

Oath of the Continental Army



“So help me God”

Editors Note: During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress established oaths for the enlisted men and officers of the Continental Army. The Army was enforcing orders and mission statement (Declaration of Independence) of the Continental Congress formed under the Articles of Confederation. “When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. ... But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government.”

Oath for the enlisted men and officers of the Continental Army

Enlisted: “I _____ have, this day, voluntarily enlisted myself, as a soldier, in the American continental army, for one year, unless sooner discharged: And I do bind myself to conform, in all instances, to such rules and regulations, as are, or shall be, established for the government of the said Army.” (June 14, 1775)

The revised version, “I _____ swear (or affirm as the case may be) to be true to the United States of America, and to serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies opposers whatsoever; and to **observe and obey the orders of the Continental Congress, and the orders of the Generals and officers** set over me by them.” (September 20, 1776)

Officers: “I _____, do acknowledge the Thirteen United States of America, namely, New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, to be free, independent, and sovereign states, and declare, that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience to George the third, king of Great Britain; and I renounce, refuse and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him; and I do swear that I will, to the utmost of my power, support, maintain, and **defend the said United States against the said king**, George the third, and his heirs and successors, and his and their abettors, assistants and adherents; and will serve the said United States in the office of _____, which I now hold, and in any other office which I may hereafter hold by their appointment, or under their authority, with fidelity and honour, and according to the best of my skill and understanding. **So help me God.**” (October 21, 1776)

The revised version, “I, _____ do acknowledge the United States of America to be free, independent and sovereign states, and declare that the people thereof owe no allegiance or obedience, to George the third, king of Great Britain; and I renounce, refuse and abjure any allegiance or obedience to him: and I do swear (or affirm) that I will, to the utmost of my power, support, maintain and **defend the said United States, against the said king George** the third and his heirs and successors, and his and their abettors, assistants and adherents, and will serve the said United States in the office of _____ which I now hold, with fidelity, according to the best of my skill and understanding. **So help me God.**”¹ (February 3, 1778)

Endnotes:

1. The U.S. Army Center of Military History, Oaths for the enlisted men and officers, <http://www.history.army.mil/faq/oaths.htm>

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