

Lesson Eighteen

The Old Wagoner

LESSON IDEA

Our lessons this month will recall the courage, character, and heroic acts of four generals of the Revolutionary War: Daniel Morgan, Nathaniel Greene, Francis Marion, and George Washington. A fifth lesson will contrast their laudable records with the unheroic behavior of other personalities of Revolutionary War era.

Our first lesson, about Daniel Morgan (the Old Wagoner), will help instill a "hero image" of the Founders while teaching family members about key battles of the war.

PREPARATION

Gather pictures of Revolutionary War soldiers or generals that show the uniforms and manner of fighting of the period. Suggested sources include *Quest Of A Hemisphere*, pp. 114-145, and other books and pictures available at a public library.

AT AT THE BEGINNING of the War for Independence, Great Britain seemed assured of victory. It had more soldiers, guns, ammunition, money, and ships than most nations in the world at the time. The Americans, on the other hand, had only one major strength: leaders with a will to win and the intelligence to find ways to do it. Can you name some of the Revolutionary War heroes? [Give everyone a chance to answer. Names could include George Washington, Nathan Hale, Paul Revere, and John Paul Jones.]

There were many others who served which honor and helped make the American victory possible. One was Brigadier General Daniel Morgan, a wagoner from Virginia. [Ask someone to define "Wagoner." Explain, if necessary, that it was someone who drove a wagon

and team of horses carrying supplies from one place to another, much as trucks do today. Morgan was nicknamed "Old Wagoner" by those who fought with him because he owned his own wagon and team.]

Morgan moved from his native Pennsylvania to the frontier settlement of Charlestown, Virginia, at age 17. The tough, brawny lad worked with what seemed like the strength of two men as he cleared trails, felled trees, and hauled supplies to new settlements west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. His education came, not from books, but from woods, mountains, and wilderness trails.

Like George Washington, he fought with British troops to protect settlers against Indian massacres. He had watched the British foolishly march their men to war in European formation, only to be mowed down by Indians concealed behind trees, rocks, and bushes. It was a lesson he never forgot. [Ask a member of the family to describe the British method of fighting. Mention the brilliant red uniforms that made easy targets of the troops; formations similar to marching bands; and the drum beat which announced the troops' arrival.]



General Daniel Morgan

WHEN THE WAR with England began, Morgan was commissioned a captain and asked to raise a company of Virginia riflemen. He chose his men with care. Muskettoting volunteers were dismissed in favor of woodsmen who used long rifles. Morgan explained the difference to

a raw but eager recruit.

"That musket of yours can hit a man only if you wait to see the whites of his eyes before you fire,"

he advised. "Now, this rifle I have is five feet long. It's heavy. Mebbe quite a load unless you carried one since you was cordwood high. But to me it's no weight at all. Takes only a halfounce ball. Your shot won't harm a rabbit at 125 yards. Mine can kill a man at 200 yards."

Morgan picked 96 hardy riflemen and marched them 600 miles in three weeks to join the Continental Army that was forming under Washington's command on the outskirts of Boston. Within six weeks, Morgan's men, dressed in hunting shirts, buckskin trousers, moccasins, and coonskin caps, were on their way to Québec to secure Canada as an American colony and prevent the British from using it as a base for invasion. General Benedict Arnold was in charge of the troops to which Morgan's men were assigned.

A twopronged attack was planned. General Richard Montgomery was to sail up the St. Lawrence River from upstate New York, while Arnold's forces pushed northward along the Kennebec River in Maine and approached Québec from the east. The expedition turned into a disaster. The 200 flatbottomed boats that used to transport the army up the Kennebec River were rendered useless in the swift, rockfilled waters and stagnant, muddy marshes of the northern wilderness. Food rotted and medicine and equipment were lost as the cumbersome boats, hastily made of green lumber, sprung leaks, overturned, or were smashed against rocks in the treacherous waters. Almost half of the men under Arnold's command died from disease or starvation.

In early December, the remnants of the wilderness army rendezvoused with Montgomery's men at a small village up the river from Québec. For ten days the exhausted Americans ate, rested, made shoes, and patched clothing while their commanders planned for battle. The attack on the walled city of Québec began on December 31, 1775, at 4:00 a.m. in the midst of a blizzard. Within hours, Arnold was wounded and Montgomery lay dead. The army was left without a commander.

INSIDE THE CITY, Morgan led his sharpshooters through a maze of streets and barricades. Faced with a barrier at the end of a narrow passage, he ran forward through British cannon fire to raise a ladder against the wall.

When a soldier hesitated, the Old Wagoner climbed up first. A barrage of musket fire knocked him backward into the snow.

Since no one volunteered to take his place, he again climbed the ladder and leaped over the top. Fortunately, he fell beneath one of enemy's the cannon, beyond the reach of British sabers. American riflemen now scrambled over the barrier, forcing the Redcoats to retreat to a nearby house. Morgan led his men in pursuit. Alone, he blocked a rear entrance from which the British troops were attempting to escape, convincing the Redcoats that they were surrounded. The bluff worked and they threw down their arms.

With the surrender of so many enemy soldiers, Morgan was believed that the tide had turned. He immediately planned an attack to secure the city, but other officers vetoed the plan. Since no one was officially in command, Morgan was powerless. Disorganization spelled defeat as the enemy regrouped and American strength dwindled. With only a handful of troops, Morgan fought on until cornered.

WITH HIS BACK against a wall, he dared the British to take his sword. Even some of his own men begged him to surrender, but he would have none of it. Finally, noticing a priest in the crowd, he handed the padre his weapon, accompanied by the fiery declaration: "Not a scoundrel of these cowards shall take it out of my hands!"

As a British prisoner Morgan was well treated and adequately fed and housed during the winter. One Redcoat officer, thinking he had won the Virginian's friendship, offered him a colonel's commission if he would defect and serve the Crown. Morgan's reply was as defiant as his terms of surrender. "I hope," he thundered, "you will never

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

Take time as you go through the lesson to define the following words:

Redcoats — British soldiers

Militia — part-time soldiers

Saber — sword with curved blade

Musket — single-shot rifle

Ranks — rows of soldiers

Flanks — right or left sides of a military formation

Cavalry — soldiers on horseback

Dragoons — heavily armed cavalry

