

Witness TO REVOLUTION | The Unlikely Travels of Washington's Tent

AUDIO TOUR »

Home and Headquarters 202

George Washington's sleeping and office tent, or marquee, was a beehive of activity during the Revolutionary War. As the center of his headquarters complex, it often stood at the heart of a large Continental Army encampment. Even when he stayed in private homes — all those places with signs "Washington slept here" — he used his tent as a private office. He also used the tent as a symbol of his commitment to the Revolutionary cause. Soldiers and observers noticed how often he remained in the "tented field" with his army, choosing shared hardship over his own comfort and security.

By 1776, Washington was used to weathering life under canvas. He had been on long expeditions as far back as 1748, when as a sixteen-year-old he travelled in western Virginia as a land surveyor, and during the Seven Years' War, also known as the French and Indian War, when he served as a British provincial officer. He knew what to expect.

But the Revolutionary War presented a new challenge: how would Washington become a general in a republic? He needed to show that he was a virtuous common citizen but also demand the respect and discipline needed to command an army. He realized that people would judge him not only by his actions and words but also by what he wore, ate, and used. He chose all of these things carefully. The sort of tent he chose to serve as his home and headquarters, would have profound symbolism for the fragile wartime United States.