

DON'T MISS
OUR VIDEO
READ-
ALOUND!

Blood,



A Scary Sight

Joseph watches as his fellow fighters take on a group of British soldiers, known as “redcoats” because of their bright-red uniforms.



Text Evidence As you read, look for evidence (examples and details) that the author includes to support her description of events.

Smoke, and Freedom

A True Story of the American Revolution

Joseph Plumb Martin was still a boy when he became an American soldier. Would he survive his first battle?

BY LAUREN TARSHIS | ART BY GARY HANNA

Turn the
page for
the story



Boom! Boom! Boom!

Explosions shook the ground. Smoke filled the air. Fifteen-year-old Joseph Plumb Martin was lying in the dirt, trying to stay alive.

It was August 27, 1776. America and England were fighting the first big battle of the Revolutionary War, in New York. Joseph had begged his family to let him join the American army. He thought being a soldier would be exciting. And he was sure America would win!

But now Joseph knew that the

Americans were **doomed**. Hundreds of soldiers were dead. The cries of injured men rose up into the sky.

It seemed Joseph had two choices: **surrender** or die.



PAUSE AND THINK: How was being a soldier different from what Joseph expected?

A New World

Joseph was born in 1760. The United States wasn't a country yet. America was still mostly **wilderness**, except for a strip of land along the East Coast. This

doomed: going to fail

surrender: give up or stop fighting because you know you won't win

wilderness: a wild, natural area where few people live

The 13 Colonies

See how much of the U.S. didn't exist back in 1776?



land was ruled by England. It was divided into 13 areas, or colonies. Joseph lived in the colony of Connecticut.

Hundreds of thousands of people had come to the colonies from England and other parts of Europe. Rules were too strict there. People had few choices about their religion, their jobs, or even their friends. In the colonies, people had more choices—but they still had to follow England’s rules.

Not everyone in the colonies had a good life. Hundreds of thousands of Native American people were killed. They died of diseases brought by Europeans. They died in fights over land. They starved after being kicked out of their homelands. During this time, African people were

dragged to America in chains. They were forced to become **slaves**.

Meanwhile, Americans had become angry at England. They said it wasn’t fair that they had to follow England’s rules.

America’s anger toward England **smoldered** like a fire. And then, in April 1775, that anger exploded into war. The American Revolution had begun.



PAUSE AND THINK: Why did people leave England and other countries to come to the colonies?

Getting Ready to Fight

At first, the thought of fighting scared Joseph. But his courage grew. Soon he wanted to join the new American army. In June 1776, his family said yes. Joseph sailed to New York City. This big, **bustling** city had been turned into an American army camp.

“I was now what I had long wished to be,” he later wrote. “A soldier.”

But Joseph wasn’t really a soldier yet. And neither were most of the nearly 20,000 men and teenagers in the American army. They were just regular people, like Joseph. Some could barely

slaves: people who are owned by other people and must work for them for free

smoldered: burned slowly

bustling: fast-moving, busy



fire a gun. Their leader, General George Washington, had never led an army before. All summer, he struggled to turn this group into strong fighters.

Joseph didn't complain about shooting practice or endless marching. He choked down the Army meals, such as wormy biscuits and flavorless meat. He coped with the summer heat and the stink of garbage and human waste. Still, he was excited to be a soldier.



PAUSE AND THINK: What did Joseph and others need to learn to become soldiers?

Surprise Attack

Meanwhile, the British planned a huge attack on New York. They'd sailed ships packed with weapons. Joseph could see the soldiers on those ships. They were waiting like caged beasts. They were hungry for blood and ready to strike.

They struck early one morning at the end of August. While it was still dark, more than 15,000 British soldiers arrived on the shores of Brooklyn. Brooklyn was a village across the river from New York City. There were a few thousand American soldiers there. They were all caught by surprise.

Washington rushed to send more men to Brooklyn. Joseph was one of

The Two Georges

These leaders were enemies—but they were similar. Both men were popular and cared about their countries. Both were farmers. And both were more than 6 feet tall, in a time when most men were much shorter.



U.S. General
George Washington

them. He saw a scene of horror. Men were lying in the grass: “some with broken arms, some with broken legs, some with broken heads,” Joseph wrote. He and other soldiers tried to stop the British from reaching American **forts**.

But the British forces were too powerful. Hundreds of American soldiers were killed or injured.



PAUSE AND THINK: What did Washington do when the British attacked Brooklyn?

Secret Escape

Even with all the blood and fear, General George Washington stayed calm. Then he came up with a brilliant plan. He would sneak the American

forts: buildings for troops that are strengthened to protect against attacks



King George III of England

IF YOU HAD LIVED IN 1776...

Life was different back in Joseph's day.

Here are just a few reasons why:

Kids loved eel pie.

Eew! These slimy water snakes, baked in a pie, were an American favorite.



Schools were just one room.

A single teacher taught children of all ages— together.

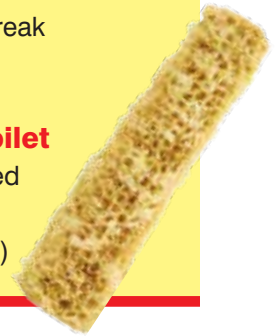


New shoes were really painful.

Shoes were expensive and hard to get. There were no left or right shoes, and it took months to break in a new pair.



There was no toilet paper. People used corn cobs to clean themselves. (Ouch!)



army out of Brooklyn during the night.

He sent an **urgent** message: "We need boats in Brooklyn now!" Because it was dark and foggy, thousands of soldiers were able to sneak back to New York City. This included Joseph. In the morning, the British attacked the forts. They were shocked to find them empty.

The Americans still lost the Battle of Brooklyn. But their army had survived. And they would keep fighting.

The American Revolution lasted for

urgent: very important

eight years. Towns were burned down. Thousands of soldiers were killed. Many Americans felt afraid all the time. But in 1783, the war finally ended. The British surrendered. America had won the war.

Joseph fought during the entire war. He later moved to Maine, married, and raised five children. He died at age 89. He always remembered the terrors of war. But he was also proud that he helped America win its fight for freedom. ■



PAUSE AND THINK: How long did the American Revolution last? Who won?

THINK AND WRITE

Pretend you're Joseph in 1776. Write a journal entry explaining how hard it is to be an American soldier. Include at least five details from the story. Send it to "War Contest" by May 15. Five winners will each receive *I Survived the American Revolution, 1776*, by Lauren Tarshis. See details on page 2.

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