



Revolutionary War: Soldier's Perspective

Analysis

Aim

*What was life like for a soldier during the American Revolution?
What can this tell us about Revolutionary War America?*

Directions: You have been assigned to learn about one aspect of the life of a soldier during the American Revolution by reading an excerpt of a primary source. Read your selection and answer the analysis questions that follow. When you are done, you will share information with three classmates who read other selections. Together, fill out the table below and answer the two analysis questions that follow.

<i>Aspects</i>	What was promised	What was actually received
Food Rations		
Clothing		
Payment		
Post-War Promises		

Analysis Questions:

- 1) Based on the four excerpts, how would you describe the young men who signed up to join the Revolutionary Army?
- 2) Based on the four excerpts, did the US Congress and US Army keep their promises to the young men who joined the Revolutionary Army? What does this suggest to you about the financial state of America during and after the war?

Primary Source: [A Narrative of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary War Soldier](#) by Joseph Plumb Martin (1830)

Joseph Plumb Martin enlisted in the Continental Army in 1776, and served in New York and Connecticut during the American Revolution. In this excerpt, he recalls the hardships that soldiers experienced on the line and after they were discharged.

During the War: Clothing

1 They were likewise promised the following articles of clothing per year. One uniform coat, a
2 woolen and a linen waistcoat, four shirts, four pair of shoes, four pair of stockings, a pair of
3 woolen and a pair of linen overalls, a hat or a leather cap, a stock for the neck, a hunting shirt, a
4 pair of shoe buckles, and a blanket....But what did we ever receive of all these promises — why,
5 perhaps a coat (we generally did get that) and one or two shirts, the same of shoes and
6 stockings, and, indeed, the same may be said of every other article of clothing—a few dribbled
7 out in a regiment, two or three times a year, never getting a whole suit at a time, and all of the
8 poorest quality, and blankets of thin baize [woolen], thin enough to have straws shot through
9 without discommoding the threads. How often have I had to lie whole stormy, cold nights in a
10 wood, on a field, or a bleak hill, with such blankets and other clothing like them, with nothing but
11 the canopy of the heavens to cover me. All this too in the heart of winter, when a New England
12 farmer, if his cattle had been in my situation, would not have slept a wink from the sheer anxiety
13 for them. And if I stepped into a house to warm me, when passing, wet to the skin and almost
14 dead with cold, hunger, and fatigue, what scornful looks and hard words have I experienced...

Analysis Questions:

- 1) *Close Reading:* How many pieces of clothing were soldiers promised?
- 2) *Close Reading:* To what extent did the American soldiers receive the clothing that they were promised?
- 3) *Analysis:* According to lines 13 and 14, do you think that American soldiers receive warm welcome in the homes of American citizens? What does this tell you about support for the war among Americans?
- 4) *Sourcing and Contextualization:* Do you trust this source? What might the author have been biased by?

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During the War: Food Rations

1 If we had got our full allowance regularly, what was it? A bare pound of fresh beef and a bare
2 pound of bread. The beef that we got in the army ...had not much fat upon it and very little
3 lean. When we were given bread, which was much of the time we were in the field or on
4 marches, it was of small value, being eaten half-cooked...
5
6 When in the field, and often while in winter quarters...for seven days, we received four days of
7 meat and the whole seven days of bread. At the expiration of the four days, the other three
8 days allowance of beef. Now, dear reader, consider a moment, how were five men, five hearty,
9 hungry young men, to subsist four days on twenty pounds of fresh beef (and I might say
10 sometimes only twelve or fifteen pounds) without any vegetables or any other kind of sauce. In
11 the hottest season of the year it was the same. Though there was not much danger of our
12 provisions decaying, we had none on hand long enough for that, if it did, we obliged to eat it, or
13 go without anything. When General Washington told Congress, "the soldiers eat every kind of
14 horse fodder (food) but hay" he might have gone a little farther and told them that they eat
15 considerable hog's fodder (food)...

Analysis Questions:

- 1) *Close Reading:* What was the full allowance of food provided to the soldiers?
- 2) *Close Reading:* To what extent did the American soldiers receive the full allowance of food they were promised?
- 3) *Analysis:* Revolutionary war soldiers often marched miles at a time to get to the next campsite or battle ground. Do you think the food provided was sufficient for the tasks they were expected to do? Why/why not?
- 4) *Sourcing and Contextualization:* Do you trust this source? What might the author have been biased by?

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During the War: Payment



1 We were, also, promised six dollars and two thirds a month^{*}, to be paid us monthly, and how
2 did we fare? Why, as we did in every other. I received the dollars and two thirds, till (if I
3 remember rightly) the month of August, 1777, when paying ceased. And what was six dollars
4 and sixty-seven cents of this "Continental currency," as it was called, worth? It was scarcely
5 enough to procure a man a dinner. I received one month's pay in currency while on the march
6 to Virginia, in the year 1781, and except that, I never received any pay worth the name while I
7 belonged to the army. Had I been paid as I was promised to be at my engaging in the service, I
8 needed not to have suffered as I did, Had I known I would not get paid, I would not have done
9 it; there was enough in the country and money would have procured it if I had the opportunity
10 to pursue it it. It is provoking to think of it. The country was rigorous in exacting my compliance
11 to my engagements to a point, but equally careless in performing her contracts with me, and
12 why so?

**In today's dollars, that would be about \$170 per month*

Analysis Questions:

- 1) *Close Reading:* What was the full payment promised to the soldiers?
- 2) *Close Reading:* To what extent did the author get compensated by the American congress while participating in the war?
- 3) *Analysis:* Based on the soldiers statements in lines 8 - 10, what do you think motivated him to join the Revolutionary Army? What does this suggest to you about the type of men who signed up for the Revolutionary Army?
- 4) *Analysis:* What does the lack of payment suggest to you about the finances of America during the revolutionary war?
- 5) *Sourcing and Contextualization:* Do you trust this source? What might the author have been biased by?

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Post-War Promises



1 When those who engaged to serve during the war enlisted, they were promised a hundred
2 acres of land, each, which was to be in their or the adjoining states. When the country had
3 drained the last drop of service it could screw out of the poor soldiers, they were turned adrift
4 like old worn-out horses, and nothing said about land to pasture them upon. Congress did,
5 indeed, appropriate lands under the denomination of "Soldier's Lands," in Ohio state, or
6 some state, or a future state, but no care was taken that the soldiers should get them. No
7 agents were appointed to see that the poor fellows ever got possession of their lands; no one
8 ever took the least care about it, except a pack of speculators, who were driving about the
9 country like so many evil spirits, endeavoring to pluck the last feather from the soldiers. The
10 soldiers were ignorant of the ways and means to obtain their bounty lands, and there was no
11 one appointed to inform them. The truth was, none cared for them...

Analysis Questions:

- 1) *Close Reading:* What was the promise to the soldiers regarding land grants after the war?
- 2) *Close Reading:* To what extent did Congress keep their promises about land grants post-war?
- 3) *Analysis:* What does the lack of organization and land grants made tell you about the organization of the US Congress after the Revolutionary War?
- 4) *Analysis:* To what extent do you think the promise of land motivated young men to sign up for the Revolutionary Army? What does this suggest to you about the type of men who signed up for the Revolutionary Army?
- 5) *Sourcing and Contextualization:* Do you trust this source? What might the author have been biased by?