

Nathanael Greene, Washington's General

Beside every successful leader is a cadre of loyal supporters and committed individuals. In the War for Independence, Major General Nathanael Greene was an aide and confidant to General George Washington and one of the most trusted generals of the army. During the revolution, Greene would emerge as second only to Washington in military ability, and along with Washington and Henry Knox, they would be the only three generals to serve the entire eight years of the war.

Greene was born in Warwick, RI in 1742, the son of a prosperous Quaker farmer and ironmaster. He had little formal schooling, yet was an avid reader, which shaped his habits of living, moral ideals and purposes. Although he walked with a slight limp, he managed his father's forge. His political and military career began when he served in the Rhode Island General Assembly and then became a member of the Kentish Guards. The Assembly asked him to take command of the Rhode Island military force of 1,600 men, with the rank of Major-General, and he positioned his troops around Boston in 1775, joining Washington's army. A life-long friendship began between the two men, and Washington came to depend on him and their relationship soon became confidential. Before long, Greene was virtually second in command, and took an active part in all the army's operations.

Greene thrived on commanding military forces, and he played an important role in the defense of New York City in 1776 and the surprise attack on Trenton. From 1777-1778 he worked closely with Washington during the battles at Morristown, Brandywine, Germantown, Valley Forge and Monmouth. In 1778 he was appointed Quartermaster General and served in that position until 1780. A plot was discovered that Benedict Arnold, who had teamed up with the British spy John Andre, was negotiating to turn West Point over to the British. Once this was thwarted, Greene was placed in command of West Point and presided at the trial of Andre, who was hanged. In late 1780, Greene was chosen to succeed General Gates in command of the Southern war theater and took over the leadership of the shattered and destitute army. His strategy and military tactics against Lord Cornwallis resulted in victory at Cowpens in 1781 and though he lost the battle at Guilford Courthouse, he won the campaign, and then surrendered his commission in 1783. His skills brought a close to the war in the South, and North Carolina and Georgia legislatures awarded him with choice acreage. He retired in 1785 to "Mulberry Grove", his plantation near Savannah, only to die the following year. He was honored by cities named after him – Greeneville, TN; Greenville, SC; and Greensburg, PA; with, memorials erected in Guilford Courthouse, NC, Coventry, RI, and Savannah, GA, and St. Clair Park in Greensburg, PA. A one cent postage stamp was issued in 1936 with photos of Washington & Greene along side of Mount Vernon.

Greene's great-grandmother was the daughter of Samuel Gorton, the founder of Warwick, RI in 1642. My ancestor, Captain Samuel Gorton of 2nd Exeter Company, a distant relative of Nathanael, was one of the soldiers who served under Greene's command in the Rhode Island infantry in the initial siege of Boston.

Nathanael Greene's character has applications for compatriots today – dedication, commitment, endurance, overcoming hardships, and loyalty. May we look for ways to put these attributes into practice, not only within the Chapter, but in our journey of life.