

General Washington was nearly fifty-two when he decided to retire from military life and return to his Mount Vernon plantation. He said good-bye to his officers (in [the Long Room at Fraunces' Tavern](#) in New York City), told the Army farewell in Rocky Hill (near Princeton, New Jersey) and bid Congress adieu (in the [Old Senate Chamber](#) at the Annapolis State House).

When he gave his farewell address to Congress, he returned his commander-in-chief commission which he'd received in 1775. It was a powerfully symbolic gesture that the new country would be governed by civilians, not generals.

The excerpt, pictured above, is the last section of Washington's November 2, 1783 farewell orders to the Army. It says:

*May ample justice be done them [all members of all branches of the military] here, and may the choicest of Heaven's favors both here and hereafter attend those, who under the divine auspices have secured innumerable blessings for others: With these Wishes, and this benediction, the Commander in Chief is about to retire from service - The Curtain of separation will soon be drawn - and the Military Scene to him will be closed for ever.*

The following month, the General publicly gave his farewell address to Congress. The speech was so personally significant, he had to still the shaking document by holding it with both hands. Washington knew the importance of his actions, and his words were so sincere the crowd wept.

When the event was over, he gave the original speech to a friend and sped away from the Annapolis State House on horseback. Later, John Trumbull (who was present when the British surrendered at Yorktown) [memorialized the scene](#) in a famous painting.

The most powerful man in his new country, Washington could likely have established a monarchy had he wished it. But he did not want Americans to trade one King George for another. As he wrote to his friend, Lafayette, soon after he returned to Mount Vernon as a private citizen:

*I have not only retired from all public employments but am retiring within myself, and shall be able to view the solitary walk, and tread the paths of private life, with heartfelt satisfaction. Envious of none, I am determined to be pleased with all; and this, my dear friend, being the order of my march, I will move gently down the stream of life, until I sleep with my fathers.*

His "retirement" lasted about five years.

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Main image, Library of Congress.

Linked above: *Washington Bidding Farewell to His Officers*, from *George Washington* by Calista McCabe Courtenay, illustrated by A.M. Turner and Harriet Kaucher, 1917 (page 73). Published by Samuel Gabriel Sons & Company, New York. Online, courtesy Project Gutenberg.

Linked above: Images, information and quotes from Volume Four of John Marshall's five-volume *Life of*

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Also linked above: *General George Washington Resigning His Commission*, 1824 painting by John Trumbull, photograph by the Architect of the Capitol. Image, Architect of the Capitol web site.

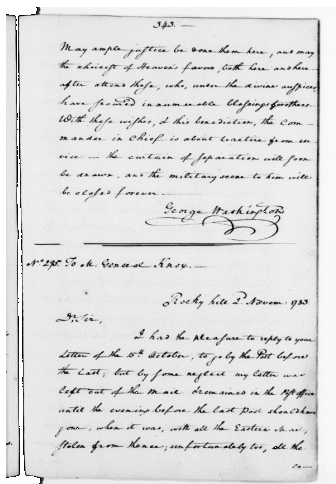
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