



## George Washington – Coming of Age



George Washington was born on February 22, 1732 at his family's farm in Popes Creek, Virginia. His father, Augustine, was considered to be in the middle tier of Virginia Society. Though not an aristocrat, he was a planter and owned several tobacco plantations. In 1738, Augustine moved his family to Ferry Farm near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Washington spent most of his youth at Ferry Farm, years that gave him a passion for farming. Washington was an impressive figure physically. As a teenager, George approached six foot tall, dwarfing other boys his age. George Washington seemed a little uncoordinated as he tried to compete with other young men for the attention of ladies. While this was not an advantage for George in his youth, later in life being the tallest man in the room gave him a commanding appearance wherever he went. Washington eventually used a determined desire and impeccable attention to detail to become very successful during the entirety of his eventful life.

### Shaping the Man

Adversity arrived in Washington's life early. The death of his father at age eleven prevented him from attending school in England.

In 1748, at the age of 16, Washington began surveying. The Fairfax family, one of the most influential families in Virginia, invited him to join an expedition to survey western Virginia. The Fairfax's also helped Washington to obtain the lucrative job as a county surveyor. George worked hard, saved his money and started to buy his own land.

While Washington was in Barbados with his older half brother Lawrence, he contracted and survived small pox, a major killer in the 18th century. Contracting the disease and surviving it immunized Washington to the virus for the rest of his life.

When George was seventeen, Lawrence, who had become Washington's father figure, died from tuberculosis. After Lawrence's death, Washington sought his first military post. He secured a commission as a major in the Virginia militia in 1753.

### Fighting the French and Indians

In 1753, George Washington was sent north to a French outpost, Fort Le Boeuf, to warn them of being on English lands. Washington returned to Virginia with grim news. The French had no intentions of leaving the land.



In the summer of 1754 Washington met the French again in western Pennsylvania, but this time fighting erupted between the two sides. As a consequence of the May 28th Skirmish at Jumonville

Glen, the French on July 3rd forced a surrender of Washington's troops at Fort Necessity.

In 1755 Washington once again moved against the French, but this time as an aid to General Edward Braddock. Defeated by the French and Indians on July 9th, George Washington is one of the few officers who survived the fighting.

Washington participated in sporadic fighting throughout the rest of the French and Indian War, fighting mostly Indians sympathetic to the French cause in the frontier regions of Virginia.

### Lessons Learned

During Washington's campaign in Western Pennsylvania, he learned many lessons about war. Prior to these campaigns, Washington's only knowledge of warcraft came from books and from conversations with older brother Lawrence. Washington learned three main lessons after the battle at Fort Necessity. He applied these lessons throughout the remainder of the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War.



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## Lessons Learned

continued

### **Take care of your men.**

Washington spent the spring and early summer of 1754 with poorly equipped and poorly supplied men. The men's physical condition prevented the unit from fighting to its full potential. Even more devastating was low morale. Desertion became an issue. It was one of Washington's own men who informed the French of the location of Fort Necessity.

In the Revolutionary War, Washington spent much of his personal wealth to have the Continental Army at least partly supplied with such necessities as food and clothing. He spent £10,000 during the war. Even with such a large personal monetary commitment, George had only procured barely enough items to keep his army together.

### **Always have an escape route.**

Fort Necessity was the only time Washington surrendered his army to the enemy. When Washington commanded the Continental Army he was

swept from the field numerous times. However, he had always escaped to fight another day. The strategy committed Parliament to continually send supplies and troops to America from already depleted stockpiles in Great Britain. The tactic was made famous by a Roman General named Fabius Maximus. Fabius successfully defeated Hannibal by engaging in a war of attrition with his army against the more powerful Carthaginians. Washington applied it during the American Revolution as well.

### **Do not fully trust those who send you out to fight.**

In 1754, the Governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie, promised him many things and did not deliver. According to George's writings on April 25th, 1754, he was suppose to be supplied with seventy two wagons from Winchester, Virginia to Will's Creek (Cumberland) Maryland. He only received ten - in very poor shape. Later, in the Revolution, Washington fought a constant political war with the Continental Congress to supply his army.

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## American Revolution

Washington applied the lessons of 1754 throughout his later military trials in Revolutionary War. The lessons learned at Fort Necessity allowed him to maintain an army opposing British forces in America for many years and eventually wear out the British.

George Washington fought the only war with the British he knew, a war of attrition. During the Seven Years War he had seen how successfully the Native Americans could attack British settlements and troop formations, then disappear quickly into the forest leaving devastation behind. He applied those lessons to fighting the British twenty years later with enough success to defeat the British. General George Washington did not win many battles against the British. Over the course of the entire Revolution, he won only three major battles.



In October of 1781, with the help of French army and naval support, Washington cornered General Cornwallis's army at Yorktown. The defeat of General Cornwallis finally brought Britain to look for a diplomatic solution to end the fighting in North America.

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## And Beyond

After the American Revolution, Washington became the first president of the United States. He served from 1789 to 1797. Washington finally retired to his Mount Vernon home, where, in December of 1799, he died.

