**The Militia and the Continental Army**

There were two main groups of soldiers who fought on the American side during the Revolutionary War.

One group was the militia. The militia was made up citizens who were ready to fight in case of an emergency. Most cities and communities in the colonies had a militia in order to fight off Indian war parties and bandits. Most of the men between the ages of 16 and 65 were members of the militia. They only trained a few times a year.

The other group of American soldiers was the Continental Army. The Continental Congress established the Continental Army as the first real army of the United States. They made George Washington the commander. The army was made up of paid volunteers who enlisted for a period of time. At first the enlistments were for shorter periods like six months. Later on in the war, the enlistments were as long as three years. The soldiers in the Continental Army trained and drilled as fighting men.

**How many soldiers were there?**

As many as 150,000 men fought as part of the Continental Army over the course of the Revolutionary War. However, there were never nearly that many serving at the same time. The largest the army was at one time was around 17,000 soldiers.

**Were the soldiers paid?**

When soldiers signed up for an enlistment period they were promised to receive a bounty at the end of the time. The bounty was either money or land. They also received a monthly salary: privates earned $6, sergeants $8, and captains $20. Soldiers had to buy their own uniforms, gear, and weapons with their own money, however.

**Who joined the Continental Army?**

People from all walks of life and from all the different colonies joined the Continental Army. This included farmers, tradesmen, preachers, and even slaves. Some slaves were offered their freedom for fighting. Many poor people saw the bounty of land as a way to better themselves.

**How old were the soldiers?**

The soldiers were of all ages from young boys to old men. The majority of the soldiers, however, were ages 18-24. Young boys in the army worked as messengers, water carriers, and drummers.

**Medicine and Disease**

During the Revolutionary War more soldiers died from disease than from combat. Soldiers had a poor diet, worn out clothes, damp shelters, and lived in unsanitary conditions. Diseases such as smallpox and typhus killed thousands of soldiers.

Hospitals and medicine were not very good at this time in history. An injured soldier was often better off if he was left to heal by himself rather than being treated by a doctor.

**What if you were taken prisoner?**

Perhaps the worst thing that could happen to a soldier was to be taken prisoner. The British treated their prisoners terribly. Over 8,500 American soldiers died while in prison, that's almost half of all the American deaths during the war. The British barely fed the prisoners and kept them in crowded disgusting conditions. Many prisoners were held in prison ships near New York City. Getting sent to one of these ships was practically a death sentence.