

What challenges did the Continental Army face?

It was a huge amount of work to supply Continental Army soldiers with what they needed. The army faced many problems with organization, money, and transportation. The Continental Army formed a special department, called the Quartermaster, to take care of getting needed items and delivering them to soldiers in the field. The Quartermaster asked each state and its people to help provide food, clothing, blankets and other items, but this did not result in having enough supplies to go around. Early in the war, the Quartermaster department wasn't very organized and had problems getting the state governments to cooperate.

There was not a lot of gold and silver in the American colonies. Paper money, or currency, became more and more worthless as the war went on. That meant that the Quartermaster could not easily purchase military supplies from Europe or food from local farmers. Equipment that usually came from Britain was no longer available to the colonies because of the war. Even when supplies did arrive, there was not a good system for transporting it to the soldiers. There were poor roads, the people in charge of delivering the supplies were not always honest, and ships had difficulties getting around British blockades. Army supplies, such as clothing and blankets, arrived late or not at all and food was often spoiled or damaged. Because of these difficulties, soldiers received much less than the promised rations and sometimes had to ask farmers for food or survive on what they could find or take for themselves.

Congress and the states were not able to raise the money needed to run the war effort. This created another hardship for soldiers. Pay rarely came on time, and when it did come, it was often in the form of increasingly worthless paper money made by the states or Congress.

At first, the Continental Army was poorly trained and did not have a standard way to drill, discipline or maneuver. This put them at a huge disadvantage when facing the well supplied, well trained British army. That all changed when in February 1778, Baron von Steuben, a Prussian military officer, offered to help General George Washington train and discipline the Continental Army. Because of von Steuben's work with the Continental Army, the soldiers greatly improved as a professional fighting force and they became more successful in battle.