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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**WHY FOLLOW WASHINGTON?  
A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY, AND WHAT HIS EXAMPLE IN THE  
FRENCH AND INDIAN AND AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WARS CAN SHOW MILITARY  
OFFICERS TODAY**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

MAJOR STEVEN M. PIACENTE, USMC

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Why Follow Washington? A Study of Leadership in the Face of Adversity, and What His Example in the French and Indian and American Revolutionary Wars Can Show Military Officers Today.

**Author:** Major Steven M. Piacente, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** George Washington's ability to lead by precept and example offers powerful tools for sustained leadership, and military officers of today can reflect on and internalize his extraordinary character and principled leadership for the very positive purpose of becoming even better military officers.

**Discussion:** Today's economic, political, and military environments are very challenging and require effective leadership. Good leadership is essential for the governance of society; without good leaders, a society would fail. There are many lessons on leadership that can be learned from George Washington that have validity and currency today. It is essential that the country invests its time and resources in developing principled leaders. The Nation's future civilian and military leaders are fortunate to have many great examples, both dead and alive, to study, analyze, and question the elements that were essential to that individual's success or failure. It is essential to learn how these leaders navigated their lives and what was it about them that made them such effective leaders. There is something unique about Washington that sets him apart from other influential leaders. The principles and virtues that appealed to and inspired Washington's men during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution at places like Fort Mifflin, Fort Mifflin, Cambridge, Trenton, Princeton, and Newburgh, can be studied by and instilled in today's leaders to become more effective. The mission always comes first, and by setting the example and maintaining high moral standards, a competent leader can lead his or her people to achieve mission accomplishment. Leadership is a dynamic process and continuous learning is essential to address the challenges of higher command. A leader understands that leadership is about inspiring trust and confidence of both subordinates and superiors through respect and competency. A leader knows his or her people--their capabilities, their strengths, their weaknesses, and knows how to set aside cultural, religious, and political differences to appeal to their virtues to reach the desired goals. A leader must lead by high principle. By following George Washington's profound sense of duty, his willingness to assume increasingly complex responsibilities, and his values of honor, courage, commitment, and integrity, today's military officers can improve their leadership skills and become more effective military leaders.

**Conclusion:** There are many military and civilian leaders throughout history who can be studied and emulated, but George Washington's ability to successfully lead by precept and example in the face of tremendous adversity offers powerful tools for sustained leadership. These tools can be studied and translated by today's leaders into effective knowledge, skills, and abilities to address the challenges of today and of tomorrow's complex and unpredictable environments.

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## *Preface*

What was it about George Washington that made him such an effective leader? How was he able to influence so many people who represented every level of society? What was it about him that made so many men want to follow him? These were the questions that I wanted to answer as I began researching about Washington and navigated through his life. It was not good enough for Washington to be just a good leader; he challenged all leaders to be examples. So, it is in George Washington's character and competence that my inquiry yields compelling answers to the question, "Why follow Washington?" Through a detailed review and analysis of Washington's life, both personal and public, I feel one can reflect on and internalize his extraordinary character and principled leadership to improve leadership skills and become a better military officer. Military officers must continue to develop and strengthen their leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities to be worthy of the service and sacrifice of the men and women that they have the honor of leading in order to earn the trust of the American people and those that depend on America to provide for the National Defense.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and acknowledge Dr. John Gordon, PhD and Dr. Linda Di Desidero, PhD for their assistance and valuable guidance as mentors for my Master of Military Studies (MMS). I would also like to thank my wife, Ganeane, for all her support throughout this process. Her patience and dedication to our family allowed me the time I needed to focus on both the research and writing phases of this MMS assignment.

Study your history, child. Learn all that you can about those troublous days, and about the brave men who risked, and gave, their lives for their country and made it what it is, a blessed land, and, above all, thank God for Washington.

- Susan P. Embury, *A Grandmother's Recollection of the Old Revolutionary Days*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Today's economic, political, and military environments are very challenging and require effective leadership. Good leadership is essential for the governance of society; without good leaders, a society would fail. There are many lessons on leadership that can be learned from George Washington that have validity and currency today. It is absolutely essential that our country invests its time and resources in developing principled leaders. Our future civilian and military leaders are fortunate to have many great examples, both dead and alive, to study, analyze, and question the elements that were essential to that individual's success or failure to develop stronger leadership. It is essential to learn how these leaders navigated their lives and what it was about them that made them such effective leaders. There is something unique about Washington that sets him apart from other influential leaders. The principles and virtues that appealed to and inspired Washington's men during the French and Indian War and the American Revolutionary War at places like Fort Mifflin, Cambridge, Trenton, Princeton, and Red Bank, can be studied and instilled in today's leaders to help them become more effective. Leadership is a dynamic process; continuous learning is essential to address the challenges of higher command. A leader understands the importance of self-improvement while constantly developing subordinates. A leader knows his or her people--their capabilities, their strengths, their weaknesses--and knows how to set aside cultural, religious, and political differences to appeal to their virtues to reach the desired goals. This paper will advocate that Washington provides a model for inspiring trust and confidence through respect and competence more than anyone else, his ability to lead

by precept and example offering powerful tools for sustained leadership that today's leaders can reflect on and internalize in order to improve their own leadership skills for the very positive purpose of becoming better military officers.

### **ABILITY TO INSPIRE: THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP**

In the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff's second-term Strategic Direction to the Joint Force, General Martin Dempsey stated, "The cornerstone of service must be dignity and respect among all members of the force. And the Mortar is leadership. We must set the example of extraordinary character and exceptional competence at every echelon."<sup>1</sup> This is where Washington excelled. He demanded these qualities at every echelon and set the example by ruling himself by these qualities. It was not good enough to just be a good leader; he challenged all leaders "at every echelon" to be examples. It is in George Washington's character and competence that our inquiry yields compelling answers to the question, "Why follow Washington?"

The essence of leadership is the ability to inspire. It is the ability to recruit others to do work. Leadership is knowing one's people and understanding how to appeal to their virtues to motivate them to accomplish a goal or mission. Washington demonstrated this well in Newburgh, New York, where he employed a level of theatrics to appeal to his men in such a way that provoked emotion and got them to follow him. He was able to get his men to associate themselves and their purpose with his vision.<sup>2</sup> As a quintessential officer, he set the example of extraordinary character and uncompromising integrity. Even after 225 years, George Washington still provides a framework and model to emulate. At the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, Washington was able to create a Continental Army that started out as individual colonies' militias, and he kept them together through the most trying times. Some of these chal-

lenges included facing a superior enemy, organizing an army of individuals from different backgrounds and cultures, a shortage of food and munitions, and a constant fear of disease. Washington brought order, discipline, and purpose to this assemblage and made them into an effective fighting force despite their differences and hardships. Congress trusted him, men followed him into combat, and civilian and political figures who many have been perceived as more powerful and smarter than he was did what Washington told them do.<sup>3</sup> Answers to the questions how and why provide the framework for those aspiring leaders to become stronger and more effective. Washington's leadership attributes provide today's military officers tools needed for effective leadership. Military officers would benefit from following Washington's high standard of conduct both in battle and in garrison. Military officers can apply this standard to their warrior ethos to maintain the trust and the respect of not only their subordinates and superiors, but the American people as well.

In my eleven years as a Marine Corps officer, and with personal experiences of leading Marines in combat, there are five attributes that appear essential for military officers to be effective leaders. These attributes are judgment, character, courage, integrity, and knowledge. Leaders need to have good judgment to make ethical decisions, and their subordinates need to have the confidence that their leaders are making the right moral decisions. Leaders need to have the integrity to do what is right, the character to hold themselves and their subordinates accountable, and the courage to challenge those who do not. Leaders also need to have the substantive knowledge to be tactically and technically proficient to employ their troops on the battlefield. Because Washington exemplified these character traits, by studying key events in Washington's life leading up to and during the American Revolution, a deeper understanding can be developed

as to how Washington influenced his men. In confronting overwhelming odds and broken by fatigue and extreme weather conditions, these patriots continued to follow Washington.<sup>4</sup>

### **PROFOUND SENSE OF DUTY: BECOMING COMMANDER IN CHIEF**

George Washington inspired the trust of the delegates in Congress and had the ideal character they desired in a leader. When compared to proven leaders such as Horatio Gates, Charles Lee, and John Hancock, Washington was seen as having a more commanding presence, having considerably better judgment, and perhaps even better political insight. There was nothing arrogant about him. Delegates noted in their diaries that Washington was a complete gentleman who was sensible, virtuous, calm, reliable, and brave. They respected his composure and restraint in keeping his opinions to himself.<sup>5</sup> Washington understood selfless service. For Washington, it was always about the cause, always about the mission. When Washington was appointed the General and Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, he humbly replied that he was honored to be chosen, but was concerned that he did not have the abilities and appropriate military experience for the position and responsibility he was being entrusted with. However, because Congress requested his service, and in respecting their judgment, he would accept the responsibility and do everything that was within his power to support the cause. He stated, "...as the congress desire it, I will enter upon the momentous duty and exert every power I possess in their service and for the support of the glorious cause."<sup>6</sup> His humility and modesty were reflected in his candid admittance that he lacked the experience to fight the British Empire. He was always concerned about his sense of honor and he feared failure. He feared disgracing his reputation. Washington's passion, humility, and honor are evident in a letter he wrote to his wife following the acceptance of his appointment. He stated that he did not want to part from her and his family

but he was being called upon to serve his country, and though he believed he was accepting more responsibility than he was capable of handling, he would not refuse the appointment for that would bring dishonor upon himself and his friends.<sup>7</sup>

Washington understood the responsibility and power that Congress had given him as General and Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Both Washington and Congress shared the view that the American Revolution was a war for independence, a war for independence where a republic would be established under a constitutional government and its officials would represent and be determined by the American people. Washington not only shared the same view of establishing a republic but also agreed on the importance of having the military under civilian authority. Washington as well as Congress feared the consequences of military commanders seizing political power and control of the government after a revolution. In response to a letter from the New York Legislature on June 26, 1775, that expressed concerns about Washington resigning his power back to the people once the war was over, Washington responded, “When we assumed the soldier, we did not lay aside the Citizen; and we shall most sincerely rejoice with you in that happy hour when the establishment of American Liberty, upon the most firm and solid foundations, shall enable us to return to our Private Stations in the bosom of a free, peaceful and happy Country”<sup>8</sup> According to Historian Don Higginbotham, Washington had no intentions of replacing King George, though it might be within his power. He believed in the relationship between the military and civilian authority. He believed the military should be under the control of the civilian power and that the president should not be a member of the military but should be in control of it. This not only confirmed but also strengthened the delegates’ trust and confidence in Washington.<sup>9</sup> Washington reminded members of Congress that they

were part of something more important and bigger than themselves. Congress, aware of the uncertain risks with declaring independence from Britain, was ready to follow Washington.

### **ASSUMING INCREASINGLY COMPLEX RESPONSIBILITIES: THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR:**

Up until becoming Commander In Chief, Washington had not commanded anything more than a regiment of provisional Virginia soldiers. According to Joseph Ellis, from 1754 to 1759 Washington spent the majority of his time leading expeditions into the Ohio wilderness, and his experiences were the preamble to a life long interest in the profession of arms. His experiences during the time of the French and Indian War served as crash courses in the art of soldiering and shaped his view of the world.<sup>10</sup> Just as Washington learned from these mistakes, military leaders too can benefit from his experiences and more importantly learn from his principled leadership and his desire for professional military education to improve their leadership abilities.

On April 2, 1754, at age 22, a young Lieutenant Colonel Washington, eager to lead but lacking experience, set out into the Ohio wilderness with orders from Governor Robert Dinwiddie to maintain a defensive posture against the French but had permission to engage them if they interfered with the British military or any English territory.<sup>11</sup> Following him were 160 inexperienced Virginia troops. On May 28, 1754, Washington had his first taste of battle. Washington and 40 of his men, accompanied by their Indian allies, successfully ambushed what Washington believed was a French scouting party spying on the British camp. Instead of using his troops to mask himself, Washington led the attack from the front and exposed himself to enemy fire. He led by example and for his first time under fire proved his calmness and professionalism in battle.<sup>12</sup>

After that attack, Washington refused to give up any ground and had his troops set up a defensive position to prepare for a retaliatory attack by the French. This defensive position that became known as Fort Necessity was a terribly constructed and poorly placed fort that was inadequate to defend against the size of the advancing French Army and Indian allies. Washington's strategy to defend against the French attack did not impart confidence to his Indian allies and in turn caused the Indians to abandon Washington and leave him with few resources. The Indians saw Washington as a naively incompetent young commander who would not listen to their advice, a character trait that he would later improve after observing Major General Edward Braddock's shortcomings and ineffective leadership.<sup>13</sup> On July 3, 1754, the French retaliation overwhelmed Washington and his force and taught Washington several hard lessons that would leave lasting impressions. Fort Necessity had been constructed on low grasslands and the rain tended to pool up in the fort and trenches, making it hard to maneuver in the mud. Thick woods surrounded the small stockade and made it easy for the French to mask their movement and use the trees as cover and concealment: their seizing the high ground allowed them to shoot down upon Washington's exposed forces. The fort was also open to the sky and the troops were unable to keep their cartridges dry, which made it nearly impossible to shoot their weapons to return fire. Washington had over 100 of his men killed or wounded while the French had three dead and 17 wounded.<sup>14</sup> Washington, both professionally embarrassed and disheartened, surrendered. Washington would not forget these mistakes.

The Fort Necessity disaster was proof of Washington's inexperience. However, though inexperienced, he displayed several leadership strengths that are worth noting. Though he made several mistakes and would continue to make mistakes throughout the French and Indian War, it is important to note that Washington made every effort to learn from them. These mistakes were

invaluable lessons that would later benefit him during the American Revolution. He would remember the hard lessons of frontier warfare and how lethal the Indians were in ambushing from the woods as opposed to the conventional European style warfare of open battlefield, linear tactics. Though he suffered a terrible loss, Washington held his composure in battle. He proved to be absolutely fearless and displayed personal courage as he and his men faced terrifying odds.<sup>15</sup> Even with the overwhelming odds, he maintained his professionalism, continued to execute his orders, and lead by precept and example. He continued to build and shape the trust and confidence of his men. Washington did not expect anything from his men that he did not expect from himself; he said so and those serving with him knew it.

In February 1755, Washington became the aide-de-camp of General Braddock, who was sent to America with the tasks of defeating the French at Fort Duquesne and of establishing a stronger British presence in the Ohio Valley. Higginbotham wrote that Washington saw it as an opportunity to learn and increase his professional military knowledge from an experienced British general. He understood the important principle of becoming technically and tactically proficient and took his military education seriously. He educated himself through observation, reading, conversations with experienced combat veterans, and through practical application.<sup>16</sup> Joining Braddock's campaign not only provided Washington with an opportunity to become more proficient in battlefield tactics, but it also gave him the opportunity to observe the daily life of a professional army. Washington took advantage of every opportunity to study the military art and to seek self-improvement, an important attribute necessary for all military officers. He diligently studied the army's tactics, techniques, and procedures and would have in depth discussions with junior and field-grade officers as well as General Braddock himself.<sup>17</sup>

The lessons and mistakes Washington learned from Braddock were again invaluable and further strengthened Washington's leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities. Washington disliked that Braddock viewed the colonial governors as inferiors and would openly reveal his narrow-minded views of them to the men. From observing and following Braddock, Washington learned the virtues of restraint and reason. Braddock had a terrible temper, was so blunt to the point where he was rude and demeaning, and was so arrogant that he would not listen to the advice of his men or even seek it.<sup>18</sup> Washington experienced this first-hand when he offered Braddock advice on the non-traditional tactics of the French and Indians in the Ohio Valley. Braddock's character flaw would later contribute to Braddock's death at the battle of Monongahela and the defeat of the British Army under his command.

The Battle of Monongahela on July 9, 1755, gave Washington another opportunity for first-hand combat experience where he again portrayed professionalism and heroism. Washington fashioned an image there that would resonate in America as a fearless soldier who enjoyed the dangers of the battlefield. In attempting to reassemble the disorganized regulars during the battle, Washington had two horses shot out from under him and four bullet holes shot through his coat. Again, he found himself leading by example and inspiring his men. As Braddock insisted on fighting the traditional European style, despite the advice from Washington, the French and Indians assaulted the British flanks from the woods and delivered a humiliating defeat.<sup>19</sup>

During this period, Washington's officers developed a deep respect for him. They valued his courage, dignity and fairness. One officer wrote, "Our colonel is an example of fortitude in either danger or hardships and by his easy, polite behavior has gained not only the regard but affection of both officers and soldiers."<sup>20</sup> Washington absolutely believed leadership by example was necessary for effective officers. He believed that the courage and cowardice of the officers

would be mirrored by their troops. He stated, “This is the true secret...that whatever regiment is well officered, the men will behave well -when otherwise, ill -the misconduct or cowardly behavior always originating with the officers, who have set the example.”<sup>21</sup> So many of Washington’s subordinates respected him because he was honest and true to his word. He earned their respect not because he was an officer but by his actions as an officer.

Military officers today need to maintain the same perspective as Washington with regards to earning the respect of their troops. In doing so, they will create an environment that will get the most out of their command. It would be a mistake for officers to believe they are entitled to the respect of their men because of the insignia they are wearing on their shoulders. Officers must earn it through character and action. Washington demanded his officers earn it. He held them to the high standard he held himself. Washington warned his officers, “Remember, that it is the actions, and not the commission, that make the Officer--and that there is more expected from him than the Title.”<sup>22</sup>

It is important to understand the relevance of the French and Indian War with regards to Washington’s development as a principled leader and use his experiences and actions to improve the leadership skills of Military leaders. Military leaders, regardless of rank, can internalize Washington’s character and benefit from following Washington’s example during this period. He was a young and inexperienced officer but took advantage of every opportunity to increase his knowledge, skills, and abilities to learn the profession of arms. He learned from his mistakes and constantly sought self-improvement. He understood the importance of leading by example and in turn earned the respect of his men.

## **COMMITMENT: ASSUMING COMMAND IN CAMBRIDGE**

It was July 3, 1775, and Washington arrived at Cambridge, Massachusetts, to assume command of the Continental Army. Upon arrival, he immediately began the process of molding the militias into an army through order and discipline. Between the cultural differences of the militias, the contrasting homemade uniforms, the disciplinary issues, and the fraternization among the officers and their men, Washington was faced with many leadership challenges. He also faced a shortage of artillery and gunpowder and was concerned with the sanitary issues within the camp. He knew dysentery and smallpox were just as much of a threat to his men as were the British.<sup>23</sup>

Although Congress officially integrated the state militias into the Continental Army, it was Washington who forged them into a cohesive fighting Army. On July 4, 1775, Washington faced the inherent cultural distinctions between the state's militias. Washington attempted to create unit cohesion by establishing a new national identity for the Army by declaring it the instrument of the United Provinces of North America in hope that the colonies would put their differences aside.<sup>24</sup> Uniting the army and the colonies was one challenge, but keeping his army together would prove to be more difficult. It was a constant struggle to maintain unity among the men. That winter, a fight broke out in Cambridge between the Virginia and Massachusetts troops where over a thousand men fought as though they were mortal enemies. Washington charged into the heart of the brawl, dismounted from his horse, and grabbed two men by their throats to break them apart. With his presence immediately known, the troops scattered and it was just Washington and the two men left standing in the field. Keeping them at arm's length, he reprimanded each of them so they understood that the fighting was unacceptable.<sup>25</sup> He in-

sisted and demanded that they be better than this. They would never win if they remained divided.

At a time when the American press was glorifying the militias for their actions at Concord and Bunker Hill and considering them the solution to the British invasion, Washington struggled to prove to Congress the necessity for a national army.<sup>26</sup> Washington believed that the inconsistent service of the short-term enlistments of the militia created an unreliable army in terms of size, strength and capability. He saw it as a major problem. He knew that if he could not convince Americans that it was their duty to serve for a longer period of time, he would not be able to build a worthy and capable Army.<sup>27</sup> He believed the Americans needed a standing force of regulars if they were to have a chance against the British Army and to protect the dignity of the American cause. He also believed that in order for America to have equal status among other nations, America needed to have a European-style professional army.<sup>28</sup> As Washington gained the authority to establish a professional standing army that much reflected the Old World model, he was faced with the challenges of seeking out and training individuals willing to fight as regulars. Americans feared that Washington would create a force that mirrored that of Oliver Cromwell's army. There was fear that the regular army that Washington was attempting to create would challenge the very cause that it was being asked to defend.<sup>29</sup> Washington wanted to eliminate militia regiments that identified themselves by state because of the attitudes that were instilled in the men that went against the order and discipline that he saw was necessary for an effective fighting force.<sup>30</sup> According to Ron Chernow, despite his difficulties in principles with the militia, Washington gained the trust and respect of his men. His troops noticed his leadership right away. He was up before sunrise and rode through camp to observe the men. He appeared very noble and his presence lifted his men's spirits. John Adams received a letter from a

friend that stated Washington “has in a manner inspired officers and soldiers with a taste for discipline and they go into it readily, as they venerate and love the general.”<sup>31</sup> Washington began to foster an environment where his men understood that they were part of something more important and bigger than themselves. Washington was able to provoke a strong esprit de corps in his men. He had the ability to inspire enthusiasm and a strong sense of honor. They admired the General and respected his character and fairness. Though, they had not yet seen him in battle, Washington’s men were ready to follow him.<sup>32</sup>

### **COURAGE: THE BATTLES OF TRENTON AND PRINCETON**

It was Christmas Eve, 1776, and Washington had his men encamped near McKonkey’s Ferry in Pennsylvania after British forces forced them out of New Jersey. His men were tired, cold, hungry, and beaten. Many enlistments were also about to expire at the end of the year. The declining patriotic support troubled Washington more than his concern for the overwhelming strength of the British army.<sup>33</sup> He called his officers in for a meeting to prepare an attack on the Hessian forces that occupied Trenton across the river. It was at this time that Washington started to exhibit innovative approaches and willingness to unconventional tactics. Washington would propose his ideas as someone else’s plan to encourage and stimulate open debate to avoid his officers agreeing to a bad plan simply because it was Washington’s idea.<sup>34</sup> He had developed a good working relationship with his generals and would seek their advice.<sup>35</sup> Most likely Washington developed this character trait while serving under Braddock in response to Braddock’s deficiencies of not listening to any of his officers’ advice. This character trait promoted a deeper trust from his officers. Washington knew he needed a decisive victory to lift the morale of his men and rekindle the spirit of the American people. His concerns went far beyond his command

alone. He was aware of the larger picture and understood how what he did fit in and supported that larger picture. The Army's previous misfortunes were reason for concern and the American people were losing faith.<sup>36</sup> A few days earlier, Washington had published thirteen essays, symbolic of the 13 colonies, and had them read aloud to his men who were encamped near McKonkey's Ferry. Washington published the essays in pamphlet form and titled it *The Crisis*. He crafted and designed the essays to motivate and inspire his men to continue to fight. He knew the conditions were terrible and understood what his men were feeling. Washington stated, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in the crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."<sup>37</sup> In a letter to his fiancée, Colonel William Tudor stated, "I cannot desert a man...who has deserted everything to defend his country, and whose chief misfortune...is that a large part of it wants [lacks] spirit to defend itself."<sup>38</sup>

On Christmas day, 1776, Washington's men, unaware of the objective, nevertheless followed their commissioned and non-commissioned officers and began the march to the Delaware River to prepare for the crossing. Some men were bare foot and left traces of bloody footprints in the snow. They were committed. They were following Washington. Under the cover of darkness and in terrible snow and hail, 2,400 men, most unable to swim, plus artillery and horses, crossed the 800-foot breadth of the river into New Jersey.<sup>39</sup> Once across the river and formed up, Washington split his army into two columns and marched them nine miles through the night in total darkness to Trenton which was occupied and guarded by three Hessian regiments. Washington was so determined to persevere that when a messenger from General John Sullivan informed Washington the men's weapons were useless because of the wet conditions, Washington told him to tell the general to use the bayonet--he was determined to take Trenton. Washington

executed the surprise attack at Trenton with precision and defeated the Hessians in less than an hour. Washington's forces completely overwhelmed the unprepared Hessians. The Americans killed 22 Hessians, wounded 84, and captured 900. Washington suffered two deaths from combat and four men had frozen to death.<sup>40</sup> John Hancock was amazed that men "broken by fatigue and ill-fortune" were able to accomplish such victory and stated that men who have complete trust in their leader and properly inspired will often achieve success and accomplish what people see as impossible.<sup>41</sup>

As 1776 was coming to an end, Washington had to face the issue of his men's enlistments expiring. If Washington hoped to continue the fight, he had to convince his men to stay. On December 27, Congress had authorized Washington and given him the power to use any means necessary, to include offering more money, to get the troops to stay in the army and fight. In response to Congress, Washington wrote, "Instead of thinking myself freed from all civil obligations by this mark of their confidence, I shall constantly bear in mind that as the sword was the last resort for the preservation of our liberties, so it ought to be the first thing laid aside when those liberties are firmly established."<sup>42</sup> It was proof again of Washington's character and the trust of unlimited power that Congress placed in him. Offering more money would help in retaining men to stay and fight. But Washington knew his men, those who stayed with him when others departed for home: Yes, he knew how to appeal to his men and how to inspire them, but more important he knew to why they had followed him. As 200 men from his New England Regiments approached the termination date, Washington personally addressed them. "My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do, and more than could be reasonably expected; but your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear. You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will con-

sent to stay one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty, and to your country, which you probably can never do under any other circumstances.” These men knew exactly what was at stake and what Washington was asking of them. All 200 men chose to follow Washington and stayed. Almost half of these men were later killed in battle or died from disease.<sup>43</sup>

On January 3, 1777, Washington would lead another surprise attack against the British Forces at Princeton and again deliver a massive blow to the enemy forces using deception and the cover of darkness. During the battle, one officer would note, “I shall never forget what I felt...when I saw him brave all the dangers of the field and his important life hanging as it were by a single hair with a thousand deaths flying around him. Believe me, I thought not of myself.”<sup>44</sup> Washington was the example of courage and it inspired his men to fight. The victories at both Trenton and Princeton changed the course of the war. The victories proved the esprit de corps of the Americans and renewed their desire for liberty and justice. Washington’s best traits were brought out by the adversity; his perseverance inspired his men to achieve the impossible.<sup>45</sup> Washington’s men defeated the most highly trained military in the world while battling the most dangerous obstacles and challenging weather conditions, conditions that prove Washington’s ability to arouse men to greatness.

### **HIGH PRINCIPLE: THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS**

In 1776, the Policy of Humanity, written by John Adams and implemented by Washington during the war, was the guiding principles of the American Republic and aligned the moral conduct of the war with the principles of the American Revolution. American leaders believed

that the Americans had to hold themselves to a higher standard. It was not enough to just win the war. They needed to win in a manner that was consistent with their American values.<sup>46</sup>

After the battles of Trenton and Princeton, Washington set the example ordering and ensuring the humane treatment of prisoners. He did this in the face of the conduct of the Hessian mercenaries and the inhumane treatment American prisoners met at the hands of the British. Many Americans suffered and died miserable deaths from starvation, exposure to the elements, and disease. This was not acceptable to Washington and would not tolerate this barbarism in the American Army.<sup>47</sup> In removing the Hessian prisoners to the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River after the Battle of Trenton, Washington ordered that all Hessian prisoners were to be treated as human beings. He wanted the Hessians treated with the same human rights that Americans expected from their adversaries. Because of the atrocities committed by the Hessians after Long Island and Fort Washington, the Hessians expected a different outcome. The Hessian captives were treated with such dignity and kindness that of the 13,988 Hessians who survived the war, over three thousand of them declined repatriation and decided to stay in America after the war was over.<sup>48</sup> After the Battle of Princeton, Washington wanted to again set the example for his men. Washington had accompanied two wounded British soldiers to a private residence to be seen by American surgeons for medical care.<sup>49</sup> Washington stated “Treat them with humanity and let them have no reason to complain of our copying the brutal example of the British army in their treatment of our unfortunate brethren.”<sup>50</sup> He did this in the face of the atrocities visited upon Americans that were wounded and denied quarter. An example occurred at the Battle of Drake’s Farm during the Forage War where seven wounded Americans were left in a field after the Americans were driven back by the British during the battle. The British troops denied the

seven Americans quarter when they surrendered and viscosly murdered them all with bayonets.<sup>51</sup>

The treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib during the Iraq War in 2003 was completely unacceptable and inconsistent with the high standards of conduct that is expected by the United States Military. It is almost certain that Washington would have been both outraged and disappointed to hear of such inhumane treatment of enemy prisoners. Moreover, closer study of Washington's leadership might have certainly had a different effect on the outcome of this situation, perhaps preventing it from occurring. The unprofessional and undisciplined conduct of those US Army soldiers and their senior leadership responsible for the care of the detainees brought discredit to both our military and our country. Their actions were not consistent with the principles America was founded on; surely had they considered Washington's example, they would have understood that very clearly. The United States must continue to set the example, holding to a higher standard than its enemies. Inhumane treatment that is done by our hands works to reinforce the propaganda of our enemy and hardens those abused to be lasting enemies that will seek revenge whenever possible. Our conduct should never be such as to be used by others to justify their criminal acts.

### **LOYALTY AND HONOR: NEWBURGH**

Over the next seven years Washington would continue to inspire and lead his men to defeat the British Army. Though his army faced incredible challenges like the brutally cold winter encampment at Valley Forge where he lost over 2,500 men to hypothermia and disease, or the battles of Monmouth Courthouse and Yorktown, Washington's men continued to follow him.

Perhaps his greatest hour came near the end of the war when members of the Officer Corps attempted to seek redress of their grievances against Congress and brought on the most dangerous challenge to General Washington's command. On March 15, 1783, General Washington stood in front of an assembly of several hundred angry and hostile officers in Newburgh, New York. An anonymous petition had circulated through the camp summoning all officers to a meeting to consider possible military actions against Congress and to give Congress a final chance to address their grievances. These officers were veterans and patriots, men who had fought with Washington from the beginning. All of the soldiers had suffered personally in their neglect of their personal affairs as they fought the battles that won the war and ensured independence from Great Britain. But now they were conspiring against Congress and calling for mutiny if Congress failed to honor the promises it made to the army regarding salary, back pay, and life pensions.<sup>52</sup> In the past, he had to address concerned officers who were critical and skeptical of the behavior of civilian governments and the attitudes and values of society, but this was different, he confronted a hostile assembly of his own officers and it seemed to have now reached a culminating point.<sup>53</sup> As the war was coming to an end, the officers believed if they did not act now, peace would benefit everyone but those who fought for their independence. It was after all the army's courage and sacrifices that helped bring about this independence and the officers wanted to challenge the perceived ungratefulness of their fellow citizens.<sup>54</sup> In a letter to Joseph Jones, Washington noted that the temper of the Army had become the most irritable he had seen since the start of the War.<sup>55</sup>

As he addressed the assembly, he sympathized with his officers' demands but condemned the methods they were planning to attain them. He showed empathy. Washington reminded them that he had been through it all with them. He stated, "I have been the constant companion

and witness to your distress and not among the last to feel and acknowledge your merits.”<sup>56</sup>

Washington understood he was dealing with a very volatile situation and everything they had fought so hard to achieve could be lost and their legacy ruined. It was another moment where the fate of the country and the men that had followed him depended upon his leadership. In establishing the foundation of his message, he relied upon his knowledge of his men. He knew what mattered to them. He had trained them and nurtured their development. As he was himself, he trained them to the stature of principled officers of the American Revolution. And he trained them well. He made no apologies; he came at them straight on and broke through the superficial hold of those who preyed upon their weakened bodies and spirits. He did not ask, but rather ordered, his officers to oppose anyone, “who wickedly attempts to open the flood gates of civil discord and deluge our rising empire in blood.”<sup>57</sup> While this appeal was couched in terms as a loving friend and with respect, he was very much their commander calling them to their duty. The scene was high drama: As he took out a letter from a Virginian delegate, he struggled to read it. He then pulled out his glasses and said, “Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.”<sup>58</sup> When he was done, he left the men with tears in their eyes. Washington knew his men and appealed to them on grounds that only he could claim with unchallenged authority--high principal. And they were once again ready to answer their General’s call to duty and follow Washington. With their faces wet with tears, the mutiny was over.

### **HONOR AND INTEGRITY: RESIGNING HIS COMMISSION**

Though Washington tried, he was never able to get the money or the rewards he promised his men, and Congress never met all of its demands. In July of 1783, fourth-fifths of the army

were disbanded and sent home, many without the means to support their families or to pay off any of the debts that they accrued while in service. According to Thomas Fleming, his men had departed without a victory parade or a letter from Congress thanking them for their service.<sup>59</sup> In his farewell address on November 25, 1783, a teary eyed Washington stated, “In a heart full of love and gratitude, I now take leave of you. I most devoutly wish that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former...have been glorious and honorable.”<sup>60</sup> Washington could feel the pain in the room and though there was only a small group of officers present, he hoped his words would reach the rest of his men.<sup>61</sup>

Three weeks later, Washington arrived in Annapolis, Maryland, to meet with Congress to resign his commission. Here was a man who had commanded all of the military power and could have become king, or perhaps something like Oliver Cromwell, victorious after the English civil war. Despite his feelings towards Congress for how it had treated the Army, Washington maintained his belief in the guiding principles of the American Republic and the importance of civilian control over the military. Just as he promised in his letter to the New York Legislature in 1775, Washington stated, “The great events on which my resignation depended having at length taken place; I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress and presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the Service of my Country.”<sup>62</sup>

## **CONCLUSION:**

George Washington’s ability to lead by precept and example in the face of tremendous adversity offers powerful tools for sustained leadership, and military officers of today can reflect on and internalize his extraordinary character and principled leadership for the very positive pur-

pose of becoming even better military officers. The ability to inspire is the essence of leadership, and for Washington, it was not just his subordinates that he inspired. Just as Washington inspired and held the loyalty of his men, he also inspired and earned the trust and support of very powerful political figures, businessmen, financiers, and wealthy plantation owners when the American Revolution was all but lost. The same leadership qualities that inspired these men and fed into their desire to follow Washington were the same leadership qualities that contributed to the unanimous vote for Washington to become the Commander-In-Chief of the Continental Army, the presiding officer of the Constitutional Convention, and the first president of a newly formed federal government under the Constitution of the United States.

Washington believed that both military and civilian leaders must be the moral leaders of their people. A leader is not just responsible for running a political or military organization; it is essential that a leader represent the people. He had to be the symbol of the people that represented all the aspirations. To lead by example, Washington believed it was a leader's responsibility to take advantage of all the tools available such as public speeches, letters, and newspapers, dinners, and routine activities like handshaking and visiting the wounded at the hospital.<sup>63</sup> Leaders need to be the moral compass. Washington never stopped training and morally developing his men. He always expected more from them. He was not just a citizen-soldier but also a citizen-statesman who expected his men to become professional soldiers and hold themselves to a higher standard. He wanted his soldiers to set the example for all patriots.<sup>64</sup>

Looking back on the American Revolution, it can be argued that if the American rebels could keep a government in existence and an army in the field, they had a chance to win. The army did not always need to be victorious and Washington's army frequently was not. Yet the Continental Army was the American's center of gravity, especially Washington's "main army",

and key to victory. It was Washington's leadership that inspired the men and gave them the esprit de corps that held the army together through the most challenging times. Washington knew he was not perfect. Though he made mistakes in judgment or lost a battle, he never gave up. He continued to call for perseverance. After the battles of Trenton and Princeton, Washington wrote, "A people unused to restraint must be led, they will not be drove."<sup>65</sup> It was Washington's leadership and perseverance that gave the Americans the will to fight. They followed Washington because he earned their trust and through that, their shared service and sacrifice, won the hearts and support of the American people. That special relationship borne out of mutual respect and trusted leadership became the keystone to embracing the newly formed federal government under the Constitution of the United States of America.

Washington never would have argued that he was the perfect commander and yet time and time again, in victory and more frequently in defeat, he was knocked down and got back up again. William Dwyer wrote of a letter that he found written by a Susan Embury in 1875 of her grandmother's experiences in Trenton titled a "A Grandmother's Recollection of the Old Revolutionary Days," regarding Washington's crossing of the Delaware and defeating the Hessians at Trenton and the British at Princeton. She ended the letter with, "Study your history, child. Learn all that you can about those troublous days, and about the brave men who risked, and gave, their lives for their country and made it what it is, a blessed land, and, above all, thank God for Washington."<sup>66</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> US Department of Defense, *Chairman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Term Strategic Direction to the Joint Force* (Washington, DC, 2103), [http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/CJCS\\_2ndTermStrategicDirection.pdf](http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/CJCS_2ndTermStrategicDirection.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York, The Penguin Press, 2010), 435.
- <sup>3</sup> Richard Brookhiser, *George Washington on leadership* (New York, Basic Books, 2008), 1.
- <sup>4</sup> David McCullough, *1776* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2005), 284-286.
- <sup>5</sup> Chernow, 185-186.
- <sup>6</sup> Chernow, 187.
- <sup>7</sup> Chernow, 188-189.
- <sup>8</sup> George Washington to New York Legislature, June 26, 1775, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/contarmy/newyork.html>
- <sup>9</sup> Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*. (Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1985), 67.
- <sup>10</sup> Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York, Vintage, 2004), 12-13.
- <sup>11</sup> Chernow, 40.
- <sup>12</sup> Chernow, 44.
- <sup>13</sup> Chernow, 46.
- <sup>14</sup> Chernow, 47.
- <sup>15</sup> Chernow, 49.
- <sup>16</sup> Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, 14.
- <sup>17</sup> Fred Anderson, ed., *George Washington Remembers: Reflections on the French and Indian War* (Maryland, Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 78.
- <sup>18</sup> Chernow, 54.
- <sup>19</sup> Anderson, 78.
- <sup>20</sup> Chernow, 66.
- <sup>21</sup> Chernow, 66.
- <sup>22</sup> Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, 17.
- <sup>23</sup> Chernow, 195-196.
- <sup>24</sup> Chernow, 195.
- <sup>25</sup> Chernow, 198
- <sup>26</sup> Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, 49.
- <sup>27</sup> James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789*. (United Kingdom, Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 70.
- <sup>28</sup> Russell F. Weigley, "American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Paret, et al., 408-443 (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1986), 412.
- <sup>29</sup> Martin, 78.
- <sup>30</sup> Chernow, 197.
- <sup>31</sup> Chernow, 195.
- <sup>32</sup> Chernow, 195.
- <sup>33</sup> Chernow, 271.
- <sup>34</sup> David Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), 265.
- <sup>35</sup> Chernow, 272.
- <sup>36</sup> Chernow, 270.
- <sup>37</sup> Chernow, 271.
- <sup>38</sup> Chernow, 272.
- <sup>39</sup> Chernow, 272-273.
- <sup>40</sup> Chernow, 276.
- <sup>41</sup> McCullough, 284.
- <sup>42</sup> McCullough, 286.
- <sup>43</sup> Fischer, 272-273.
- <sup>44</sup> McCullough, 289.
- <sup>45</sup> Chernow, 283.
- <sup>46</sup> Fischer 375-379.
- <sup>47</sup> Fischer 378.
- <sup>48</sup> Fischer 379.

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- <sup>49</sup> Chernow, 282.
- <sup>50</sup> Fischer, 379.
- <sup>51</sup> Fischer, 377.
- <sup>52</sup> Chernow, 433-434.
- <sup>53</sup> Higginbotham, 100.
- <sup>54</sup> Thomas Fleming, "George Washington's Tears," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 20, no.3 (Spring 2008): 8-14, <http://search.proquest.com/>.
- <sup>55</sup> Higginbotham, 97.
- <sup>56</sup> Chernow, 435.
- <sup>57</sup> Chernow, 435.
- <sup>58</sup> Fleming, 11.
- <sup>59</sup> Fleming 12.
- <sup>60</sup> Fleming 13.
- <sup>61</sup> Fleming 13.
- <sup>62</sup> Fleming, 14.
- <sup>63</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington's War* (Illinois, Sourcebooks, Inc, 2002), 144.
- <sup>64</sup> Chernow, 209.
- <sup>65</sup> McCullough, 293-294.
- <sup>66</sup> William M. Dwyer, *The Day Is Ours! An Inside View Of The Battles Of Trenton and Princeton, November 1776-Januart 1777* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1998), 396.

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