

UNIT 3 WORKSHEET

MEET JOSEPH PLUMB MARTIN

Continental Army soldier Joseph Plumb Martin claimed he had three constant companions that accompanied him throughout the Revolutionary War — fatigue, hunger and cold.

A militia recruit at the age of 15, Joseph Plumb Martin was swept into many of the key events and battles of the Revolutionary War over seven long years of military service. From the disastrous New York Campaign of 1776, the harsh winter encampment at Valley Forge, and the climatic Siege of Yorktown, Martin personally experienced the day-to-day hardships of a Continental Army soldier. Many years later, in 1830, Martin anonymously published an account of his time in the army. It was nearly 300 pages in length and provided a witty and intimate account of soldier life during the conflict. His memoir gained little attention at the time but is now considered an important first-hand account of the American Revolutionary experience.

Read the following excerpt from the memoir of Joseph Plumb Martin and answer the questions on the other side of the handout:

"The winter of 1779 and '80 was very severe; it has been denominated [called] 'the hard winter,' and hard it was to the army in particular. The period of the revolution has repeatedly been styled 'the times that tried men's souls.' I often found that those times not only tried men's souls, but their bodies too; I know they did mine.

"At one time it snowed the greater part of four days successively, and there fell nearly as many feet deep of snow. We were absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals into my mouth for four days and as many nights, except a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood, if that can be called victuals. I saw several of the men roast their old shoes and eat them, and I was afterwards informed by one of the officers' waiters, that some of the officers killed and ate a favorite little dog that belonged to one of them. If this was not 'suffering' I request to be informed what can pass under that name; if 'suffering' like this did not 'try men's souls,' I confess that I do not know what could."

without thought of position or wealth. Only the Quakers, already mentioned, are an exception to this. Although they are among the richest people, their daughters dress very plainly. They have a cap or a round silver hat, and never adorn themselves with bright ribbons or ornaments of gold and silver."

1. What hardships did Joseph Plumb Martin encounter during the winter of 1779-1780?

2. What surprised you in reading this account?

3. Do you think you could have survived as a soldier alongside Joseph Plumb Martin?

4. How do you think soldiers remained motivated under these conditions?

5. We don't know for certain why Joseph Plumb Martin published his account anonymously.
Why do you think he did?