

Washington's Crossing Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Washington's Crossing is a story of a young nation forging its way toward independence. It is a story of freedom, liberty, discipline, leadership, and perseverance. George Washington comes across as a true war hero and leader. Through the bleakest days of the Revolution, Washington continued to rally his men and lead them to much-needed victories without which their cause would have failed. As Washington plots and plans his army's journey to victory, the foundation is laid for the future United States of America.

The story begins at a low point in the Revolution. Although the Americans won some battles, they were only a prelude to what was to come. Some of the most crushing defeats occurred at this point. Working off of misguided intelligence, the American army marched into defeat after defeat in New York. Time and again, they managed to escape and regroup to attack another day. After the fall of New York, the darkest days were yet to come as the army was forced into a retreat across New Jersey.

The British and Hessians proved to be formidable enemies. Several factors worked in their favor at the beginning. Both armies were lead by highly organized and disciplined aristocrats. The American army in contrast, was not. A big factor that led the enemy armies to win was accurate intelligence. This, along with order and discipline, made it easy for them in the beginning. Additionally, they did not believe that the American army posed enough of a threat. This overconfidence would be part of their downfall.

As the Americans retreated through New Jersey, Washington prepared for his attack on Trenton. The winter months arrived and the British and Hessians planned to settle in for winter quarters. An attack from the Americans was the last thing they imagined happening. Washington wanted to use this to launch a surprise attack and turn the war in their favor. Washington's army crossed the Delaware River in treacherous weather on Christmas night, 1776. Though the odds were against them, the Americans succeeded in crossing the river and surprising their enemy. Their hard-earned victory was solidified a few days later after a second attack forced the enemy to retreat from Trenton. The Americans continued to push the enemy east and back out of New Jersey.

The American army fought the overwhelming odds against them to win these pivotal battles. The relationship changed between them and Washington. They became better soldiers and he became a better leader. Some of his methods would later be used once the presidency was established. The war intelligence also improved which aided in the Americans' victories. Above all else, it was the determination and perseverance of Washington's soldiers that lead the Americans toward ultimate victory.



The Rebels

The Rebels Summary and Analysis

Washington's Crossing is a story about the Revolutionary War from the summer months of 1776 through the winter months of 1777. It details each battle fought from Brooklyn, Long Island, Manhattan, Fort Lee, Trenton, and ultimately, Princeton. Washington's crossing of the Delaware River was the turning point in the war. Until this point, the Americans suffered many crushing defeats. By the time Washington lead his men across the Delaware, he had learned a great deal about the enemy as well as the men he lead.

When the British left Boston, George Washington marched through and was hailed as a hero. The Americans thought the war was over and showered Washington with honors. Deep down however, he knew the war was not over. The British would indeed be back. So far, the Americans enjoyed many victories. The only big defeat they had was a battle in Canada. After the British left Boston, Washington began sending troops to New York. He was certain this was where the enemy would strike next.

Washington was not everyone's first choice as commander-in-chief of the army. He was chosen because the southern delegates would only support a Continental army if a Virginian were to lead it. Washington was the best choice; he had experience of command and was young enough to take the field. This chapter is where the author first uses the term "his Excellency", foreshadowing future events such as his rise to the presidency years later. People saw him as a true leader. This first chapter foreshadows the biggest battles and hardest struggles yet to come in the Revolution.

The Regulars

The Regulars Summary and Analysis

The British and Hessian armies arrived in New York Harbor off Staten Island. The British army had no equal in the world. The first battalions to land were grenadiers, then light infantry. Light infantry was a new concept. They were chosen for size as well as intelligence, energy and marksmanship.

As the British convened, training continued at a furious pace. The ideas behind the British military training were very different from the American Revolution. Military training was important to them, as they felt it enforced obedience and preserved order. The British were very organized in this manner. Here they learned specific skills and a general attitude. Discipline also played a big part of training. Once they learned how to march they learned how to use their weapons.



The Hessians

The Hessians Summary and Analysis

The Hessian army was made up of German soldiers. The British tried hiring them to serve in the Colonies long before the Revolution but they were too costly. When fighting broke out in the Colonies, they put cost aside and hired several thousand Hessian troops. Friedrich Wilhelm II expanded the Hessian army and conducted drills every day. As a result, the army expanded very rapidly.

Most high-ranking officers came from the aristocracy. The officers of this army all believed in hierarchy, order, and discipline. These men were defined by courage and honor. Most young men were encouraged to enlist. Those considered "expendable" were also forced into the army. These people consisted of masterless servants, school dropouts, bankrupt tradesmen, the idle, and the unemployed and wandering youth. The Hessian system of discipline was different than that of the British, as they made more use of corporal punishment. If a soldier misbehaved his family would suffer the punishment as well. Hessian soldiers were legendary for their discipline, courage, and obedience.



The Plan of the Campaign

The Plan of the Campaign Summary and Analysis

The Howe brothers, Admiral Lord Richard Howe and General William Howe, were in command in New York. They were both highly experienced military officers that were stationed in the Colonies on the king's orders. Originally serving in Boston, William Howe became part of a strong demonstration that was intended to force the colonists back to their proper allegiance. The result was the Battle of Bunker Hill. Although the British ultimately had the upper hand in the battle, the determination with which the Americans fought surprised the British. What haunted William Howe was the sight of so much bloodshed after one scene.

William Howe did not think that they could win the war against the rebels. In order to put the Americans down and keep them down, they would have to be very aggressive. He was unsure that this could happen. He also knew these people would never see eye to eye with the King's troops. After the battle at Bunker Hill, William Howe developed some unruly habits. He gambled and caroused, appearing as though he gave little thought or care as to what happened next. In a way, he might have already known they were defeated.



The Fall of New York

The Fall of New York Summary and Analysis

During the summer of 1776, a sickness tore through the troops that worked against the Americans. They lost large amounts of troops as a result. The Americans displayed their lack of training and discipline in many ways. One important way was how they kept their lodgings. They did so in disarray and left it constantly soiled. Another big issue was the Americans' lack of intelligence. The methods they used in Boston did not work well in New York. Washington and other officers made costly mistakes as a result.

This lack of intelligence created a lot of confusion and resulted in many errors. One of these mistakes cost the Americans the battle of Long Island that August. Washington had false reports that the British were holding back most of their troops. He believed that only twenty five percent of the British forces were on Long Island when in fact it was actually closer to ninety percent. The Americans paid dearly for this mistake.

Washington evacuated the remaining troops to Manhattan. Luckily, bad weather prevented the enemy from catching up with them at that time. Later, the British caught up with them and attacked again from Kip's Bay on the east side of Manhattan. Although the rebels wanted to surrender, they were actually able to escape to the north end of Manhattan. Despite the larger losses, they did manage a small victory in Harlem Heights. From there, a large battle ensued at Fort Mifflin that completed the loss of New York to the enemy. Severely outnumbered and outmaneuvered, Washington's forces succumbed once again. This last blow hit the General very hard.

The author makes great effort to point out how order and discipline are so crucial to the victories and defeats of each army. These were issues that continued to come up throughout the remainder of the war. These were also very hard lessons that the Americans needed to learn along the way. As they matured as a cohesive unit they would eventually see the benefits.



The Retreat

The Retreat Summary and Analysis

After their defeat in New York, George Washington moved the troops to New Jersey. He considered it a "shift in fronts" rather than a retreat. The war intelligence improved and Washington had it on good authority that the British intended to make camp there. He wanted to do everything in his power to be sure the British did not make it to New Jersey and would protect it at all cost. Unfortunately, General Nathanael Greene who had the responsibility of guarding the Palisades did not do well as this is exactly where the British came over and settled. The Americans that were camped in Fort Lee had no idea the British were only a few short miles away.

Upon learning that the Americans were close, General Cornwallis instructed his troops to follow them clear across the state. The intention was to force their retreat without engaging them in battle. This fell in line with their overall goal, which was to restore peace and order to the Colonies rather than continue a war. The British and Hessian troops continued to chase the rebels down through southern New Jersey.

Early in the chapter there is foreshadowing of events to come at the end of the year that would lead to Washington's pivotal victory. This is the first time the reader sees a weak spot in the British forces. After their victory in New York, the Howe brothers made plans to settle down for the winter months. The distance factor worked against them in a big way. It would take long months before fresh troops and supplies would reach the forces in America.

The British also started to get cocky in their attitude toward the rebellion. They began to doubt that there would be any future military engagements. The British did not think that the rebellion would survive the winter. It was this belief that the Howe brothers worked from in making their winter plans. Even as the forces ended up in Trenton, William Howe made no attempt to engage the enemy; rather, it seemed he gave them enough time to move on unimpeded. Howe's forces were overextended and exhausted. He decided to end the campaign and prepared to send his army into winter quarters.

An interesting point to note is that during the American retreat through New Jersey, the rebels did not behave like a beaten army. In skirmishes along the road, small parties of American infantry resisted stubbornly against heavy odds. This was often to the surprise of the British. However, as the British and Hessian troops approached the Delaware River at Trenton, the residents of Philadelphia feared an invasion. They believed the enemy would march on their city, so many of them fled. Many on both sides thought that the rebellion was broken and that the American war was over.



The Crisis

The Crisis Summary and Analysis

In November 1776, Thomas Paine decided to publish another pamphlet similar to *Common Sense*. Paine's intention was to revive army and civilian spirit for the American cause. The events thus far in the revolution left many to wonder if their cause would survive. After so many losses, spirits were at an all-time low. Paine sought to change that with his second pamphlet, entitled *The American Crisis*.

Although he hated war with a passion, Paine believed it was the lesser of two evils. The worse evil was having to live under British tyranny. *The American Crisis* was an attempt to awaken the people of the United States to this urgency. Luckily, it worked as he hoped. The people began to see things in this new perspective and caught Paine's spirit. Paine concentrated the mind of the nation on the single most urgent task, which was to rebuild its army, and to do so quickly. It is important to note that this revival grew from defeat, not from victory. This awakening was a response to a disaster.

As the American army built back up, the British and Hessians suffered losses. This occurred as the natural part of their process. They tended to lose officers after long engagements in America. Soldiers were lost due to illness, exhaustion and through lack of replacements. The American system proved superior in this way. Their system was simple and flexible. Plus, unlike the British and Hessians, The Americans used the same units for marching, fighting and administration.

The author also mentions in this chapter that George Washington was referred to as a dictator. While people had already used the title "his Excellency" when speaking to him, "dictator" had a very different tone to it. Congress granted Washington full power to build his new army using any means as he saw fit. Congress thoroughly trusted Washington and knew he would not abuse this new power. This act of Congress foreshadows the events to come with the birth of the presidency for the new nation. Washington's command was determined for a set period of time and with a limited scope only. At all times Washington was accountable to Congress so he only had a limited amount of authority. Again the foreshadowing of the presidency came at the author's mention of Congress taking a step toward a system of separate legislative and executive powers. This served as the foundation of checks and balances for the current government.



The Occupation

The Occupation Summary and Analysis

Richard Stockton as well as members of other notable New Jersey families played both sides in the Revolution. The British pegged Stockton as a signer of the Declaration of Independence. After they captured him, he pledged allegiance to the king and abandoned the American cause. Other families did so as well, such as the Van Hornes. Although Washington knew about their involvement of both sides, he did nothing other than look down on it. Another group of individuals able to play both sides well was merchants. Some chose their sides, but many just followed their fortunes.

The British pacification policy ran into problems that rose from a problem of supply. It was common practice for the troops to forage for supplies as needed. It became a much bigger issue as forage turned into plunder. Even worse, plunder turned into pillage, which eventually turned into rape. Even though the actions of the British and Hessian troops angered the Howe brothers, there was little they could do to enforce the rules.

As Washington made plans for the attack on Trenton, the Howe brothers kept troops posted along the forward positions along the Delaware River. They moved other troops to occupy most of the Jersey countryside. Their forces were spread far and wide throughout New Jersey. After they spread their forces, they soon had problems. These problems were not directly caused by the Americans but from the failing strength of the British and Hessian forces. Since they were so spread out now, they began to feel slightly vulnerable to attack.

The Hessian troops were exhausted. They wanted to move to better quarters to fully rest themselves. Colonel Rall did not allow them the rest they requested. They would wait to march on Philadelphia. They needed to wait until the Delaware froze up sufficiently for them to cross. Since they did not think that the Americans would attack, they did not feel the need to make any preparations of that nature.

Washington, in the meantime, knew that the British were salivating over the prospect of invading and conquering Philadelphia. Washington continued to seek ways to gain the upper hand in the hostilities. The Americans badly needed a victory. Intelligence continued to serve Washington well as he was told that the Delaware River could not be sufficiently guarded enough to prevent their crossing it at some point. This gave Washington the idea to cross the river. The decision was made and the troops were given three days' notice to get supplies and weaponry together for the crossing. They wanted to create the element of surprise.

Even when Rall was warned that the Americans would attack Trenton, he either did not believe it or he believed that they would not be able to create sufficient damage. Then the weather took a turn for the worse and it created an opportunity that would change the course of the war. They knew the weather was bad as mid-December approached

and never believed that Washington and his troops would march onward and cross the Delaware. They sorely underestimated their opponents.

The River

The River Summary and Analysis

On Christmas day, the American troops got ready for their river crossing. They knew the importance of this, and their destination was originally kept secret. The plans were to cross the Delaware River under cover of darkness and attack Trenton a little before dawn, using all their strength. Unfortunately, the weather continued to deteriorate and a nor'easter blew through. Time was vital to the success of the operation. Between the troops, weapons, and supplies they needed to get across the river, traveling in the storm put them back by four hours.

Several times during the operation Washington believed they were finished. He was beside himself when he realized they would have to attack in the daylight. He was sure that the element of surprise was lost. The men were soaked and chilled to the bone, but were in remarkably good spirits. The men's determination helped see the completion of this mission. In the end, not one man was lost to the river. Every artillery piece also arrived in good order on the Jersey shore.



The March

The March Summary and Analysis

After the troops made it across the river, they continued their march onward to Trenton. Since they had been so delayed, Washington put their attack time at about 7:00 a.m. The Americans learned from battles in Boston and New York that artillery was highly effective. They intended to use their guns as shock weapons against the enemy and as supporting arms for their own infantry. It could break a formation of highly trained British and German Regulars, and it could also steady an amateur army of citizen soldiers and give them a fighting chance against disciplined troops. In the field the guns were a great strength, but on the march they were a major impediment for a mobile army.

The stormy weather continued and got worse. As the troops assembled for their march on Trenton, the artillery took a long time to become unstuck in the mud and ice. This added to the already long delay and continued to make Washington anxious. Despite the delays and struggles, Washington continued to urge his men on. Whatever happened, he was determined to strike against the enemy that day. All of the unexpected obstacles that Washington met on the road to Trenton deepened his determination to see the operation through.

The nor'easter that broke over Trenton that day seemed a blessing in disguise. The storm increased in ferocity as the troops got nearer to the battleground. It is almost as though the physical environment was responding to the tension that surrounded the troops. The men had great difficulty getting their weapons in order due to the weather. Through all of the problems and mishaps, General Washington held firmly to his resolve, which was one of the reasons his men loved him.

The soldiers' determination truly shone through during this whole campaign. At many times the entire operation could have failed. As the author mentions, Washington's own determination played a big role in their success. Through it all his only order to his men was to "press on". This display of determination and courage was apparently contagious to his men who also showed this amount of determination.



The Surprise

The Surprise Summary and Analysis

The troops got into Trenton about 7:30 in the morning. To Washington's relief, the Hessians were completely caught off guard. For all of his worrying, Washington had his surprise attack. From the beginning, the Hessians retreated. Though they fought bravely the entire way, they did continue to move back from Washington's forces.

Although the Hessians prepared in every other way possible against an attack, the weather played a crucial role in the events. As the nor'easter blew through, the soldiers that were out on duty grew cold and tired. After a week of constant alarms and patrols, the men were exhausted. Since the weather worsened, they relaxed their vigilance a little. After some time they were allowed to come indoors to warm up and rest or wait out the storm altogether.

The Hessians received incorrect intelligence that the Americans surrounded them on all sides outside the city of Trenton. This was not entirely true. However, since the Hessian troops believed this, they did not think that they could gather the type of offensive needed to fight the rebels off. This proved to be a mistake of historic consequence. Ultimately, the American artillery overpowered the Hessian guns. When this happened, the Hessians began to flee from their posts, making it even easier for the Americans to successfully complete their mission.

Time was still of the essence for the Americans. If their assault did not proceed quickly enough they would have been in grave danger of losing the battle. Luckily, this did not happen. If the Americans lost the battle, it would have signaled the end of Washington's career, if not the end of the American cause altogether. When the Hessians surrendered, the battle was over. The Americans had won a decisive victory. As the news spread, the battle's greatest affect was felt in America, where many people received it as a vindication of the Cause. Naturally, the British blamed the Hessians for the great defeat. Thus began a controversy regarding the Hessian presence in America. The loss of Trenton was a major factor, for it added the sting of defeat to the stain of moral disgrace.

Intelligence had a great deal to do with the American's success and the Hessian's failure. Washington's tactical intelligence was excellent this day. The Hessians' lack of proper intelligence might have been what cost them this pivotal battle. This was the first mark against the Hessians in this battle. The Hessians quickly became surrounded by several battalions and started to retreat. The Americans fought with a determination that the Hessians had not seen before. At the end of the day, the Hessians were simply tired and the Americans far too driven to accept another defeat. The Americans were fighting for their freedom.



Hard Choices

Hard Choices Summary and Analysis

Washington had the victory he needed. Luck was on his side. He also knew he awoke a formidable enemy. Washington was in a delicate spot because if he made any mistakes or if fortune turned against him, he could ruin the American cause. Not only that, but he was worried about the state of the forces and the weather. Washington was afraid that the army would be completely lost if they had to fight another battle on a frozen field.

The enemy was fast making its way back toward the east side of the state. John Cadwalader urged Washington to get the troops rounded up to continue pushing them from the state. It could have turned a victory into a larger triumph. After much debate, the consensus was to pursue the enemy. They determined that one victory was not enough.

It was difficult to get the troops together for another battle since they had not sufficiently rested and recovered from the last one. However, they crossed the Delaware once more. This campaign was bigger than the first, and the weather was worse. Due to the bad weather, they did not all cross until just before New Year's Eve. In addition to tired troops and inclement weather, Washington also had to face the problem of a shortage of food supplies. Luckily, Washington was able to iron out the details and the food was flowing once again. Ammunition was in great supply. Additionally, the army reequipped itself with tents, blankets and replaced much of the equipment that had been lost at Fort Lee and in the retreat from New York.

One of the biggest problems facing Washington's army was recruiting new troops. Many soldiers were reaching the end of their term and planned to leave to go home or to serve in the navy. Washington was not able to recruit as many as he was losing. After making some bargains, the army offered a substantial fee to those who were willing to sign on for another tour of duty. In addition to the money, the men knew the important of the cause and were willing to volunteer for more service.

It is important to note Washington's style of leadership. In this chapter, when Washington's war council convened, he presented a promising proposal as someone else's idea rather than his own. It was his way of encouraging open discussion and constructive debate. His style was starting to come into its own and he was very successful this way. Washington the statesman was beginning to emerge.

Good Ground

Good Ground Summary and Analysis

The Americans expected an attack in great strength by British and Hessian troops. They decided it would be best for them to have it in Trenton, on their own ground. Trenton however, was not easily defensible as they learned from the last battle. Their objective was to entice the enemy into an assault on the Americans' turf. This was to be a defensive battle that could prove to be dangerous if something did not go their way. If it did, then the reward would also be greater.

Even though the British caught sight of the approaching American army, the Americans still had the advantage and had some amount of surprise in their attack. The British took heavy losses. The Americans found out that the British leaders were planning to strike at either Trenton or Crosswicks. Washington got the troops together and set to march on Trenton.

Though the trek was a treacherous one in such cold weather, the soldiers' spirits were rising. However tough their situation was, they were determined to have the enemy gone from their country. The men shared a spirit that was different from the last fight. Benjamin Rush's word to describe the men's mood was "composure". The British however, took a different view on things. Just one week before, many British leaders had believed that the American rebellion was nearly broken. The disaster at Trenton ended that way of thinking. British commanders in New Jersey had lost the initiative in the span of a single week. They had also lost control of the countryside.



The Bridge

The Bridge Summary and Analysis

The British needed to regroup and strike back hard. Cornwallis intended to march on Trenton. Colonel Donop disagreed since he knew how quickly the Americans could move against them. Cornwallis held to his own opinion. The Hessian officers were angry about the defeat in Trenton. They were out for revenge on the Americans.

While Cornwallis had no shortage of soldiers, the Americans posted in strength. They were particularly bold in their approach to the British. They did what they needed to prevent the British from getting back into Trenton. They forced Cornwallis' troops into battle. The bridge at Assunpink Creek was crucial for the Americans to protect since this was the best way to cross the river that was otherwise almost impassable and get back into Trenton. The Americans were able to hold the bridge at its most important point through the use of their superior use of artillery.

In this area, they were much stronger than the British and Hessians. However, the British and Hessians were in full force when they attempted to take the bridge. So much so that the Americans shared a sense of foreboding over what was to come. Regardless of how discouraging this seemed, there were still many who were in bright spirits. The men had a sense of their own strength and a confidence in one another.

The Hessians attempted to cross the bridge and began a full-out assault on the American troops there. After heavy gunfire, the Hessians were pushed back. After the Hessians fell back, a force of British infantry moved forward and tried to seize the bridge. They pushed forward with a show of strength that astounded the Americans. Wave after wave, the British came and the Americans forced them to retreat. Eventually, the British wore out and the Americans continued to hold the bridge. It was another victory for the rebels. Thus ended the second battle of Trenton which was another great victory for the Americans

Cornwallis was in denial over the growing strength of the American troops. Acting on his experience, he felt that a strong stroke was the best course against a weak opponent. Despite their victory at Trenton, Cornwallis did not believe that the Americans were a formidable enemy. While Cornwallis felt that way, his troops felt differently. They had a new respect for their enemy and were losing faith in their own leaders. On the other side, the men of Washington's army felt close to their commander. They trusted him implicitly and had full confidence in his abilities as a leader.



Two Councils

Two Councils Summary and Analysis

That night after the battle for the bridge, Cornwallis ordered his men outside to keep tabs on the Americans. Their objective was to watch the enemy and to keep American patrols from discovering the positions of British and Hessian units. Cornwallis attempted an attack on the American front, but the Americans knew what he was up to. Washington was sure to defend his troops and ward off their attackers. They were outnumbered five to one by Cornwallis' regiments.

While those preparations were going on, Cornwallis and Washington met with their respective councils of war. Each took a very different approach to decision making. Cornwallis had a large army and a smaller council. Washington had a smaller army and a larger council. While Washington's meeting was a council, Cornwallis' was more of a court. In his council, Cornwallis was a ruler more than he was a leader and was often called "My Lord".

Washington ran his meetings differently. His gatherings were more open and mixed than Cornwallis's small, aristocratic circle. Local citizens were invited to attend and to speak freely. Washington did not offer only one course of action. He proposed a problem then asked for advice on how to proceed. He did not presume to know all the right answers. There were differences too between the armies. The British officers lived in mortal fear of lost honor and reputation, which was everything in their world. In the American war, these men had little reputation to gain by victory but much to lose if something went wrong.

Cornwallis was arrogant and relied too heavily on his experience to pull him through more battles to victory. Washington knew better than to not listen to others when making decisions. He understood that he needed the people to help him succeed. This is why he was a great leader. Washington thought not only of the military problem but also of popular opinion that would eventually help him as president.

There are great contrasts of leadership between Washington and Cornwallis. British commanders were highly skilled professionals who bonded with one another as old boys but were sensitive to rank and privilege. Cornwallis made his own decisions and rejected ideas from his officers. Other senior British commanders adopted this system. The Americans improvised a different system of command. The system was brought on by a diversity of cultures in the country and expanding ideas of liberty and freedom. Washington met frequently with his council and encouraged a free exchange of views. He also listened more than he talked. It earned him great respect.

Cornwallis was still sure his troops would defeat the Americans in the next maneuver. He proceeded in typical fashion after his council meeting. Against the advice of a council member, Cornwallis did attack at night, but rather waited until the daytime.

Throughout the war in the Colonies, the British and Hessian troops were notorious for getting a late start to their day. This advice cost him the victory he looked for. Washington's troops were in no condition to fight that night and it would have been the best time to strike.



The Battle at Princeton

The Battle at Princeton Summary and Analysis

Washington decided to march on with the army and attack at Princeton. Their orders were to seize control of the highway where the road crossed a bridge over Stony Brook. The object was to keep the British from fleeing Princeton and also to stop reinforcements arriving from Trenton. Cornwallis ordered Charles Mawhood to bring two regiments to Trenton. While on their way they saw the Americans. Mawhood decided immediately to attack. The British did so with remarkable speed. Mawhood did exactly what was expected of a British officer in such a situation. He could have gone back but he chose to attack.

The Americans continued onward to Princeton. They outnumbered the British nearly three to one. Eventually the British fell back under heavy fire. Their troops thinned out and victory was nearly complete for the Americans. After hours of fighting, more and more troops joined the fray on both sides. Eventually, the Americans went running after the fleeing British. The British tried to defend Princeton but their position was "untenable". However, they managed to disrupt part of Washington's operation. The men who had gone for days without rest were too tired to push on into Brunswick.

Through the relentless fighting, Washington's men remained in high spirits. Again, this says something about their leadership. Washington served as a great example, and the men wanted nothing more than to please him and win their cause. The British however, fought hard in this battle. The Americans were awed by the discipline, skill, and sheer effrontery of their opponents.

Once again the British were outwitted. They started to feel the turn of the tides. The battles at Trenton and Princeton both had a profound effect on the British conduct of the war. Up until mid-December of 1776, the British had all but put an end to the rebellion. New Jersey's Governor William Livingston believed that the cause of the British defeat was their pride and overconfidence.



Aftermath

Aftermath Summary and Analysis

The Loyalists were increasingly unhappy with their leaders. People like the Howe brothers offered amnesty and reconciliation for those that vowed loyalty to the British. When it got down to it, they did not keep their word. After the battle of Princeton, the Americans continued to engage the enemy in smaller attacks. They continued these aggravated assaults to further drive the enemy out. The New Jersey residents were thrilled. The army's objective now was to keep British and Hessian forces on the defensive and to gain control of the New Jersey countryside. This did happen quickly in northern New Jersey.

One important thing that British army lacked was feed for its animals. Forage and fodder were critical to the army. Without forage the army could not move or fight. It could not have artillery in the field, or supply wagons for the infantry, or mounts for cavalry. Seeing ahead, Washington knew that if they were to take out the enemy's horses, the army would be easier to take out in the field for they would not be able to manage the artillery without the horses. The British and German officers in the field understood what was happening and tried to recover the initiative that was slipping away from them. Even heavily outnumbered, the Americans could still defeat their enemy.

The Americans pressed the enemy into The Forage War to prevent them from being able to launch an attack in the spring. In effect, the Americans were trying to create enough aggravation so that the British and German troops would be prevented from foraging, which is what they needed to keep their armies going. The Americans overpowered them almost every time. The Forage War was not simply a series of small symbolic victories. These small battles throughout inflicted severe damage on the British and German's ability to continue the war efforts.

The response of the British was very changed. Since their defeat at Trenton and then at Princeton, they began to think defensively. The British were still awed by the change in the American army. During the summer of 1776 they had such high spirits and now their forces were all but decimated. The conditions they met in the towns after the battle of Princeton were deplorable. The living conditions were bad, the food was worse, illness was increasing, and the rebels whom these regulars despised had gained the upper hand.

During the course of the year Washington was busy with the recruitment for a new army since the last had almost all finished their duty. He spent his time with Congress and leaders of the states. He was beginning to function more and more as a leader of the republic. With the army he also learned how to delegate authority. He also urged his officers always to be the drivers of events and never allow themselves to be "drove".



Characters

General George Washington

Lord Charles Cornwallis

Admiral Lord Richard Howe

General William Howe

Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall

Friedrich Wilhelm II

General Nathanael Greene

General Charles Lee

Alexander Hamilton

Thomas Paine

Richard Stockton

Lieutenant Andreas von Wiederholdt

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Mawhood



Objects/Places

Continental Congress

The Continental Congress in Philadelphia was beginning the functions of sovereignty although each colony governed itself. In the spring of 1776, independence was not an imminent thought so much as was restoration of rights within the empire.

Boston

The story begins in this New England town where the Americans drove the British out. Many Americans believed that this was the end of the conflict with England.

Philadelphia

Philadelphia served as the country's capital at this time. The Continental Congress operated out of Philadelphia.

Manhattan

Several important battles were fought here. The rebel armies suffered several crushing defeats on this island. After the battle of Fort Washington at the northern tip of Manhattan, many believed that the cause was lost.

Staten Island

An island just south of Manhattan where the British and Hessian troops landed prior to the battles in Brooklyn and Long Island.

Long Island

The Battle of Long Island was fought during the summer of 1776. It was another defeat for the Americans. The armies moved to Manhattan after this.

Fort Lee

This is the spot in New Jersey that the American army retired to after the fall of New York. From there the Americans began their retreat across New Jersey.



Trenton

The battle at Trenton, New Jersey was the first big victory for the American cause, which was the pivotal point for the war. General Washington staged a surprise attack that pushed the Hessian forces beyond the city.

Delaware River

When the Americans crossed the Delaware on their way to Trenton, they did what the British and Hessian troops thought was impossible. With the weather conditions as abominable as they were, the river crossing almost did not happen at all. The river crossing was a true display of American courage and perseverance.

Princeton

The second large victory for the American army came at Princeton. Once again, the enemy underestimated the strength and organization of the Americans and did not believe they would attack. The British were too weakened and disorganized to defeat the Americans in this battle. After the Americans won the battle at Princeton, they were viewed as a formidable foe.

Whigs

This was a British political party that upheld the monarchy. They wanted to enforce the loyalties in the Colonies to the king.

Loyalists

They were Americans who pledged allegiance to the British monarchy and did not support the War of Independence.



Themes

Order and Discipline

Throughout the book, one of the most prevalent themes is that of the contrasts between order and discipline between the armies and their impact. Washington believed that "the distinction between a well regulated army, and a mob, is the good order and discipline of the first, and the licentious and disorderly behavior of the latter." Washington felt that the American army he saw while on Long Island looked like a mob. There are many associations with the Americans as unruly and disorganized soldiers and the losses that they suffered. On the other hand, the British and Hessians who were highly organized and disciplined soldiers won at every opportunity up until Trenton.

The American forces seemed easily swayed by the currents of the war. At each failure, their composure came apart a little more. When they discovered that the British reached New Jersey, American discipline collapsed. Most men did not go out of the way to get affairs in order. As a matter of fact, they broke into the rum supply and drank, feeling as though they were fighting a lost cause.

After Thomas Paine released *The American Crisis*, American opinion on the war changed. People remembered what it was they were fighting for. Washington recruited new troops and although they suffered many defeats before, they now seemed firm in their resolve to win. This determination helped the troops during the dangerous crossing on the Delaware and again as they made their first attack at Trenton. Without the order and discipline they had, their cause was lost.

As a result of these things coming together for the Americans, it in turn took them away from their enemies. Their initial victory at Trenton shook the Hessians down to their core. Neither the Hessians nor the British ever expected the Americans to turn things around and claim such a great victory. The British and Hessians were shaken further after their second defeat at Trenton and the subsequent loss at Princeton. Their resolve was shaken and while they were still strong opponents, the Americans were able to take them down.

Leadership

Leadership played a crucial role in the outcome of the Revolutionary War. There were distinct differences between the leaders on each side. Both worked, but it was the American leadership that won the war. It was Washington's way to bring issues to the people for an open discussion. If there was a good idea on the table, he presented it as someone else's and encouraged others to give their opinions. Washington would merely use tactful encouragement to move something along, but he made the outcome feel like it was the people's choice. His leadership style also worked well at bringing many



different kinds of people together. Between the Yankees, Pennsylvanians, southerners and others, they began to operate as a cohesive unit and pull for a common cause.

Since Washington was a man brought up to deal only with others on his social level, he did a great deal of learning how to lead others. That learning included listening and understanding many different types of people from different social classes. His maturing style was beginning to work in the army of radically independent people. He began to treat the various people in his armies as men of honor who were entitled to equality of esteem. As a result of this, the soldiers of all ranks felt that they were one with him and were inspired by his example.

It is important to note how different Lord Cornwallis's leadership was from Washington's. A perfect example is how each conducted their councils of war. Cornwallis's meeting was more like holding court than a council. In his meetings, he was more of a ruler than a leader. People called him "My Lord". If others presented ideas, Cornwallis would reject them outright. Thus the two leaders conducted affairs very differently.

Tactical Intelligence and Communication

During the battles in New York, Washington's intelligence sources were some of the causes of the losses there. On Long Island, Washington mistakenly thought the British commanders were holding back most of their forces. In reality, more than 90 percent of Howe's troops were there, not the 25 percent that Washington thought. As a result, he did not send as many troops in as he should have. There was a second time on Long Island that Washington's intelligence failed. He did not know where Howe's forces were and did not actively patrol for them. The Americans had very little cavalry there and the British were simply better informed. They outnumbered and outmaneuvered the Americans at every chance in New York.

Along the way the Americans got smart. They learned to collect intelligence from every source they could find: prisoners, deserters, couriers, and more were all questioned at length for information. Washington became deeply involved in intelligence gathering, as well. Some of his sources included newspaper publishers and mounted officer patrols. The results started to show. These intelligence tidbits all aided in gaining American victories. Throughout the campaign, there was always great emphasis on intelligence. By the time of the Trenton and Princeton victories, the intelligence had grown more sophisticated as did Washington in his leadership of the troops.



Style

Perspective

David Hackett Fischer is a university professor at Brandeis University located in Waltham, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. He teaches history in one of the historical hotbeds of the United States. Fischer's expertise in this field is clear. He has spent years researching the subject. The most likely audience for this book is history students.

It seems that the author is determined to make it known how important the events in this book were to the formation of our nation's history. Washington's crossing of the Delaware River is a well-known event in history. However, it is probably not well known how much planning and effort went into the crossing. The story is clear: if Washington did not undertake this feat and if his army was unsuccessful, the cause was lost. Things up until this point were bleak for the Americans. This was a make-or-break event. Fischer also brings to light all the players that made the victories a reality. Additionally, Fischer details the evolution of events that lead to the foundation of the presidency and the Constitution of the United States.

Tone

The tone of this book is subjective. David Hackett Fischer is clearly opinionated on this topic. As his other books suggest, he has a love of British-American history as each book discusses the relationship between England and America and its impact on history. The story of *Washington's Crossing* is a lively account of the most crucial parts of the Revolutionary War. Fischer is very clear and emphatic about how important these events were in the formation of the United States.

While Fischer's depiction of George Washington includes the positive and negative traits, it mostly focuses on the positive. The use of Washington's "negative" traits helps flesh out his progression to a great leader. Fischer's particular use of language brings to life each step the American army took toward victory. The details of the uniforms, the weather, the men's attitudes, all allow the reader to buy in to the reality of the events. During Washington's arrival at Trenton and the ensuing fight, it is easy to see and hear the battle. The author makes the story come to life.

Structure

The book is well structured. The chapters are grouped in sets of three's that are all related to each other. The first three chapters cover the three armies involved in the War of Independence: the Rebels, the Regulars and the Hessians. The next group is about the plans leading up to the New York battles and their losses. The next three chapters are about the regrouping of the armies and the Americans' plans to cross the Delaware

River and attack Trenton. The rest of the book details the Americans' crossing the Delaware, the battle details at Trenton, and then the charge to Princeton. The last three chapters detail the differences between the army leaders and the changed realities for both sides.

It is important to note that the author makes use of direct quotes whenever possible. The use of firsthand accounts brings life to each aspect of this war. The people who fought become more real and they have a very distinct voice from that of their commanders. While each individual had a unique voice and each person had a unique role in the Revolutionary War, the overall objective was uniform for everyone. This was a very easy format to follow and brings the story full circle.

Quotes

"American troops lacked experience and camp discipline, and they paid a terrible price. They polluted their camps and fouled their water supply. The result was a polydemic of dysentery, "putrid fevers," typhoid fever, malaria, and enteric diseases." *The Fall of New York*, p.87

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." *The Crisis*, p.140

"Our republics cannot exist long in prosperity. We require adversity and appear to possess most of the republican spirit when most depressed." *The Crisis*, p.143

"It may be said that this is an application for powers that are too dangerous to be entrusted. I can only add that desperate diseases require desperate remedies...The enemy are daily gathering strength from the disaffected. This strength, like a snowball rolling, will increase unless some means can be devised to check effectually the progress of the enemy's arms." *The Crisis*, p.145

"It never struck him that the rebels might attack us, and therefore he had made no preparations against an attack. I must concede that on the whole we had a poor opinion of the rebels, who previously had never successfully opposed us." *The Opportunity*, p.190

"It is in vain to ruminate upon, or even reflect upon the authors or causes of our present misfortunes. We should rather exert ourselves to look forward with hopes, that some lucky chance may yet turn up in our favour." *The River*, p.207

"The noise of the soldiers coming over and clearing away the ice, the rattling of the cannon wheels on the frozen ground, and the cheerfulness of my fellow-comrades encouraged me beyond expression, and, big coward as I acknowledge myself to be, I felt great pleasure, more than I now do in writing about it." *The River*, p.220

"While I was talking to him, I observed him to play with his pen and ink upon several small pieces of paper. One of them by accident fell upon the floor near my feet. I was struck with the inscription upon it. It was "Victory or Death"." *The River*, p.220

"We began an apparently circuitous march, not advancing faster than a child ten years old could walk, and stopping frequently, though for what purpose I know not." *The March*, p.226

"Heard the unpleasant news of a whole brigade of Hessians under Colonel Rall being taken prisoners at Trenton by a large body of rebels, and at nine o'clock in the morning. I was exceedingly concerned on the public account, as it will tend to revive the drooping spirits of the rebels and increase their force." *The Surprise*, p.260



"They are of a moderate stature rather broad shoulders their limbs not of equal proportion light complexion with a bluish tinge (probably with cold), hair curled as tight to the head as possible sticking straight back like the handle of an iron skillet." *The Surprise*, p.258

"If we could happily beat up the rest of their quarters bordering on or near the river, it would be attended with the most valuable consequences." *Hard Choices*, p.264

"My brave fellows," Washington began, "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 the fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will consent 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." *Hard Choices*, p.272

"The Americans had constantly run before us. Four weeks ago we expected to end the war with the capture of Philadelphia, and now we had to render Washington the honor of thinking about our defense. Due to this affair at Trenton, such a fright came over the army that if Washington had used this opportunity we would have flown to our ships and let him have all of America. Since we had thus far underestimated our enemy, from this unhappy day onward we saw everything through the magnifying glass." *Good Ground*, p.289

"This has been one of the most splendid Actions of the whole campaign, and has given convincing Proof that British valour has not declined from its ancient Glory." *The Battle at Princeton*, p.343



Topics for Discussion

The bad weather that occurred on that fateful Christmas day will always be remembered. Overcoming tremendous adversity, Washington and his troops still managed to cross the Delaware River and execute a surprise attack on the British. Do you think that this would have been possible if the weather had been favorable? Explain.

What obstacles did the American troops face during the summer and fall months of the Revolutionary War that caused them to be defeated in battle? What could they have done differently?

Many times during the entire campaign the Americans suffered setbacks. At crucial points however, the men came through and overcame many obstacles that enabled them to become the eventual victors. How do you think that their determination drove them onward in their cause? Did it have an active role in their ultimate victory?

From the summer 1776 through mid-December, the British and German troops enjoyed high spirits. After more months of difficult battles, the American troops began to see a surge in their confidence and overall attitude. What events occurred that contributed to this flip in attitude?

Toward the end of the conflict, the British looked at George Washington with a newfound respect. What qualities made them feel this way? How did they relate or differ from them?

How did the events of the war shape George Washington as a leader?

George Washington viewed honor as an emblem of virtue. How did his character serve as a model for others to live by?