

America's Story

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U.S. Presidents ▶ George Washington



What a find!



George Washington on horseback, fighting during the battle of the Monongahela, 1755

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George Washington the Soldier

At 16, Washington helped survey and plot the lands of Lord Fairfax, who owned more than 5 million acres in northern Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley. After surveying for a few years, he was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in 1754 and fought in the French and Indian War. In 1755, he was serving as an aide to British General Edward Braddock at a fateful battle in Pennsylvania on July 9. That day the British made an attempt to capture Fort Duquesne.

George Washington had been sick during most of the month of June but he insisted on joining the battle. The British suffered a terrible defeat that day. Out of 1,459 soldiers, almost 1,000 were killed or wounded. The French and their Indian allies routed the British who were not accustomed to the guerrilla warfare style of combat. General Braddock was killed, and Washington had to help lead the Virginians and British in retreat to safety. Do you think this experience was frightening to the young cavalry officer?





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Washington passing the Delaware, December 25, 1776

George Washington the Soldier

Washington kept a record of his life, in letters and journals. Ten days after the battle he wrote a letter to his mother, Mary Ball Washington. He said that he had escaped uninjured but "I had four Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me."

No doubt Mrs. Washington was worried about her son, but he proved to be an excellent soldier. Washington was made commander of all Virginia troops. Due to difficult circumstances and hardships in the wild, Washington became very ill and his doctor insisted he go home to his estate in Virginia to recover.

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An engraving of George Washington

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George Washington the Soldier

Washington recovered from his illness, and then returned to lead the Virginia army. He attained the rank of brigadier general and was a major factor in Britain's defeat of the French and capture of Fort Duquesne (renamed Fort Pitt by the British) in 1758. Immediately after his return to Virginia, Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis on January 6, 1759.

Wilderness fighting had made Washington a trained military man. This training helped prepare him for his greatest military challenge--leading the American revolutionary forces as commander in chief during the fight for independence that began in 1775 with the Battle of Lexington and Concord.



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