his free leadership e-zine and get a free white paper: "49 Ways To Turn Action Into Results," at www.actionleadership.com



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