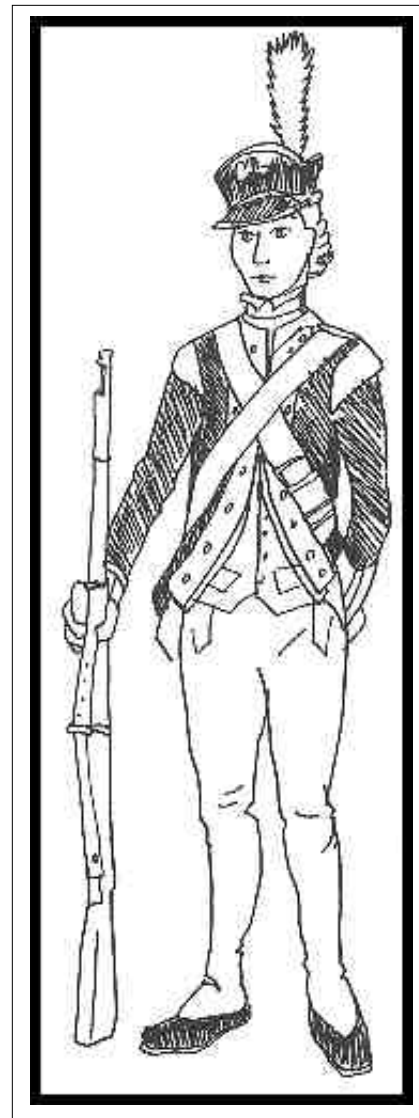


*When the American Revolution began, there was a call to arms for men to join the Continental Army. And although the call to arms was for men, a woman named Deborah Sampson wore the uniform of a Revolutionary soldier and fought against the British.*

## Deborah Sampson, Revolutionary Soldier

1 Deborah Sampson was born in Plympton, Massachusetts, on a wintry day in 1760. She was the oldest of six children born to a poor family. When her father chose to desert his family and go off to sea, Deborah's mother had trouble making ends meet. Poor health finally forced the woman to send her children off to live with various neighbors and relatives. Young Deborah first lived with a cousin and then with the widow of a minister.

2 Around the age of 8, Deborah became an **indentured servant**, a worker bound to labor for a period of years. She worked in the household of Jeremiah Thomas, who had a wife and ten sons. For almost ten years, the girl helped with the housework and worked in the field. The hard labor made her strong. She also gained skills usually reserved for men. She could ride a horse, plow a field, stack hay, and even do carpentry work. Often going hunting with the Thomas boys, she became



very skillful at shooting. When there was little farm work in the winter, she was able to attend school. Deborah soon took an interest in politics. She closely followed the events of the war that had begun between the American colonies and England.

3 After leaving the Thomas family, Deborah became a teacher. The war against the British had already been under way for a few years. In the winter of 1780, she found out that two of the Thomas boys had been killed in that war. Grief-stricken for the boys she had come to love as brothers, she wanted to fight. But the army did not allow women to join. It would be two more years before Deborah decided what to do about this problem.

4 At 5 foot 7 inches, Deborah was tall for a woman of that time. She made herself a suit of men's clothes and cut her hair. Then she practiced walking and talking like a man. When she was able to fool her mother, she knew she was ready. On May 20, 1782, she joined the Continental Army under the name of Robert Shurtleff. Her fellow soldiers teased her about not having to shave, but they never guessed her secret. They thought that the "boy" was just too young to grow hair on his face.

5 Army records show that Deborah was an excellent soldier. She gained the respect of the other soldiers with her courage in battle. Because of her fear of discovery, wounds were always a source of anxiety. Nevertheless, she fought bravely. Twice Deborah was wounded in raids along the Hudson. Near Tarrytown, New York, she suffered a sword cut to the head. At Eastchester, she took a bullet to the thigh. The wound was deep, but Deborah was determined not to see the camp doctor. If he discovered her secret, she would have to go home. So, late in the night, she dug out the bullet by herself. The pain coursed through her body like an electric shock, but she never screamed. Sadly, her leg never healed properly. The wound would cause her trouble for the rest of her life.

6 Deborah was able to keep her secret until she went to Philadelphia as a general's aide. There she came down with a fever and was sent to the hospital. Imagine the doctor's surprise when he discovered that the young soldier was a woman! He felt it was not suitable for the young woman to stay in a hospital full of men. As a result, the doctor took her to his own home to recuperate. Slowly, she recovered from her illness.



7 In a letter to the general, the doctor revealed that Deborah was a woman in a man's army. Her days as a soldier were at an end. She was given an honorable discharge from the army. Sometime later, Paul Revere helped her receive a pension for her military service.

8 Back home in Massachusetts, Deborah married a young farmer named Benjamin Gannet. They had three children. Unfortunately, the farm did not do well. They needed money, so Deborah once again took action. She became one of the first women in this country to travel alone and give talks for money. She began her lecture dressed as a woman and later changed into her uniform to demonstrate a soldier's routine. The audience would eagerly listen as she told about her experiences as a soldier. Her fame spread across the country.

9 Deborah Sampson Gannet died April 20, 1827, after a long illness. Her husband was deeply in debt because of his wife's medical bills. So, he applied to Congress for an increased pension. Congress delayed the decision for many years. Three weeks after Benjamin's death, Congress granted his request. The money went to Deborah's three children, who received a total sum of \$466.66.

10 In 1983, Deborah received a special honor. She was named the Official Heroine of Massachusetts.

