

George Washington's Secret Weapon for Defeating the British

The third Monday of February is a national holiday in the U.S. known as Presidents Day, honoring America's two greatest presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's birthday is Feb. 12 and Washington's is Feb. 22. Here are some amazing, little-known facts about Washington and America's War for Independence.

In May of 1775, Washington answered the call of the Continental Congress to be commander-in-chief of the American forces. It was a daunting challenge preparing the ragtag, Colonial militia groups into an army that could face the mighty British war machine. He knew that apart from God's intervention and help, there was no hope, leading Michael Novak to say,

"Washington knew his only hope lay in a profound conviction in the hearts and daily actions of all his men that what they did they did for God, and under God's protection" (Hyatt, "1726: The Year that Defined America," 114).

Prayer Made a Priority in the Revolutionary Army

Washington therefore issued an order stating that each day was to begin with prayer led by the officers of each unit. He also ordered that, unless their duties required them to be elsewhere, every soldier was to observe "a punctual attendance of Divine services, to implore the blessing of heaven upon the means used for our safety and public defense."

He also forbade profanity, swearing, gambling and drunkenness, explaining that "We can have little hope of the blessing of

Heaven on our arms if we insult it by our impiety and folly.” He went on to express his desire that “Every officer and man will endeavor so as to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier” (Hyatt).

During a difficult period of the war when Washington and his army were quartering at Valley Forge, Rev. Henry Muhlenberg (1711–1787), pastor of a nearby Lutheran church, observed Washington’s activities. He wrote, “Washington rode around among his army yesterday and admonished each one to fear God.” Muhlenberg went on to say:

“This gentleman does not belong to the so-called world of society, for he respects God’s word, believes in atonement through Christ, and bears himself in humility and gentleness. It appears that the Lord God has singularly, yea marvelously, preserved him from harm in the midst of countless peril ... and hath hitherto graciously held him in His hand as His chosen vessel” (Hyatt, 115).

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Not only was there corporate prayer in the ranks of the Colonial Army, but Washington engaged in private prayer on a regular basis. This was confirmed by the Quaker Isaac Potts, who lived near Valley Forge and happened upon Washington alone at prayer in the forest. He said:

I heard a plaintive sound as of a man at prayer. I tied my horse to a sapling and went quietly into the woods and to my astonishment I saw the great George Washington on his knees alone, with his sword on one side and his cocked hat on the other. He was at Prayer to the God of the Armies, beseeching Him to interpose with his Divine aid, as it was ye Crisis, and the cause of the country, of humanity and of the world. Such a prayer I never heard from the lips of man (Hyatt).

Potts and his wife were Quakers and pacifists who believed that war was antithetical to Christianity. However, seeing and hearing Washington at prayer that day challenged Potts' thinking, and he said, "We never thought a man could be a soldier and a Christian, but if there is one in the world, it is Washington."

Not only did Washington and his troops pray, but members of the Continental Congress also opened each of their sessions with prayer. They also issued no less than 15 proclamations for national days of repentance, prayer and fasting. Novak is thus correct in saying, "In all moments of imminent danger, as in the first Act of the First Continental Congress, the founding generation turned to prayer" (Hyatt, 109).

Amazing Answers to Prayer

Although it was a grueling seven years of war, numerous answers to prayer occurred protecting Washington and his troops and giving them victory when defeat seemed inevitable.

For example, in the early part of the war, Washington and his 12,000 troops were trapped on Long Island by a British army at least twice that size. The British took up positions and got ready to march forward and pin Washington and his troops against the East River. Confident of their position, the British decided to wait until morning to make their advance and put down this colonial rebellion.

During the night the Americans prayed and scoured the area for boats of any kind that would take them, their cannon and their armaments across the East River to Manhattan. As dawn approached, it was obvious they had not achieved their goal.

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However, at that point a heavy fog rolled in wherein a person could only see a few feet in front of themselves. It remained

for several hours until the entire army and all its cannons had been moved across the river to Manhattan. The fog then lifted, and the British were amazed to see that the Colonial army with its armaments had disappeared, as if into thin air.

God Is Acknowledged and Praised

After British General Cornwallis ended the war by surrendering to Washington on Oct. 19, 1783, Washington appointed Israel Evans, a chaplain in the Revolutionary Army, to deliver a Thanksgiving sermon to the troops that same day.

A massive crowd from the surrounding region gathered with the troops to hear this sermon. Evans exhorted them to give thanks to God, knowing that their victory was not the result of their own strength and prowess. He also declared that the same God who fought for Israel in days of old had fought for them. In poetic verse, he declared:

*To Him who led in ancient days,
the Hebrew tribes, your anthems raise.
The God who spoke from Sinai's hill,
Protects His chosen people still,
Not in ourselves success we owe,
By Divine help we crushed the foe.*

Can We Recover Washington's Secret Weapon?

Yes, Washington's secret weapon for defeating the British was prayer, both private and corporate. His example highlights just how far America has departed from the character and vision of her founders. But all is not lost. Ever since 2010, when I experienced a seven-hour visitation from God, I have known that America can be saved.

Her salvation, however, is not in a political party or political process. America will be saved when the bold witness and sincere prayers of God's people reach a tipping point and another Great Awakening is unleashed across the land.

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Dr. Eddie Hyatt is a historian, Bible teacher and revivalist. This article is derived from his book, "1726: The Year that Defined America," available from Amazon and his website at .