

= George Washington in the French and Indian War =

George Washington (February 22 , 1732 ? December 14 , 1799) commanded the Continental Army in American Revolutionary War (1775 ? 1783) , and was the first President of the United States , serving from 1789 to 1797 . Because of his central role in the founding of the United States , Washington is often called the " Father of his Country " . His devotion to republicanism and civic virtue made him an exemplary figure among early American politicians .

Washington 's military experience began in the French and Indian War with a commission as a major in the militia of the British Province of Virginia . In 1753 Washington was sent as an ambassador from the British crown to the French officials and Indians as far north as present @-@ day Erie , Pennsylvania . The following year he led another expedition to the area to assist in the construction of a fort at present @-@ day Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania . Before reaching that point , he and some of his men , accompanied by Indian allies , ambushed a French scouting party . Its leader was killed , although the exact circumstances of his death were disputed . This peacetime act of aggression is seen as one of the first military steps leading to the global Seven Years ' War . The French responded by attacking fortifications Washington erected following the ambush , forcing his surrender . Released on parole , Washington and his troops returned to Virginia .

In 1755 he participated as a volunteer aide in the ill @-@ fated expedition of General Edward Braddock , where he distinguished himself in the retreat following the climactic Battle of Monongahela . He served from 1755 until 1758 as colonel and commander of the Virginia Regiment , directing the provincial defenses against French and Indian raids and building the regiment into one of the best @-@ trained provincial militias of the time . He led the regiment as part of the 1758 expedition of General John Forbes that successfully drove the French from Fort Duquesne , during which he and some of his companies were involved in a friendly fire incident . Unable to get a commission in the British Army , Washington then resigned from the provincial militia , married , and took up the life of a Virginia plantation owner .

Washington gained valuable military skills during the war , acquiring tactical , strategic , and logistical military experience . He also acquired important political skills in his dealings with the British military establishment and the provincial government . His military exploits , although they included some notable failures , made his military reputation in the colonies such that he became a natural selection as the commander in chief of the Continental Army following the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War in 1775 . His successes in military and political spheres during that conflict led to his election as the first President of the United States of America .

= = Background = =

Born into a well @-@ to @-@ do Virginia family near Fredericksburg in 1732 [O.S. 1731] , Washington was schooled locally until the age of 15 . The early death of his father when he was 11 eliminated the possibility of schooling in England , and his mother rejected attempts to place him in the Royal Navy . Thanks to the connection by marriage of his half @-@ brother Lawrence to the wealthy Fairfax family , Washington was appointed surveyor of Culpeper County in 1749 ; he was just 17 years old . Washington 's brother had purchased an interest in the Ohio Company , a land acquisition and settlement company whose objective was the settlement of Virginia 's frontier areas , including the Ohio Country , territory north and west of the Ohio River . Its investors also included Virginia 's Royal Governor , Robert Dinwiddie , who appointed Washington a major in the provincial militia in February 1753 .

= = Emissary = =

The Ohio Country was occupied by a variety of Indian tribes that were nominally under the suzerainty of the Iroquois Confederacy based in what is now northwestern New York . The area was also the subject of several conflicting claims by British and French colonies . The British provinces of Virginia and Pennsylvania both claimed the area , and traders from Pennsylvania had been trading

with the Indians at least since the early 1740s . In 1752 , representatives of the Ohio Company reached an agreement with the local Indian leaders allowing the construction of a fort and a small settlement at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers (present @-@ day Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania) , and for the establishment of some settlements south of the Ohio River . The French were alarmed by these developments , and in 1753 began the construction of a series of fortifications in the uppermost headwaters of the Ohio River (near present @-@ day Erie , Pennsylvania) , intending to extend the line of forts downriver and deny British traders and settlers access to the territory . When news of this reached Virginia , Governor Dinwiddie sought advice from the British government in London . He received orders to send a messenger to the French , reiterating British claims and demanding that they stop construction of their forts and quit the territory .

Governor Dinwiddie chose Major Washington , then 21 years old , for the trek into the Ohio Country to assess the French military situation , and to deliver the British demands . He was a good choice despite his youth because he was familiar with the frontier from survey work , had good health , and both government and Ohio Company leaders trusted Washington . Although he had no frontier warfare experience , neither did most other Virginians . Washington departed from Williamsburg at the end of October 1753 . In Fredericksburg he picked up Jacob Van Braam , a family friend who spoke French , before heading into the Virginia highlands . There he was joined by Christopher Gist , an Ohio Company agent who was familiar with the territory , and a few backwoodsmen to assist with expedition logistics . When the expedition arrived at the site of the proposed fort , Washington noted that the site was well chosen , having " the entire Command of the Monongahela " .

The expedition then proceeded on to Logstown , a large Indian settlement a short way down the Ohio River . After parleying with the Indians , the Mingo " Half King " Tanacharison and three of his men agreed to accompany the British expedition to meet with the French . Washington also learned that many of the Ohio tribes were as unhappy about the British plans for settling the area as they were of the French plans to fortify it . Leaving Logstown on November 30 , they arrived at Fort Machault on December 4 . The commander there , Captain Philippe @-@ Thomas de Joncaire , directed Washington to his superior officer , stationed at Fort LeBoeuf , further north . While dining with Joncaire , Washington learned of French intentions to " take possession of the Ohio " .

Washington 's party reached Fort LeBoeuf on December 11 , in the middle of a raging snowstorm . The French commander , Captain Jacques Legardeur de Saint @-@ Pierre , received them with hospitality ; however , in response to Dinwiddie 's demands , he pointed out that the letter was more properly addressed to his superior , New France 's governor the Marquis Duquesne . The letter Legardeur drafted in response to Dinwiddie 's was clear and to the point : " as to the summons you send me to retire , I do not think myself obliged to obey it . " Washington took careful notes of the military arrangements at both forts before departing on December 16 . He was somewhat concerned by the fact that Tanacharison and his men remained behind for further discussions with the French ; he wrote , " I saw that every strategem which the most fruitful brain could invent , was practiced to win Half King to their interest " . He returned to Williamsburg after a month of difficult travel . Dinwiddie had Washington 's account of the expedition widely distributed to emphasize the French threat . It was printed on both sides of the Atlantic , giving Washington an international reputation .

= = Jumonville and Fort Necessity = =

While Washington was returning from this expedition , Dinwiddie sent men from the Ohio Company (who were also commissioned into the provincial militia) under William Trent to begin construction of the company 's fort . In February , with Tanacharison 's blessing , Trent and his men began construction of the fort at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers . Legardeur 's successor at Venango , Claude @-@ Pierre Pécaudy de Contrecoeur , led a force of about 500 men Canadiens and Indians (rumors reaching Trent 's men put its size at 1 @, @ 000) to dislodge them . On April 16 , they arrived at the forks ; the next day , Trent 's force of 36 men , led by Ensign Edward Ward in Trent 's absence , agreed to leave the site , over the vociferous objections of Tanacharison . The French then began construction of Fort Duquesne .

Washington , upon his return to Williamsburg , was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in the newly created Virginia Regiment , and ordered by Dinwiddie to raise a force to assist in the completion of Trent 's fort . Dinwiddie 's orders were to " act on the [defensive] , but in Case any Attempts are made to obstruct the Works or interrupt our [settlements] by any Persons whatsoever , You are to restrain all such Offenders , & in Case of resistance to make Prisoners of or kill and destroy them . " Historian Fred Anderson describes Dinwiddie 's instructions , which were issued without the knowledge or direction of the British government , as " an invitation to start a war . " Washington was ordered to gather up as many supplies and paid volunteers as he could along the way . By the time he left for the frontier on April 2 , he had recruited fewer than 160 men . Moving quickly and without artillery , his force marched north and west , picking up additional militia companies along the way . On April 19 , outside Winchester , Virginia , Washington received word that a large French force was descending the Allegheny . On reaching Wills Creek he met part of Trent 's company , who , in addition to confirming the arrival of the French , brought a supportive message from Tanacharison . To keep Tanacharison 's support , Washington decided to advance rather than turning back . However , road @-@ building went slowly , and by the end of May Washington 's company had reached a place known as the Great Meadows (now in Fayette County , Pennsylvania) , about 37 miles (60 km) south of the forks . There he began construction of a small fort and awaited further news or instructions .

On May 23 , Contrecoeur , now in command at Fort Duquesne , sent Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville with 35 Canadiens to see if Washington had entered French territory , and with a summons to order Washington 's troops out ; this summons was similar in nature to the one Washington had delivered to them in 1753 . On May 27 , Washington was told by Christopher Gist that a French party numbering about 50 was in the area . In response , Washington sent 75 men with Gist to find them . That evening , Washington received a message from Tanacharison , informing him that he had found the Canadien camp , and that the two of them should meet . Despite the fact that he had just sent another group in pursuit of the French , Washington went with a detachment of 40 men to meet with Tanacharison . The Mingo leader had with him 12 warriors , two of whom were boys . After discussing the matter , the two leaders agreed to make an attack on the Canadiens .

Washington and Tanacharison then ambushed Jumonville 's party , sneaking up and surrounding the French camp . Some were still asleep , others preparing breakfast , when without warning , Washington gave the order to fire . Those who escaped the volley scrambled for their weapons , but were swiftly overwhelmed . Ten of the French , including Jumonville , were killed , one was wounded , and all but one (who escaped to warn the French commander at Fort Duquesne) of the rest were taken prisoner .

The exact circumstances of Jumonville 's death are disputed . Contrecoeur claimed that Jumonville and most of the other wounded French were massacred in cold blood by British musket fire after having surrendered ; Washington claimed in his account that Jumonville was killed , but did not give any details . Other accounts claimed that Tanacharison tomahawked Jumonville while he (Jumonville) was reading the summons . When the British left the battlefield to return to their camp at Great Meadows , they did not bury any of the French dead .

Washington then finished building Fort Necessity at the Great Meadows , anticipating a French counterattack . The fort , completed June 2 , was not much more than a wooden stockade 7 feet (2 @. @ 1 m) high and about 50 feet (15 m) in diameter surrounded by a ditch . It was so poorly sited (surrounded by higher hills and woods providing cover to the enemy) that Tanacharison tried to point out its defects . Washington dismissed these concerns , convinced the fort could withstand " the attack of 500 Indians . " Over the next month , his force grew by 200 men from Virginia and an independent company of 100 British regulars that had marched up from South Carolina , while he continued to build the road toward the forks . The arriving Virginians brought congratulations from Governor Dinwiddie on his success at Jumonville Glen , and word that Washington had been promoted to colonel , owing to the death of Colonel Joshua Fry in a fall from his horse .

While the road building went on , Washington pressed Tanacharison for more Indian support . However , the Half King seemed to have lost confidence in the British cause , and he and his

followers soon abandoned the British camp . This complete loss of Indian support prompted Washington to withdraw his work crews back to Fort Necessity . Not long afterward , a force of 700 French and Indians surrounded the fort , and Washington was soon compelled to surrender . The surrender document that Washington signed prevented his men from returning to the Ohio Country for one year , and included an admission that Jumonville had been " assassinated " . (The document was written in French , which Washington could not read , and may have been poorly translated for him .) Because the French claimed that Jumonville 's party had been on a diplomatic (rather than military) mission , the " Jumonville affair " became an international incident , and the military escalation that followed blossomed into the global Seven Years ' War . Although most Virginians were not particularly critical , there was rumbling about Washington 's actions in other quarters . One New Yorker wrote that Washington acted rashly and that he was " too ambitious of acquiring all the honor " , while London commentators dismissed the failure casually , citing a lack of colonial military experience . Governor Dinwiddie was publicly supportive of Washington , but criticized him privately , noting that some of the Virginia Regiment 's problems originated in a " want of proper Command " . Dinwiddie assigned command of a follow @-@ up expedition (that never actually reached the Ohio Country) to North Carolina militia colonel James Innes . In another step that may have been calculated to clip the young colonel 's wings , Dinwiddie reorganized the Virginia Regiment into separate companies , with no ranks above captain ; Washington resigned rather than accept a demotion .

= = Braddock 's Defeat = =

In 1755 , as part of the British military escalation , Major General Edward Braddock arrived in North America with a force of British Army regulars to head a major effort against the French in the Ohio Country . Washington wanted to serve on the expedition , but refused to do so as a provincial officer , since he would be outranked by even junior officers in the regular army establishment . (Washington was said to " [bubble] with fury when British regular officers expressed their disdain of provincial officers and soldiers " , and at the realization that British officers were always senior to colonials regardless of rank .) Through negotiations mediated by Governor Dinwiddie , Washington was offered an unpaid volunteer position as one of Braddock 's aides . Washington accepted , writing to Braddock 's principal aide , Captain Robert Orme , " I wish for nothing more earnestly , than to attain a small degree of knowledge in the Military Art " , and that the position would provide him " a good opportunity ... of forming an acquaintance which may be serviceable hereafter , if I can find it worth while pushing my Fortune in the Military way . "

When Braddock 's regulars arrived in Alexandria , Washington spent much time there , observing infantry drills and other internal workings of the army , and even copied Braddock 's orders to absorb the style in which they were written . The expedition finally marched off in April 1755 , and made extremely slow progress along the road Washington had cut in 1754 , owing to the heavy artillery and long baggage train . Braddock and his entourage arrived at Fort Cumberland on May 10 . From there the progress slowed even further as the army made its way to the Monongahela River . Washington fell ill with dysentery en route , and only rejoined the column on July 8 , when it was nearing the Monongahela .

The next day , after Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage 's light infantry had crossed the Monongahela about 10 miles (16 km) from Fort Duquesne , they stumbled into a French and Indian force that had been sent to locate them . Both sides were surprised , but the French and Indians quickly organized themselves and made a vicious onslaught against the British . Gage 's men , and the work crews they were guarding , turned and fled in a panic , right into the arriving column of regulars , which included Braddock and his entourage . The discipline of the British regulars broke down , and a panicked retreat began , with the French and Indians firing at them from the cover of the surrounding woods . Braddock lost several horses , and eventually went down with a mortal wound . Washington was one of the few of Braddock 's aides to emerge relatively unscathed , despite being significantly involved in the fighting . He had two horses shot out from under him , and four bullets pierced his coat . He sustained no injuries and showed coolness under fire . Braddock ,

who had been loaded onto a wagon in a makeshift litter , ordered Washington to ride back to fetch the remainder of the army that was working its way up from the Great Meadows . The battered remnants of Braddock 's force eventually returned to Fort Cumberland , where Washington wrote letters harshly critical of the event . To Governor Dinwiddie he reported that , although the British officers fought well , their " cowardly Dogs of soldiers " did not . The Virginians , he said , acquitted themselves well : they " behaved like Men , and died like Soldiers . " His reports burnished the reputation of the Virginia Regiment , and Washington was lauded as the " hero of Monongahela " for his work organizing the retreat . Dinwiddie was also forced to acknowledge Washington 's " gallant Behav [io] r " , and the Virginia House of Burgesses reorganized the colony 's defenses with Washington as colonel of a 1 @, @ 200 strong regiment .

= = Command , rank , and defense = =

Governor Dinwiddie had designated Fort Cumberland the regimental headquarters , even though it was located in Maryland . Washington learned that it was commanded by Captain John Dagworthy , who led a company of Maryland militia but also held a royal commission and would thus outrank him . After a brief visit to Fort Cumberland in September 1755 , Washington left , and chose to base himself at Winchester instead . He then embarked on recruiting expeditions to fill out the regiment , traveling often to Williamsburg . There , he complained bitterly to Dinwiddie about serving under Dagworthy . When Dagworthy refused to let the Virginians draw supplies from Fort Cumberland (which , despite its location , had been paid for and provisioned by Virginia) , Dinwiddie came to agree with Washington . He wrote to Massachusetts Governor William Shirley , who was acting as commander in chief after Braddock 's death , requesting royal commissions for Washington and other Virginia officers . When Shirley did not respond in a timely manner , Dinwiddie authorized Washington to travel to Boston to renew the request in person . Washington spent some time visiting in all of the major towns on the way , but his mission was ultimately only partially successful . After receiving Washington , Shirley issued a decree that Virginia 's officers outranked Dagworthy and other British officers of lower rank .

In his first year in command of the Virginia Regiment , Washington shaped the unit into one of the best provincial military units in the colonies . He rigorously enforced military discipline , often punishing transgressions with the lash , but also sometimes hanging those convicted of serious offenses like desertion . The latter was a particular problem : many of the recruits were either foreigners or from Virginia 's lower classes , and had little at stake in the conflict . He developed detailed guidelines for frontier warfare , was personally responsible for organizing the supply and equipment of the regiment , and even designed the regimental uniforms . He was also a voracious reader of military treatises of all sorts , from Julius Caesar 's Commentaries to recent British training manuals . Despite all of his work , Virginia 's frontier was ravaged by raiding parties , and he lost one third of his men in eighteen months . Washington 's relationship with Dinwiddie deteriorated again over these difficulties and ongoing complaints about pay that was inadequate compared to British regimental standards .

In 1757 Washington renewed attempts to cultivate relations in the army in the hopes of getting a commission . He wrote flattering letters to the new commander in chief , the Earl of Loudoun , and even named one of Virginia 's frontier forts after him . However , Loudoun was only in command for one year , and was recalled after a failed expedition against Fortress Louisbourg . Later in the year , Washington again suffered a serious bout of dysentery ; he was bedridden for much of the winter of 1757 ? 58 , and even suggested to the Virginia Burgesses that he be replaced since he could not properly do his duty as colonel of the regiment .

= = Forbes expedition = =

The failures of British military policy in 1757 led to a change of government in London , with William Pitt coming firmly into control of Britain 's global war effort . Pitt decided to focus a large number of resources on the war in North America , and three major expeditions were planned . One of these ,

under the command of Brigadier General John Forbes , was assigned to move against the French in the Ohio Country , with its first major goal the capture of Fort Duquesne . Forbes was to lead an army of 2 @, @ 000 regulars augmented by 5 @, @ 000 provincials raised from Pennsylvania southward .

= = = Diplomacy and military politics = = =

The Virginia Burgesses voted to raise a second regiment of 1 @, @ 000 men in addition to Washington 's , both of which would participate in the Forbes expedition under Washington 's overall command . Forbes was apparently already aware of Washington 's reputation , writing that he was " a good and knowing Officer in the Back Country . " Washington , as he had with other army commanders , hoped for notice and sponsorship , and asked General John Stanwix to " [m] ention me in favorable terms to General Forbes . " Forbes ordered the Virginia troops to gather at Winchester while the army began cutting a new road from Carlisle , Pennsylvania toward Fort Duquesne . Based in part on advice from Washington , Forbes spent much of the spring and summer negotiating with the Ohio Indians for their support . A preliminary agreement was reached in August in which many of those Indians , led by chief Teedyuscung , agreed to abandon their alliance with the French . Washington and his troops were first given the task of improving the road between Fort Frederick and Fort Cumberland , and did not join with the main army at Fort Bedford until late summer .

At this point Forbes was faced with a choice of routes . He could cut a new road directly across western Pennsylvania , or he could go south and pick up Braddock 's route . Washington extensively lobbied Forbes and other British officers to use Braddock 's route , which would have been more advantageous to Virginia interests . Forbes and others took a dim view of this activity , suspecting personal and provincial financial motivation . In response to a letter in which Washington bemoaned " our Enterprize [is] Ruind " , and blamed Colonel Henry Bouquet for his advocacy of the Pennsylvania route , Forbes angrily wrote , " I am now at the bottom , of their Scheme against this new road " and chastized Washington , writing that his heavy @-@ handed advocacy " was a shame for any officer to be Concerned in . " Forbes ultimately chose the Pennsylvania route for pragmatic military reasons : the army , was expected to occupy and hold Fort Duquesne , and would require a reliable supply route , and the Pennsylvania route was superior for this purpose . However , as the expedition pushed west and Forbes learned that the last ridge to cross would prove particularly difficult , he granted that Washington and other advocates of the Virginia route may have been correct in their assessment of the chosen route 's problems .

= = = Advance on Fort Duquesne = = =

In early September , troops under Henry Bouquet 's command began construction of a fort near present @-@ day Loyalhanna Township that eventually came to be known as Fort Ligonier . Bouquet was handling the forward activities of the expedition because Forbes was sick with dysentery . On September 11 , Bouquet authorized Major James Grant to lead a reconnaissance in force to investigate the strength of Fort Duquesne 's defenses . Grant took this opportunity to launch an assault on the fort , and was decisively beaten and taken prisoner along with one third of his 800 @-@ strong detachment . Although Washington was not involved , men from his regiment acquitted themselves well in the debacle ; 62 of them died in the battle , and others were among the prisoners . The French at Fort Duquesne , whose supply line had been cut by the British victory in the August Battle of Fort Frontenac , made an unsuccessful attack against Fort Ligonier in the hopes of either stopping the expedition or at least acquiring some of its supplies .

On November 12 , in response to rumors that the French had sent out a raiding force , Forbes sent out a detachment of the Virginia regiment to investigate reports of a French raiding expedition . When sounds of gunfire reached the British camp , Forbes sent a second detachment . Primary sources are unclear on which detachment Washington led ; the other was led by Lieutenant Colonel George Mercer . In the dimming light of early evening and the haze of musket smoke the two

detachments mistook each other for the enemy ; the friendly fire incident resulted in 40 casualties . Washington claimed to have interceded , " knocking up with his sword the presented pieces " , but Captain Thomas Bullitt , the only other officer to leave an account , held Washington responsible for the incident , noting that his opinion was shared by " several of the officers . " The incident appeared to leave an emotional scar on Washington , who did not speak or write of it for many years .

A beneficial result of the incident was that several prisoners were taken ; Forbes learned from them that Fort Duquesne was about to be abandoned . This prompted Forbes to accelerate the expedition 's advance , and it was soon in a position of strength about 10 miles (16 km) from Fort Duquesne . On November 23 they heard a large explosion from the direction of the fort ; its commander , François @-@ Marie Le Marchand de Lignery , had blown it up . Forbes assigned Washington command of one of the brigades that advanced to find the smoking remains of the French fort the next day . General Forbes , still weak from illness , only briefly visited the site . He completed the return trip to Philadelphia in a litter , and died in March 1759 . Washington was back home in Virginia by the end of December ; the expedition was his last military activity of the war .

= = End of service = =

Upon his return to Williamsburg , Washington , to the surprise of many , tendered his resignation from the Virginia militia . Many of his officers showered him with praise , including the critical Captain Thomas Bullitt . Washington was lauded for his " punctual Obervance " of his duties , the " Frankness , Sincerity , and a certain Openness of Soul " , and the " mutual Regard that has always subsisted between you and your Officers . " Biographer James Ferling characterizes as their highest tribute the statements that Washington " heightened our natural Emulation , and our Desire to excel " and " In you we place the most implicit confidence . "

= = Lessons learned = =

Although Washington never gained the commission in the British army he yearned for , in these years the young man gained valuable military , political , and leadership skills , and received significant public exposure in the colonies and abroad . He closely observed British military tactics , gaining a keen insight into their strengths and weaknesses that proved invaluable during the Revolution . He demonstrated his toughness and courage in the most difficult situations , including disasters and retreats . He developed a command presence ? given his size , strength , stamina , and bravery in battle , he appeared to soldiers to be a natural leader and they followed him without question . Washington gained connections because of his popularity , which would serve him well later in the Revolution . His involvement in the war , given the circumstances , was just enough for him to be able to craft his own idea of what a leader looked like . Washington learned to organize , train , and drill , and discipline his companies and regiments . From his observations , readings and conversations with professional officers , he learned the basics of battlefield tactics , as well as a good understanding of problems of organization and logistics . Historian Ron Chernow is of the opinion that his frustrations in dealing with government officials during this conflict led him to advocate the advantages of a strong national government and a vigorous executive agency that could get results ; other historians tend to ascribe Washington 's position on government to his later American Revolutionary War service . His dealings also gave him the diplomatic skills necessary to negotiate with officials at the local and provincial levels . He developed a very negative idea of the value of militia , who seemed too unreliable , too undisciplined , and too short @-@ term compared to regulars . On the other hand , his experience was limited to command of about 1 @,@ 000 men , and came only in remote frontier conditions that were far removed from the urban situations he faced during the revolution at Boston , New York , Trenton and Philadelphia .

= = Later life = =

On January 6 , 1759 , Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis , a wealthy Virginia widow . He

had already won election to the Virginia House of Burgesses during the summer of 1758 . For the next 16 years he lived the life of a Virginia plantation owner and politician . As tensions rose between the British parliament and the colonies , he gradually adopted positions in opposition to the parliament 's policies . When the American Revolutionary War broke out in April 1775 , Washington arrived at the Second Continental Congress in a military uniform , and was chosen as Commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the Continental Army . After leading American forces to victory , he chaired the Constitutional Convention that drafted the United States Constitution , and was then elected the first President of the United States , serving two terms . He briefly saw additional military service during a threatened war with France in 1798 , and died in December 1799 . He is widely recognized as the " Father of his country " .

= = Endnotes = =