

## “How Unhappy Is War to Domestic Happiness”

### Chapter 5

#### Revolutionary Mothers

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Many people, when talking about the wives of the Revolutionary War leaders, find that they speak in reverence and hushed tones for the wives that sent their husbands off to the stark and dreary realities of war. Is this the reality or what we have raised them up to? Were the wives of Revolutionary War leaders happy with their duties required of them by their husbands or did they wish for more? Some of the women sacrificed a lot for their husbands and country, recognizing that this sacrifice was necessary however didn't make it any easier. They had to go through a lot of trials and hardship that is never really mentioned.

Martha Washington was a devoted wife to George Washington and mother to her children. However, as the war began to invade the homes of even the most high-society women, sacrifices began to be made. Martha Washington said once, “[If] he will send for me...I must go.” Pg 68. Her determination to do what was asked of her by her husband became her drive and her motivation to continue through the war her husband was fighting. Even though she began the war describing herself as a homebody, she wrote once that “I am...determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may be.” Pg 69. Throughout the whole war, she hid her fears well. They did not see a frightened, homesick woman. They saw that “Mrs. Washington combines in an uncommon degree great dignity of manner with the most pleasing affability” pg 70. Even Baron von Steuben, a drillmaster from Prussia, “...thought that she well deserved to be the companion and friend of the greatest man of the age,” pg 71.

While Martha was content to be at home, there were others that did not feel the same way and did what they wished, even if it went against their husbands' wishes. One example of this type of woman is Catharine Greene. Caty Greene was the opposite of Martha Washington, and always wanted to be the life of the party during the war. Her main concerns were the parties and dances “organized to distract the men from thoughts of the next campaign,” pg 74. She had never shown any interest in the political issues going on in the colonies until her husband rode off to Massachusetts. While she was pregnant, she wanted to see things so much for herself that she made the full day's ride to the American army camp. “She was shocked and disappointed by what she saw, for the Rhode Island troops were not smartly dressed, disciplined soldiers, but a disorganized and disrespectful group of farm boys who ignored her husband's commands, laughed at orders, and sulked if too much was demanded of them,” pg 75. Nathanael Greene didn't think that the camp was a good place for his delicate wife, embodying the notions of gender so common to that time. She was constantly pressuring her husband for permission to leave his brother and sister-in-law's home and each time she did, she always went shopping so that she was the best-dressed general's wife in the American camp,” pg 76. Caty Greene could sometimes be seen as reckless during the war. While at the end of her pregnancy, she still could not stay at home. “She trusted her fate to army doctors near Boston.” p.76. She made it to Philadelphia in 1778 which for her proved to be the social event of the

season. She danced all night with George Washington. "The truth was that army life was a perfect antidote to Caty's boredom." P77. She used the army as an excuse to be the social center of attention. Due to the fact that her husband, Nathanael Green, was able to reclaim Charleston from the British, South Carolina granted him rich farmlands which enabled Caty to become a plantation mistress. Not all Revolutionary war wives were concerned with their social standing as Caty was. Frederika Charlotte Louise von Massow, the Baroness von Riedesel did not have these same concerns.

Frederika married Fitz Riedesel who was a career military man. After he was called up as a Hessian to fight for the British, the couple was not looking forward to being apart but he promised her she could follow soon. Frederika knew the rigors of being a camp wife, but was also a very competent woman. During the Freeman's Farm portion of the Saratoga battles, wounded were brought in to the house where the Baroness and her daughters were staying. Amongst the wounded was the son of an English family that had been very kind to her. She tried to make him comfortable, giving him food, pillows, blankets, and a mattress, but with all of this he still died. A month after this experience, while getting dinner ready, there was another skirmish taking place. Suddenly, soldiers came in carrying General Simon Fraser who had been fatally wounded. The Baroness removed dinner and started taking care of the soldier. Frederika also was bold enough to stand up to the British General Burgoyne when she saw that he was eating and dining on dainty supper's and "champagne was flowing." P. 86 She was so concerned with the well-being of the soldiers and she knew that she could not keep feeding them "tea, coffee, and what little food she could spare." P. 86 Soon the Americans thought that there were bombarding a British commander's headquarters, but it was more of a make-shift hospital. Frederika found herself taking charge of the situation. Because of the fear created of the fighting, the women and children "soiled" themselves which created a stench. The Baroness re-organized the entire basement. As a German soldier watched he later wrote, There, was...Lady Riedesel with her tender infants ... amidst the suffering and despairing. The dismal space was thronged, and the air...quite infected.—the extraordinary German woman preserved her courage and compassion. She acted then the part of an angel of comfort and help among the sufferers. She refreshed them with what she had left of provisions.... By her energy she restored order in that chaos...." P 87. Shortly before the family left to go back to Prussia, the men under the command of the Baron "greeted Frederika von Riedesel with military honors." P 91 " An English officer replied that his men would never forget what she had done for their sick and wounded comrades at Saratoga. In their minds, the general's wife was as much a war hero as her husband." P91.

Three women from slightly different backgrounds chose for one reason or another to follow their husband's camps. Were these Revolutionary wives really happy about their circumstances or following orders? Martha Washington said, "[if] he will send for me ... I must go." P68 She is said to carry a great dignity. For Caty Greene, to be wed so young, and have solitude forced upon you by the absence of your husband, she did what she could, even when her husband did not agree with everything she wanted to do. Baroness von Riedesel was admired by those around her. She said she was, "blessed with a cheerful happy temperament." P91. Through these different ways all three women found happiness in being generals' wives.

Ideas for lessons:

Compare and contrast patriot and loyalist women. Then write a two voice poem or an "I AM" poem for one of the women on either side of the war.