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Lady Riedesel's Harrowing Account of the War of Independence and the Capture of the German Troops at Saratoga

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Read excerpts from a primary source document to gather information on the hardships faced by families during the Revolutionary War, written by an eyewitness, Lady Riedesel, wife of German General Riedesel.
- identify some of the roles played by women during the Revolutionary War.
- Write their own diary entries as if they were eyewitnesses to the Revolution.

California Standards for the Social Studies:

5.6 Students understand the course and consequences of the American Revolution.

- 1. Identify and map the major military battles, campaigns, and turning points of the Revolutionary War, the roles of the American and British leaders, and the Indian leaders' alliances on both sides.
- 3. Identify the different roles women played during the Revolution (e.g., Abigail Adams, Martha Washington, Molly Pitcher, Phillis Wheatley, Mercy Otis Warren).
- 4. Understand the personal impact and economic hardship of the war on families, problems of financing the war, wartime inflation, and laws against hoarding goods and materials and profiteering.

California Common Core Standards for Language Arts – Writing Standards K-5:

3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

- Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.
- Use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.
- Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.
- Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

National Council for the Social Studies Standards:

- Identify and use various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, and others.

Materials:

- Images of General and Lady Riedesel
- Excerpts from the Diary of Lady Riedesel (ISBN 1-894643-02-X)
- Article from the National Park Service, Saratoga (History and Culture – Crucial American Victory: <https://www.nps.gov/sara/learn/historyculture/index.htm>)
- Article on the career of General Riedesel: <http://social.rollins.edu/wiki/saratoga/index.php/Riedesel>
- Map of the first battle of Saratoga: http://www.emersonkent.com/map_archive/first_battle_of_saratoga_01.htm
- Journals for the students or artifact boxes for the students

Procedure:

- Teacher will show students the images of General and Lady Riedesel
- Students will read and annotate the excerpts of Lady Riedesel's Diary
- Students will discuss her character traits and experiences
- Students will create their own journals as if they were Loyalists or Germans who took part in the Battle of Saratoga or they will create an Artifact Box that will include maps of her journey, maps of the battle of Saratoga, as well as other images that have to do with her experiences in her diary. (The students must include a list of at least 10 artifacts and an explanation of why they are significant.)

Extension:

- Students will do research to learn about what happened to the soldiers captured at Saratoga after the battle. (Where did they go? How were they treated? What happened to the Riedesels?)



Lady Riedesel



General Riedesel

The following are excerpts from the book *Diary of Lady Riedesel, Letters and Journals Relating to the War of*

Independence and the Capture of the German troops at Saratoga.

Ninth Letter From General Riedesel to his Wife

On Board the Palls, opposite Dover, March 26th, 1776

I write you at the instance we come in sight of the English coast. Captain Foy, who goes to London, will post this letter from that city. I mention to you with satisfaction that I have not for one moment been sick, not even seasick; but, on the contrary, have a good appetite and sleep well the whole time. The soldiers, however, and also my people, have mostly all been sick and yet still remain so. The poor cook is so bad that he cannot do the least work, indeed, he cannot even raise his head. This is very inconvenient, since Captain Foy and myself are obliged to attend to the cooking, which would amuse you could see us...

Sunday morning we had a heavy fog, and the sea became tempestuous. Two guns were fired from our ship to indicate to the other vessels the route for them to take. The fog lifted now, the wind and waves rose, but still there was no storm. Now all were sick. The cook could not cook; Muller could not dress me; Valentin could not find anything. To sum up, great lamentation and great filth on all places. I am hungry, had nothing to eat. Finally, Captain Foy and myself cooked a pea soup in the sailor's kitchen and we ate cold roast-beef, which makes up our whole dinner. The soldiers eat nothing. (pp. 6 and 7)

Twelfth Letter

From the Same

On Board the Pallas, April 24th, 1776

...But for God's sake, do not travel alone, and wait for Madame Foy, or some other lady of standing which whom you may embark. In the same ship. but it must be a lady who has already made the voyage to America, and consequently knows what preparations are necessary, and could help and advise you in case you or the children were sick. You must remember, dearest wife, that you, and your children, and all your domestics may easily become sick on the way over, if not constantly, yet during strong winds; for upon my entire ship there are not five men who have continued well; and every one declares that it is a regular wonder that I am an exception to the general rule. In such case, you would lie in bed with your children without the least help – having nothing to eat or drink - and having moreover, not the least heart to render yourself the slightest assistance. The crew of a ship, for the most part, are swine, loafers, and clowns, who cook nothing but salted meat half dressed, which is not at all fit to eat. One thing more; the water will finally become so bad and have such a bad smell, that you shall not be able to drink it; and you must, therefore, endeavor to take with you a filtering stone, through which you can strain it. You must, also, either accustom the children to drink beer, or boil the water in the morning, that you intend to drink. (p. 10)

From the same

On Board the Pallas, two leagues this side of Quebec.

I can give you no great description of our voyage; for what can I say of nine weeks spent between heaven and ocean, where one day passed away the same as another. Here we are, after much hardship, still two miles from Quebec, where we shall arrive this evening, but without staying. General Carleton having, before our arrival driven the rebels from the vicinity of Quebec, and now

engaged in their pursuit. This this reason we shall continue our voyage up the river to join that General. It is yet too early to give you any advice respecting your journey. Captain Foy thinks that we must first see where the expedition will lead us. I, therefore, say nothing further than this – do not travel alone, or without some lady of standing, be it Mrs. General Carleton, or Madame Foy, or any other lady. (p. 11)

Eighteenth Letter
From the same

**Crown Point, on Board the Washington, a prize taken from the
rebels, Oct. 26nd, 1776**

We destroyed the fleet of the rebels, and taken possession of Crown Point. We shall now go into winter quarters. Our campaign is at an end; and I shall go back to Three Rivers, where I am to be stationed this winter, and await you with the greatest impatience. God how happy I should be if you came this winter and I could enjoy your pleasant company!

**Mrs. General Riedesel's Account of her Journey fro
Wolfenbittel to Bristol.**

I set out on my journey, on the 14th of May, at five o'clock in the morning from Wolfenbittel; and notwithstanding my passionate longing to see my husband once more, I still felt the greatness of my undertaking too much not to have a heavy heart, especially as my friends had not ceased to repeat to me the dangers to which I exposed myself. Gustchen, my eldest daughter, was four years and nine month old; Fritzchen, my second, two years; and Caroline, my youngest child, just ten weeks old. I had, therefore, need of all courage and all my tenderness to keep me from relinquishing my unprecedented wish to follow my husband. They represented to me not only the perils of the sea, but told me, also, that we were in

danger of being eaten by savages, and that people in America lived upon horsemeat and cats. Yet all this frightened me less than the thought of going into a country where I could not understand the language. However, I was prepared for everything; and the thought of following my husband and of doing my duty, has kept be in good spirits during my whole journey. (p. 17)

Stay of Mrs. General von Riedesel at Bristol, Portsmouth and London. – Embarkation in Portsmouth

As I was fearful lest I should be obliged to pay as much there as in Portsmouth, I called only for a small room, a leg of mutton and potatoes. The hotel itself was splendid, and all its inside surroundings of great elegance. The corridors; galleries – in one word, the whole house was decorated on the outside with flower-pots and trees intertwined; between these were hung glass globes, in which were seen gold-fishes and birds. I was frightened at this elegance, and trembled for my guineas, especially when I saw myself led into the most beautiful apartments, and my table supplied bounteously with five or six delicate dishes. As the landlord insisted on waiting upon me at the table himself, I said to myself, “That now cost a guinea more!” The next morning I found my servants drinking coffee and chocolate, and eating tarts and other tit-bits, and could not restrain myself from administering to them a gentle reproof at their treating themselves to these delicacies, when they must know that I was but poorly supplied with money. They assured me that they had called for nothing more than tea, but that the landlord had said to them, that such brave servants, who were willing to follow their master and mistress to America, deserved to be well entertained. In short, there was all the attention and courtesy given to me. Finally, in fear and trembling, I called for my bill and behold, I had only to pay ten shillings! I told the landlord that he had certainly made a mistake. “No,” answered he, “I have made a fair profit, and think myself fortunate that I have it in my power to prove to you that there are

honorable people in England. I admire your courage, and wish to convince you of it.” (p. 30)...

I cannot , however, sufficiently praise the good treatment I received from the English nation. Even persons whom I did not know, came and offered me as much money as I might need; and upon my expressing astonishment at this, and saying that they did not know but I might be passing myself off for other than I really was, they answered, that if I were an imposter I would not live so retired; neither would I bestow so much care upon my children as I did.

My friends advised me to present myself at court, as the queen had stated that it would give her great pleasure to see me. I had, therefore, a court dress made, and lady George Germaine presented me. It was on New Year’s Day, 1777. I found the palace very ugly and furnished in an old fashioned style. All the ladies and gentlemen were standing in the audience room. Into this room came the king, preceded by three cavaliers. The queen followed him, accompanied by a lady, who carried her train, and a chamberlain. The king went around to the right and that the queen to the left. Neither passed by anyone without saying something. At the end of the drawing room, they met, made each other a profound bow, and then returned to the place whence they had started. I asked Lady Germaine how I should act, and whether the king, as I had heard, kissed all the ladies. “No,” she replied, “only English women and marchionesses; and that all one had to do, was to remain quietly standing in her place.” When, therefore, the king came up and kissed me, I was greatly amazed, and turned red as fire, since it was so entirely unexpected. He immediately inquired if I had received letters from my husband? I replied, “Yes, up to the 22d of November.” “He is well,” rejoined he. “I have inquired particularly after him; everyone is satisfied with him, and I hope the cold will not injure him.” I answered that I believed and hoped that, as he was born in a cold climate that the cold would not

trouble him. "I believe so," he said, "but this I can assure you, that where he is, the air is very healthy and clear." (p. 33)

Diary of Mrs. General Riedesel during the Voyage from Portsmouth to Quebec

I know not whether it was the hope of so soon again seeing my husband that gave me good spirits, but I found the sea not so dreadful as many had painted it to me, and had not the least repentance for having undertaken the journey. I was conscious of fulfilling my duty, and was calm because I trusted God that he would bring me safely to my dear husband. I would gladly have sent back my servants, who, more uneasy and timid than I, were almost, if not entirely, useless to me. I pitied them; for they of course, had not the same interest in the journey as I, who was expecting to overtake a beloved and esteemed husband. The children felt very differently from the servants; for when they also were down sick, to my question, whether they wished to persevere or go back, they answered, "Oh, we will cheerfully be sick, if we can only reach our papa!" On the 26th, we again had a fair wind, and made some headway. (p. 40)

When it was known in Quebec that I was nearing the city, I was saluted with cannon-fire by all the ships in the harbor; and at twelve o'clock, noon, we saw a boat approaching us, containing twelve sailors dressed in white and wearing silver helmets and green sashes. These seamen had been sent to get me from the ship, and they brought me letters from my husband, in which he wrote that he had been obliged to set out for the army. This news greatly grieved and frightened me, but I resolved, at the same time, to follow him, even if I should be with him only for a few days. (p. 45)

At last we safely landed after much yearning desire and an eight weeks voyage, at about one o'clock in the afternoon. When we

reached land, I found a little carryall with one horse. This was the equipage of Mrs. General Carleton, which was sent with an earnest invitation to come and dine with her, and also to lodge at her house. I accepted the first only, as I wished to follow my husband at once. At the General's, I was received by all with friendship. Indeed they did not seem to know how they should sufficiently express their joy at my arrival, which they assured me would make my husband very happy.

Continuation of Mrs. General Riedesel's Adventures

When the army again moved, on the 11th of September 1777, it was first intended to leave me behind; but upon my urgent entreaties, and as other ladies were to follow the army, I received, finally, the same permission. We made only short day's marches, and were often in serious need; yet always contented at being allowed to follow I had still the satisfaction of daily seeing my husband. A great part of my baggage I had sent back, and had kept only a small summer wardrobe. In the beginning all went well. We cherished the sweet hope of a sure victory, and of coming into the "promised land:" and when we passed the Hudson River and General Burgoyne said, "The English never lose ground," our spirits were greatly exhilarated. (p. 72)

On the 19th of September, there was an affair, which, it is true, ended to our advantage; although we were, nevertheless, obliged to make a halt at a place called Freeman's Farm. I was an eyewitness of the whole affair; and as I knew that my husband was in the midst of it, I was full of care and anguish, and shivered at every shot, for I could hear everything. I saw a great number of wounded, and what was still more harrowing, they even brought three of them into the house where I was.

One of these was Major Harnich, the husband of a lady of our company; another, a lieutenant, whose wife, also, was of our acquaintance; and the third, a young English officer of the name of

Yung. Major Harnich, with his wife, lived in a room next to me. He had received a shot through the lower part of the body, from which he suffered exceedingly. A few days after our arrival, I heard plaintive moans in another room near me, and learned that they came from Young, the young English officer just mentioned, who was suffering very much.

I was the more interested in him, since a family of that name had shown me much courtesy during my stay in England. I tendered him my services, and sent him provisions and refreshments. He expressed a great desire to see his benefactress, as he called me. I went to him, and found him lying on a little straw, for he had lost his equipage. He was a young man, probably eighteen or nineteen years old; an, actually, the own nephew of the Mr. Young, whom I had known, and the only son of his parents. It was only for this reason that he grieved; on account of his own sufferings he uttered no complaint. He had bled considerably, and they wished to take off his leg, but he could not bring his mind to it, and now, gangrene had set in. I sent him pillows and blankets and my women servants a mattress. I redoubled my care of him, and visited him every day, for which I received from him a thousand blessings. Finally they attempted the amputation of the limb, but it was too late, and he died a few days afterward. As he occupied a room close to mine and the walls were very thin, I could hear his last groan through the walls of my room. (pp. 73-74)

...Suddenly, however, on the 7th of October, my husband, with the whole general staff, decamped.

Our misfortunes may be said to date from this moment. I had just sat down with my husband at his quarters for breakfast, General Frazer, and, I believe, Generals Burgoyne and Phillips, also, were to have dined with me on that same day. I observed considerable movement among the troops. My husband thereupon informed me, that there was to be a reconnoissance, which, however, did not surprise me, as this often happened. On my way homeward, I met many savages in their war-dress, armed with guns. To my question

where they were going, they tried out to me, “War! War!” which meant that they were going to fight. This completely overwhelmed me, and I had scarcely got back to my quarters, when I heard skirmishing, and firing, which by degrees, became constantly heavier, until, finally, the noise became frightful. It was a terrible cannonade, and I was more dead than alive. About three o’clock in the afternoon, in place of the guests who were to have dined with me, they brought to me, upon a stretcher, poor General Frazer (one of my expected guests), mortally wounded.

Our dining table, which had been prepared, was taken away, and in its place they fixed up a bed for the general. I sat in a corner of the room trembling and quaking.

The noises grew continually louder. The thought that they might bring in my husband in the same manner was to me dreadful, and tormented me incessantly.

...I knew no longer which way to turn. The whole hallway and other rooms were filled with the sick, which were suffering with the camp sickness, a kind of dysentery. Finally, toward evening, I saw my husband coming, upon which I forgot all my sufferings, and thanked God that he had spared him. He ate in great haste with me and his adjutant, behind the house. We had been told that we had gained an advantage over the enemy, but the sorrowful and down cast faces which I beheld, bore witness to the contrary, and before my husband again went away, he drew me to the side and told me that everything might go very badly, and that I must keep myself in constant readiness for departure, but by no means to give any one the least inkling of what I was doing. I therefore pretended that I wished to move into my new house the next morning, and had everything packed up. (pp. 75-76)

...My husband sent me a message telling me to betake myself forthwith into a house which was not far from there. I seated myself in the calash with my children, and had scarcely arrived at the house, when I saw on the opposite side of the Hudson River,

five or six men with guns, aiming at us. Almost involuntarily I threw the children on the bottom of the calash and myself over them. At the same instant the churls fired, and shattered the arm of a poor English soldier behind us, who was already wounded, and was also on the point of retreating into the house. Immediately after our arrival a frightful cannonade began, mainly directed against the house in which we had sought shelter, probably because the enemy believed, from seeing so many people flocking around it, that all the generals made it their headquarters. Alas! It harbored none but wounded soldiers, or women!

We were finally obliged to take refuge in a cellar, in which I laid myself down in a corner not far from the door. My children laid down on the ground with their heads upon my lap, and in this manner we passed the entire night. A horrible stench, the cries of the children, and yet more than all this, my own anguish, prevented me from closing my eyes. On the following morning the cannonade again began, but from a different direction.

I advised all to go out of the cellar for a little while, during which time I would have it cleaned, as otherwise we would all be sick. They followed my suggestion, and I at once set many hands to work, which was in the highest degree necessary; for the women and children being afraid to venture outside, had soiled the whole cellar. After they had all gone out and left me alone, I for the first time surveyed our place of refuge. It consisted of three beautiful cellars, splendidly arched. I proposed that the most dangerously wounded of the officers should be brought into one of them; that the women should remain in another; and that all the rest should stay in the third, which was nearest the entrance. I had just given the cellars a good sweeping and had fumigated them by sprinkling vinegar or burning coals, and each one had found his place prepared for him – when a new and terrible cannonade threw us at once more into alarm. Many persons, who had no right to come in, threw themselves against the door.

My children were already under the cellar steps, and we would all have been crushed, if God had not given me strength to place myself before the door, and with extended arms prevent all from coming in; otherwise every one of us would have been severely injured. Eleven cannon balls went through the house, and we could plainly hear them rolling over our heads. One poor soldier, whose leg they were about to amputate, having been laid upon a table for this purpose, had the other leg taken off by a cannon ball. (pp. 82-83)

...As the scarcity of water continued, we at last found a soldier's wife who had the courage to bring water from the river, for no one else would undertake it, as the enemy shot at the head of every many who approached the river. This woman, however, they never molested; and they told us afterward, that they spared her on the count of her sex. (p. 85)

...On the 17th of October the capitulation was consummated. The generals waited upon the American general-in-chief, Gates, and the troops laid down their arms, and surrendered themselves prisoner of war. Now the good woman, who had brought us water at the risk of her life, received the reward of her services. Every one threw a whole handful of money into her apron, and she received altogether over twenty guineas. At such a moment the heart seems to be especially susceptible to feelings of gratitude. (p. 87)*

At last, my husband sent to me a servant with a message that I should come to him with our children. I, therefore, again seated myself in my dear calash; and, in the passage through the American camp, I observed, with great satisfaction, that no one cast at us scornful glances. On the contrary, they all greeted me, even showing compassion on their countenances at seeing a mother with her little children in such a situation. I confess that I feared to come into the enemy's camp, as the thing was so entirely

new to me. When I approached the tents, a noble looking man came toward me, took the children out of the wagon, embraced and kissed them, and then with tears in his eyes helped me also to alight. "You tremble," he said to me, "fear nothing." "No," I replied, "you are so kind, and have been so tender toward my children, that it has inspired me with courage." He then led to the tent of General Gates, with whom I found Generals Burgoyne and Philips, who were upon an extremely friendly footing with him. Burgoyne said to me, "You may now dismiss all your apprehensions, for your sufferings are at an end." I answered him, that I should certainly be acting very wrongly to have anymore anxiety, when our chief had none, and especially when I saw him on such a friendly footing with General Gates.

All the generals remained to dine with General Gages. The man, who had received me so kindly, came up and said to me, "It may be embarrassing to you to dine with all these gentlemen; come now with your children into my tent, where I will give you, it is true, a frugal meal, but one that will be accompanied by the best of wishes." "You are certainly." I answered, "a husband and father, since you show me so much kindness." I then learned that he was the American General Schuyler. He entertained my with excellent smoked tongue, beefsteaks, potatoes, good butter and bread. Never had I eaten a better meal. I was content. I saw that all around me were so likewise; but that which rejoiced me more than everything else was that my husband was out of danger. As soon as we had finished dinner, he invited me to take up my residence at this house, which was situated in Albany, and told me that General Burgoyne would, also, be there. I sent and asked my husband what I should do. He sent me word to accept the invitation.

...The day after this we arrived in Albany, where we had so often dreamed to be. But we came not, as we supposed we should, as victors! We were, nevertheless, received in the most friendly manner by the good General Schuyler, and by his wife and

daughters, who showed us the most marked courtesy, as, also, General Burgoyne, although he had – without any necessity it was said – caused their magnificently gilt houses to be burned. But they treated us as people who knew how to forget their own losses in the misfortunes of others. Even General Burgoyne was deeply moved at their magnanimity, and said to General Schuyler, “Is it to me, who have done you so much harm, that you show so much kindness!” :

“What is the fate of war,” replied the brave man, “let us say no more about it.” We remained three days with them, and they acted as if they were very reluctant to let us go.” (pp. 87-89)

*Saratoga Battlefield National Park has prints of a painting depicting this excerpt for sale in their gift shop. [518-664-9821](tel:518-664-9821)