

Using Eyewitness Accounts to Learn About Historic Events

Ebenezer Fletcher, a 16-year-old soldier, served as a fifer in the Second New Hampshire Regiment and was wounded at the Battle of Hubbardton, July 7, 1777. His narrative, published in 1798, vividly portrays his experience of battle and its consequences. At the time he had just recovered from the measles.

The exercises in vocabulary and reading comprehension on page 2 and discussion question on page 3 may be useful follow-up for students who have recently visited the Hubbardton Battlefield State Historic Site.

Extracts from Ebenezer Fletcher's Narrative

Orders came very early for the troops to refresh and be ready for marching. Some were eating, some were cooking, and all in a very unfit posture for battle. Just as the sun rose, there was a cry, "the enemy are upon us." Looking round I saw the enemy in line of battle. Orders came to lay down our packs and be ready for action. The fire instantly began.

I received a musket ball in the small of my back. I made out to crawl to my uncle, standing but little distance from me, and spoke to him. He and another man lifted me and carried me back some distance, and laid me down behind a large tree.

By this time I had bled so freely, I was very weak and faint. I observed the enemy were like to gain the ground. Our men began to retreat and the enemy to advance. All things looked very shocking to me. To remain where I was and fall into the hands of the enemy, especially in the condition I was in, expecting to receive no mercy, it came into my mind to conceal myself from them if possible. I crawled among some small brush and got under a log. Here I lay concealed from the enemy, who came instantly to the place I lay wounded at.

The enemy pursued our men in great haste. Some of them came over the log where I lay. I was not discovered by the enemy till the battle was over.

They soon came to me and pulled off my shoes, supposing me to be dead. An officer spoke to the soldier who had taken my shoes and said, "Give back the shoes and help the man into camp." My shoes were given back by the soldier according to order. The soldier then raised me upon my feet and conducted me to the British camp.

I was laid on the ground and remained in this posture till the afternoon, before my wound was dressed. Two doctors came to my assistance. They raised me up and examined my back. The doctors appeared to be very kind. They pulled several pieces of my clothes from my wound, which were forced in by the ball I received.

Vocabulary Exercise--Choose the modern phrase you think is closest in meaning to Ebenezer's wording.

1. The Americans were "in a very unfit posture for battle."
 - a. The Americans needed to exercise.
 - b. The Americans were not ready to fight the British.
 - c. The Americans were still asleep.
2. "I received a musket ball in the small of my back."
 - a. Someone gave me a musket ball as a gift.
 - b. I got hit by a musket ball even though I am very small.
 - c. I was shot in the lower part of my back.
3. "I observed the enemy were like to gain the ground."
 - a. The British were about to force us from our position.
 - b. Some of the British wanted to buy property in Hubbardton.
 - c. The British line did not move.
4. "My wound was dressed."
 - a. The doctors wore fancy clothes.
 - b. The doctors cleaned and bandaged my wound.
 - c. No one did anything to help me.

Reading Comprehension--Choose the response that best answers the question.

1. What time of day was it when the Battle of Hubbardton began?
 - a. In the middle of the night.
 - b. Early in the morning.
 - c. Lunchtime.
2. What was the first thing Ebenezer Fletcher did after he was wounded?
 - a. Crawl to his uncle and speak to him.
 - b. Hide under a log.
 - c. Load and fire his musket.
3. How did the battle end?
 - a. The British gave up and went home.
 - b. The Americans retreated and left their wounded behind.
 - c. The Americans stopped to eat breakfast.
4. How did the British doctors treat Ebenezer?
 - a. They ignored him.
 - b. They tried to steal his shoes.
 - c. They were kind to him and dressed his wounds.

Discussion Question

How might Fletcher's experience and what he recorded in his narrative be the same or different from other American soldiers in the battle?

Answers:

Vocabulary Exercise: 1b, 2c, 3a, and 4b.

Reading Comprehension Questions: 1b, 2a, 3b and 4c.

Discussion question: consider his youth, position as a fifer, that he had just recovered from a serious illness, and that his narrative was written and published more than twenty years after the battle.