

# Washington's Life



*Chris Brandsberg was 17 or 18 years old and still a newcomer to the United States when he wrote this essay as one of the requirements for completing Grades 1 through 8 at a country school in Pennington County, South Dakota, during the winter of 1898. Before emigrating from Norway, he had finished the seven years of schooling normally required there.*

George Washington was born in West Moreland County, Virginia, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, 1732. His father, Augustin Washington, was a farmer and owned large tracts on the banks of the Potomac. While he (George) was still a child the family moved to another house in Stafford County, on the Rappahannock river.

Here Georgie was sent to what is called "an old field school" — a sort of log house with only one room, where children was taught to read and write and cipher. When his father died he was left to the care of his mother. But he could not have had a better person to look after him. Mary the mother of Washington, as she is called, was a lady of highest character, with a very strong mind, and as good as she was wise.

She wished above everything else to make George a good man and she taught him to love God, and to kneel beside her and say his prayers night and morning. She also taught him always to tell the truth, and to do his duty in everything. These lessons, learned by him while he was still a boy, had very much to do in causing him to become a so great man.

George was very fond of outdoors sports of riding and

hunting and games in which skill and strength are shown. In time he grew very strong and a very tall young man. It is said that he once threw a stone across the Rappahannock river at the city of Fredericksburg; and there is very few men who could do that much. He did not, however, neglect improving his mind, and trying to learn everything that would be useful to him in afterlife. He kept a book in which he wrote down wise sayings, and rules to follow. He also taught himself how to keep accounts and how to survey land, which became a great use to him.

When George was fourteen years old he was a tall and strong boy and longed to lead the life of a soldier or a sailor. He thought that he would like being a sailor the better of the two; and through the influence

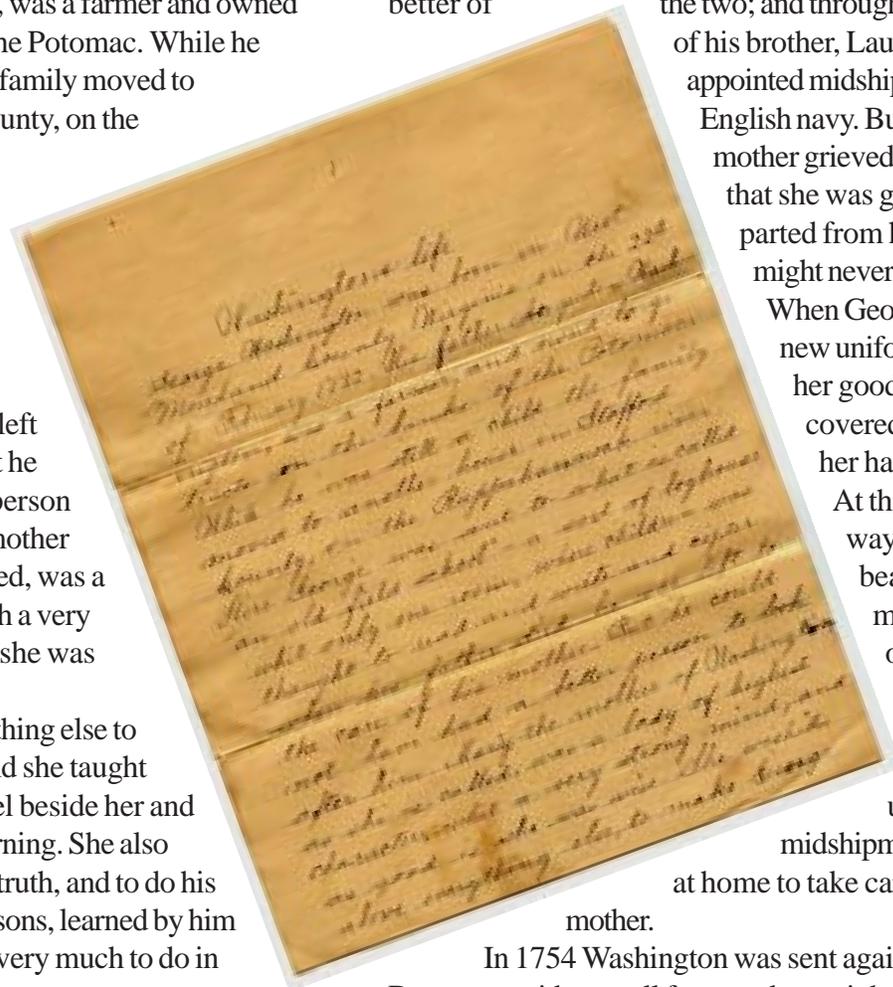
of his brother, Laurence, he was appointed midshipman in the English navy. But his poor mother grieved at the thought that she was going to be parted from her boy and might never see him again.

When George, in his fine new uniform, went to tell her goodbye, she covered her face with her hands and cried.

At this the boy gave way; he could not bear to distress his mother, and at once gave up his plans. He took off his fine uniform, gave up his place as a

midshipman, and stayed at home to take care of his mother.

In 1754 Washington was sent against Fort Duquesne with a small force and one night he surprised and defeated a party of French and Indians who had been



sent against him. But the fort was too strong for him to take with his small command. He therefore built a fort he called Fort Necessity, and resolved to hold the ground until other troops could come to his assistance. Before help could reach him, however, a large body of French and Indians attacked him and after a severe fight, he was forced to surrender.

Washington had been made Commander-in-chief of the American army, went to Boston and took command. The army was made up of farmers poorly clothed and armed, having very little powder and no regular supply of food. It was Washington's first duty to drill the men, teach them how to fight, and get together stores of food and powder.

While he was doing all this, he was careful to keep Howe's force closely shut up in the town, so that it could do nothing. In the spring of 1776, Washington posted his army so that his guns threatened the British camp in Boston, and after a brief bombardment from Dorchester Heights, forced the enemy to leave the city. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, they sailed away, and Boston was free. During the summer, the British sent all their armies and fleets against New York. At first, Washington tried to defend the city but, having only seventeen thousand men, he could not hold out long against thirty thousand.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, the British attacked the Americans on Long Island, and defeated them after a hard fight. But they did not follow their victory, and two days later, during a fog, Washington with great skill, safely withdrew his army to New York City. The British crossed over from Brooklyn to New York, whereupon Washington moved up the Hudson river. He afterward crossed to New Jersey, but not until he had given battle to the British and their Hessian allies several times.

Winter had now come, and with [it] sad times for the Americans. New York was in the hands of the British, and Washington and his little ragged army were fleeing across New Jersey, closely pursued by the British under Cornwallis. The whole country was in despair; for everything seemed lost. Early in December, Washington reached the Delaware river, and seizing all the boats within his

reach, got his army safely across just as the advance guard of the British made its appearance. He was now safe until the river should freeze over, when he knew the British would advance on Philadelphia. But Washington was not yet beaten.

He kept quiet until Christmas. The river was full of floating ice and a fierce storm had begun. Nobody supposed that an army would attempt to move at such a time and the Hessians at Trenton was making merry in honor of Christmas. As night was falling, Washington took twenty-four hundred men, and with them silently crossed the river in spite of ice and storm. Landing on the New Jersey side, he fell upon the Hessians and quickly overcame them, taking a thousand prisoners. Two days afterward, Washington again crossed to New Jersey with his whole army and occupied Trenton. At sunset, on the 2d of January, Cornwallis, with a large army, attacked him. Night coming on, the battle was stopped.

During the darkness, Washington quietly withdrew his army, leaving his campfires lighted in order to deceive the enemy. He marched around Cornwallis to Princeton, where he defeated a British force after a severe fight. Before Cornwallis could overtake him, Washington's army was strongly posted on the heights of Morristown. By a series of skillful movements, Washington early in the spring forced the British to leave New Jersey and retire to New York.

But before the close of the summer, Washington was beaten at the battle of Brandywine near Philadelphia. In October, Washington tried to overtake Germantown but failed to drive the British from it. The winter that followed as a terrible one and Washington's men suffered intense hardships at Valley Forge. In 1781, Washington laid siege of York and forced the British to surrender the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 1781. This ended the war, the treaty of peace between the U. S. and England was signed two years afterward.

Washington, after bidding farewell to his officers, returned to his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia. Washington was chosen president in 1789 and served for two terms to 1797.

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*The original essay is eight pages long, hand-written in ink and formatted in a single paragraph. A few spelling errors were corrected and it was divided into multiple paragraphs to improve readability.—Editor.*

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