

## Washington's Letter to His Wife

By the time delegates to the Second Continental Congress met in May 1775, fighting had broken out at Lexington and Concord. War between the colonies and Britain seemed certain. Congress created the Continental Army with troops from all the colonies. On June 15 members of Congress unanimously elected George Washington commander in chief of the army. Three days later, Washington wrote the following letter to his wife, Martha, about the election. As you read, notice Washington's concerns about his new role.

My Dearest,

I am now set down to write you on a subject which fills me with much concern, and this concern is greatly increased when I think about the uneasiness I know it will give to you. It has been determined by Congress that the whole army raised for the defense of the American cause shall be put under my care, and that it is necessary for me to proceed immediately to Boston to take command of it.

Believe me, my dear, that, so far from seeking this appointment, I have made every effort to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the family. I have also tried to avoid it from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my capacity.

As it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this service, I shall hope that my undertaking it is designed for some good purpose. I shall rely, therefore, confidently on Providence [God] that I shall return to you in the fall.

I shall feel no pain from the toil or the danger of the campaign. My unhappiness will flow from the uneasiness I know you will feel from being left alone. I therefore beg that you will call on all of your strength and courage, and pass your time as agreeably as possible. Nothing will give me so much satisfaction as to hear this from your own pen. It must add greatly to my uneasy feelings to hear that you are dissatisfied at what I really could not avoid.

As life is always uncertain, I have got Colonel Pendleton [a delegate from Virginia to the Continental Congress] to draft a will for me, which I now will enclose. The provision made for you in the case of my death will, I hope, be agreeable.

I shall add nothing more but to desire that you will remember me to your friends, and to assure you that I am your affectionate, etc.

Adapted from Letter to Martha Washington, Philadelphia, June 18, 1775, as found in *The American Heritage History of the Thirteen Colonies* (American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1967).

### Analyzing Primary Sources

1. What worried Washington about his election as commander in chief of the Continental Army?
2. Why did Washington make a will?
3. **Critical Thinking** What do you think this letter shows about Washington's qualities as a leader?