

TENNESSEE SUPPLEMENT

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(Editor's Note: the following is taken from the newsletter of Stephen Holston Chapter, TN Society, Sons of the American Revolution; it is presented here in hope that it will be of interest to the Knights of Tennessee as well.)

Disease and the Revolutionary War

Over the centuries, mankind has struggled against disease; this is particularly true during time of war. The movement of troops and civilians into faraway lands not only exposes them to diseases but enables the diseases to spread to those not immune to them. In the last century, the pandemic of what was then referred to as Spanish Flu was partly a result of the World War One.

The Revolutionary War was no exception. While combat casualties were approximately 6,800, death from disease was 2½ times greater, at 17,000 casualties. The population in general suffered from various diseases, due to lack of knowledge of epidemiology and a general lack of sanitation and hygiene. Diphtheria, yellow fever, and typhus were common. Among the greatest threats was smallpox. Until a few decades ago, smallpox was still very much a threat. Even now, although it was officially declared eradicated in 1980, and the last US outbreak was in 1949, the very name evokes unease. In the eighteenth century, it was among the most feared of all diseases.

The close living quarters of the troops during the Revolution meant that smallpox could spread quite rapidly. For this reason, Gen. Washington at first opposed inoculation as it might trigger an outbreak. Also, inoculation meant that soldiers would have a weakened form of the virus which required a recovery period – during which the British could attack. He himself was immune, having suffered smallpox as a lad. The dilemma was to how to protect a healthy Army from the virus while simultaneously protecting a weakened and ill Army from the British.

Some troops, fearing contagion, engaged in self-inoculation, against orders. The danger was of course that it could lead to a general outbreak. After some vacillation, Washington finally decided that organized mass inoculation was indeed the best path; in early 1777, he ordered the inoculation of troops, with isolation measures to prevent a rampant spread of the disease. Another mass inoculation was conducted in 1778, with the result that smallpox ceased to be a threat to the Army.

Diseases factored into the Revolutionary War in other ways. The

British allegedly engaged in limited bacteriological warfare by forcing civilians ill with smallpox to evacuate Boston, forcing them to join the Continental Army. Both sides probably engaged in some form of “germ warfare” at one time or another throughout the war. According to research by Dr. Peter McCandless of the College of Charleston, the British Southern Campaign was lost in no small measure because of the impact of diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. He suggests that these weakened the British Army and influenced Cornwallis’ decision to move north from the Carolinas and encamp at Yorktown.

While the impact of disease during the Revolutionary War is not a new topic, it obviously is a timely one. As we continue to navigate the current pandemic, we better understand perhaps the dangers and sacrifices our ancestors braved to create a nation that would truly “promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty” for themselves and their posterity.

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REMEMBERING OUR TEMPLAR HERITAGE

The arrest of the Knights Templar on Friday, October 13, 1307, has become an example of tyranny and injustice. Our modern Templar Order fights those forces that would prey upon the innocent, the destitute, and the helpless, through education, acts of charity, and by bringing light to those in darkness through our Eye Foundation. Also, the original Templar purpose of guarding the roads to Jerusalem has led us to create the Holy Land Pilgrimage, so that ministers can enhance their ministry by traveling to where our Savior lived and taught. Through our support of these efforts, we continue the work of our ancient Templar brethren. We strive to maintain a world of justice, freedom, and the right of every man to worship God; in telling the greatest story ever told, we present hope for a hopeless world and love for our fellow man.