



*General George Washington and the Continental Army cross the Delaware River on December 25, 1776.*

In later years he would conclude that such failure would spell economic and strategic ruin. Especially in the face of war.

In 1753, Washington began service with the Virginia militia. The following year he led an expedition to Fort Duquesne (modern day Pittsburgh) against the French during the French and Indian War.

He took command of all Virginia forces in 1755 and participated in close combat.

After leaving the militia in 1758, he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. The next year Washington married the wealthy widow Martha Custis.

After a period of living the social life of a gentleman farmer, however, Washington revisited his military

days to fight against the imperialistic British rule.

In 1774, Washington took control of the Virginia militia.

In June 1775, two months after the first shots of the American Revolution were fired, the Second Continental Congress unanimously voted Washington to command the Continental Army.

When he arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts in early July, he saw British warships hovering over Boston Harbor. Washington then recognized the power of the British Navy.

By September, General Washington, desperate to counter the Royal Navy, began commissioning privately owned ships into action to sever enemy supply lines. Thus, "Washington's Fleet" was born.

The earliest of these commissioned vessels, *Hannah*, was a seventy-ton New England schooner commanded by Nicholas Broughton.

Believing reconciliation with Britain possible, many opposed the creation of a Continental Navy.

So Washington would pen a letter to Broughton and then other captains, ordering them to disrupt enemy supply lines and to pirate provisions needed by the upstart American military.

"Washington's Fleet" would capture over fifty British ships, exposing weak points of the Royal Navy and the steel will of the independent-minded ship owners who were probably motivated more by profits of booty and self preservation than doing a patriotic chore.

