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Freedom's Price

8th grade

1,086 words

My ears rang with the reports of a multitude of rifles. The stench of musket smoke, blood, and death wafted on the breeze, and I felt tears prick the corners of my eyes and my throat contract. Grimly, I raised my gun, aimed for the enemy, and pulled the trigger. Another soldier clothed in a red uniform fell.

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When I enlisted, pretending to be fifteen so I could join the army, I never pictured this. To my fourteen-year-old self, the word "battle" had sounded alien and exciting. Along with two of my friends - Patrick and John - I signed up to fight, in order to go on the "adventure of my life" and to gain glory for myself. Even though I was too young to enlist, that made no difference to me at the time.

Turns out war is neither glorious nor exciting. During our first skirmish, my friends and I hid, trying to block out the fearsome cacophony of gunshots, screams of pain, and death cries. We were terrified. Suddenly being a soldier had lost its appeal.

It wasn't until the noise had ceased that we ventured out of our hiding place, to be met with a gruesome scene that still haunts my dreams.

Dead bodies belonging to both friend and foe littered the deserted battlefield, blood pooling on the ground. Men we had trained alongside and laughed with back at our encampment now lay lifeless at our feet.

Gazing upon that horrific sight, I felt something welling up inside of me. It was a strange, foreign feeling, a mixture of anger, grief, and passion. I knew, then and there, that I would be a soldier. I would fight for America's freedom and for all the noble men who were willing to die for the cause of liberty, and I myself would make the same

sacrifice if need be. Seeing the expressions on Patrick and John's faces, I knew they felt the same way.

When our next chance to fight came along, we were ready. Though the sights, sounds, and smells of the battle threatened to overwhelm me, I stood firm. Raising my rifle, I shot and killed my first British soldier.

As soon as he fell, a wave of anguish engulfed me. I had killed a man, the first of many men who would die because of me. He would never rise, never breathe again, and soon his family would receive the news that he would not be coming home. Such is the price that must be paid for freedom, and that young British soldier was not the only one to die that day.

After the battle, I searched for Patrick and John. "James!" I heard John call, his voice grief-stricken and cracked.

With a feeling of dread, I spun around in the direction the voice had come from, praying that the inevitable had not really happened.

John was kneeling beside a limp form.

"No." I whispered, sprinting to where John was crouched. "Please no."

But it was so. There, lying crumpled and lifeless on the ground, was Patrick. He had been shot straight through the heart.

Kneeling beside John, I broke down and wept. "How could this have happened?" I cried out, tears streaming down my face.

"Why?" John wailed. "Why?"

Silently, in joint agreement, the two of us took Patrick's body and gave him a proper burial.

The next day, our company was on the march again.

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Over the next few years, John and I continued fighting for the cause of liberty.

Now we were in the middle of yet another battle. Again raising my musket, I took a second shot, felling the next enemy soldier.

Realizing my rifle was now empty, I crouched behind what covering I could find, swiftly and deftly reloading my weapon. A bullet whizzed past my ear, and I dimly acknowledged the fact that if it had been fired a couple of inches to the right, it would have become lodged in my brain.

Dismissing the information, I raised my gun and took another shot.

A little while later, the skirmish was over. We had won this time, and I allowed myself to be slightly pleased, knowing that the war was not yet over.

When I awoke the next morning, I rolled over and shook John awake. "Wake up sleepyhead!" I chastised him.

Yawning, he sat up and blearily queried, "What's the date?"

I thought for a moment, then replied, "October 19, 1781. Now, come on, today we're practicing the stages of proper musket use."

"Again?" John grumbled, but he got up and we both went to have breakfast.

That evening, as we were consuming our dinner and commenting on the day's training, a patriot courier rode into the camp at full speed.

Coming to an abrupt stop and leaping off his horse, the man bellowed for all to hear, "Cornwallis has surrendered at Yorktown! We've won! America is free at last!"

The camp erupted. Some of the men began cheering and laughing for joy. Others clapped each other on the back and talked happily about what they'd do when they got home. Everyone rejoiced, thankful that liberty and freedom were ours at last.

In the middle of it all, John turned to me and said, "So this is the end. This time of war and bloodshed is over."

"Yes," I replied, "and it is the end of England's rule. There will be no more injustice or oppression now."

"But, alas, so many men's lives have come to an end in order to achieve our goal of liberty. Even Patrick is gone." John thought aloud.

"Not just men," I said, remembering the day we had first enlisted. "Many young boys who were still children made the ultimate sacrifice for America's freedom."

"We were so young, weren't we?" John reminisced. "We are no longer boys now. Along with many others, our childhood years of innocence and gaiety have ended. We have become men."

I pondered all this, then told him, "Yes, it truly does feel like an end of days. But look around you. What do you see? I see what we have lost and what has come to an end, yes, but I also see much more than that. I see a new country where I believe anything is possible."