

## IDEAS & ISSUES (LEADERSHIP)

2008 Hogaboom Leadership Writing Contest: Second Place

# LtCol George Washington, USMC

Defending hard-won freedoms

by LtCol Jason Q. Bohm

**L**tCol George Washington, USMC slumped into his chair as the full weight of his battalion's mission in Iraq overcame him. He thought he had prepared himself and his men well for the challenges they would face, but after completing his first week on the ground, he realized just how complex an environment he found himself in. He was now responsible for leading thousands of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), government officials, tribal leaders, and citizens, in addition to his Marines, in defining and defending the future of Iraq. George took a deep breath and exhaled as he looked up at the picture of his namesake, GEN George Washington, hanging above his desk. George smiled as he thought about the parallels between what GEN Washington faced in building the Continental Army and facilitating the birth of the United States, and what he now faced in assisting the Iraqis in establishing a new army and democratic nation. Drawing upon the leadership qualities that made GEN Washington so successful in his endeavors, George sought to devise ways in which he could apply them to his own circumstances.

### Devotion

George knew that the trait that endeared GEN Washington the most to his countrymen was his absolute devotion to a cause greater than himself. GEN Washington demonstrated this devotion through a life of service to his country. George recalled how Washing-

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ton did not return home for 6 straight years during the Revolutionary War; refused to accept a salary as the Commander-in-Chief, Continental Army; and voluntarily retired after defeating the British instead of seeking a greater position of power. Such devotion generated an absolute trust and faith in Washington and exponentially increased his effectiveness as a leader.

George knew that he must also demonstrate devotion to his Marines



*The British surrender at Yorktown. (Painting by John Turnbull, 1820.)*

and Iraqi partners and to their mission. George's Marines were aware of the many sacrifices that he made in his service to them and their country, but he understood that he must demonstrate the same level of devotion to the Iraqis in order to gain their trust and confidence. He knew that he must first determine what was important to the

Iraqis, and provide it, rather than merely provide what coalition forces thought that they needed. George understood that this methodology might be unpopular with certain people in his chain of command, but he once again looked to GEN Washington and the conviction he demonstrated as an example of how to achieve success.

### Conviction

GEN Washington's absolute conviction in prosecuting the war as he envisioned it, rather than succumbing to the enormous pressure from his subordinates, Congressmen, and citizens to take quick action, resulted in his defeat of the British. His strategy was to harass and bleed the British Army rather than face them in major battles. He planned to survive, to outlast the British, and to make the war too costly for them to continue. Many Americans did not agree with this strategy and mocked, ridiculed, and questioned Washington's ability to lead, but it was his conviction that ultimately led to victory.

George realized that he must be convicted in his plans, while maintaining a long-term outlook in order for his mission to succeed. He knew that he must follow through with the initiatives of the battalions that came before his own, while implementing actions that would facilitate long-term development after his departure. He understood that it was not about what he could achieve that mattered, but rather, how he could facilitate the success of the greater operation. He knew

this would pose a challenge as some of his subordinates, peers, and leaders were looking for quick victories and metrics upon which to measure their success.

### **Audacity**

GEN Washington taught George that he must also demonstrate audacity in aggressively translating his convictions into actions to achieve success. His audacity in striking at the British during one of the lowest points of the Revolution helped to change the tide of war. Washington had been soundly defeated in battle, the British were aggressively pursuing him, his army was tired and hungry, and many of his men's enlistments were ending—yet he chose to attack. Washington crossed the Delaware and marched his forces 9 miles through a blizzard to surprise and defeat Hessian mercenaries at Trenton. He successfully defended against British counterattacks and continued on to attack deeper into British territory against all conventional wisdom to achieve another victory at Princeton.

George knew that audacious action was required to change the status quo and to progress forward in his area. Audacity was required to rid George's area of operations of a persistent insurgent presence. Although his area was vast and his troop-to-task ratio stretched his unit beyond what was comfortable, George knew that he must accept risk by minimizing his presence in certain areas in order to weight an effort to strike a decisive blow against the final insurgent safe havens. His company commanders were convinced that the ISF was not ready to assume greater control of their area, and his higher headquarters continued to stress the importance of not losing the gains that had already been made. However, his experience and tactical instinct told him that it could be done. Being an economy of force effort, George knew that it was only through his own resourcefulness that he would acquire the assets necessary for this operation. He looked again to GEN Washington for inspiration.

### **Resourcefulness**

GEN Washington's resourcefulness was a critical factor in the United States winning the Revolutionary War. He assumed command of an army that needed to be built, trained, equipped, and sustained with few supplies, little funds, a Congress without the power to tax, and states that were not meeting their obligations to support him. He decided to help himself when he identified that help was not forthcoming. Washington created his own navy of privateers to capture British supply ships, organized his area into districts in which to forage, assigned his most able officer as his quartermaster, and personally engaged state and financial leaders to solicit funds. It is questionable whether the Continental Army would have continued to exist without the resourcefulness of its commander.

The ISF was facing many similar challenges. George knew that resourcefulness would be necessary to assist his Iraqi partners in meeting their needs. He would aggressively work with them to acquire assets through proper channels, but he realized that these capacities were not fully functional. He would adapt and overcome. George would assist the Iraqis in capturing necessary weapons and supplies from the insurgents. Refusing to simply give the Iraqis what they needed, he would instead train them in developing their own resourcefulness. These lessons would permit them to persevere and stay the course as they did for GEN Washington.

### **Perseverance**

Although he faced many setbacks throughout the war, GEN Washington knew that he must persevere to achieve his primary mission of winning American independence. Washington lost five of seven battles in the first 3 years of the war, yet he maintained a clear vision of his desired end state. He refused to react to the many distracters that confronted him, and he remained deliberate and calculated in his actions. He was aggressive, yet patient, in developing the situation as he waited for the opportunity to strike a decisive

blow. His perseverance was rewarded with a crucial victory at Yorktown. George closed his eyes and thought about how he and his country must demonstrate the same level of perseverance if they were to achieve victory in today's war.

George knew his commitment and perseverance were needed in the long war. He loved his Marines, Corps, and country, but the high operational tempo and back-to-back deployments were taking their toll on him and his peers. Although he did not question the many servicemembers who had gotten out, or were contemplating getting out, he thought back to the total commitment and sacrifices that GEN Washington and our forefathers made in securing our liberties. He was convinced that it was now his generation's responsibility to defend the freedoms that those before him fought so hard to secure. He was committed to that end.

George jumped out of his seat with a renewed confidence in his ability to lead his Marines and Iraqis in their tasks ahead. GEN Washington had shown him the way. He understood that he must continue to demonstrate an absolute devotion to his team and to their mission, he must demonstrate conviction in pursuing the course of action that he knew was right for his area, and he must be audacious in the execution of his plans in order to achieve success. He realized that he was going to have to demonstrate resourcefulness in acquiring the assets necessary to implement his plans and that perseverance would be required to ultimately achieve victory in the long war. He stood up, nodded at the picture of GEN Washington, and shouted, "XO, get the staff together. We have work to do."

 USMC



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