

For its first 160 years of existence, the colonies that made up England's North American empire acted more as individual nations than as united colonies. Hence, when tensions with England increased, and the onset of war seemed more and more likely, there was hardly a "national" army to fight the British. At the time, individual colonies relied on their local militias for defense. These militias consisted of citizens, farmers, and laborers who doubled as "soldiers" with weapons. Such militias had little formal military training.

Following the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775, a colonial army consisting of 26 regiments was formed on orders from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. Smaller forces were raised throughout New England and New York. The Continental Congress authorized the creation of the Continental Army with these regiments on June 14, 1775. The next day, Congress appointed George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the army. Although many disliked the idea of a permanent national army, it was deemed necessary in the wake of the British threat.

Throughout the war the Continental Army experienced major problems. Not only were the soldiers in the army inexperienced, but they lacked adequate weaponry, clothes, shoes, and food. Not surprisingly, desertions were frequent and morale was extremely low. Disease, starvation, and hypothermia plagued the Continental Army at its winter quarters at Morristown in early 1777, and at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-1778. Nearly one in six soldiers wintering at Valley Forge died of Typhoid, Dysentery, and Pneumonia because of the unsanitary conditions and contaminated food. Nutrition was non-existent and the only food that many soldiers ate for months at a time was known as firecake - a simple mixture of flour and water cooked over a fire until it became solid.

Despite the dreadful conditions and desertions, the Continental Army remained relatively intact under the leadership of George Washington. With the arrival of Baron von Steuben at Valley Forge in 1778, the army learned military tactics, formations, training, and discipline, and gradually became a military force that could effectively fight the British in combat. In its first action after Valley Forge, the vastly improved army fought the British to a draw at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse. Combined with French forces, the Continental Army would stage a successful siege of the British at Yorktown in 1781, which would prove the last major battle of the war.

- 1. Prior to the Revolutionary War, England's North American colonies...**
 - A. were united.
 - B. acted in each other's best interests.
 - C. acted more like individual nations than as a single unit.
 - D. raised a national army.

- 2. Which of the following best describes "soldiers" prior to the Revolutionary War?**
 - A. Most of the soldiers were just farmers and laborers with weapons
 - B. Most of the soldiers were well-trained and had military experience
 - C. Most of the soldiers had experience with the Continental Army
 - D. Most of the soldiers were in well-trained militias that had experience fighting in wars

- 3. When was George Washington appointed Commander-in-Chief?**
 - A. Before Congress authorized the Continental Army
 - B. The day after the Battle of Lexington and Concord
 - C. June 14, 1775
 - D. The day after Congress authorized the Continental Army

- 4. If the third paragraph served as the entire passage, which of the following could be its title?**
 - A. The Growth of the Continental Army
 - B. George Washington: America's Greatest Leader
 - C. The Continental Army: Methods of Survival at Valley Forge
 - D. The Dreadful Suffering of the Continental Army

- 5. At Valley Forge... (Select all that are true)**
 - A. the Continental Army was trained by Baron von Steuben.
 - B. the British attacked the Continental Army.
 - C. nearly one in six soldiers died of disease.
 - D. some soldiers had nothing to eat but firecake.

6. Which of the following best describes the Continental Army after the winter of 1777-1778?

- A. The army was weakened from the dreadful winter and was not strong enough to continue
- B. The army was significantly improved and defeated the British at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse
- C. The army was significantly improved and fought the British to a draw at the Siege of Yorktown
- D. The army was significantly improved and fought the British to a draw at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse.

7. What question is not answered in the passage?

- A. What was the last major battle of the Revolutionary War?
- B. How did soldiers make firecake?
- C. Why did some oppose the formation of a permanent army?
- D. Where was the Continental Army in the winter months of 1777?