Giving All for Nothing

All too often, we only act out of self-interest, expecting a reward for services rendered. True patriotism, however, requires freely providing one's talents out of a love for the country. Fortunately, America has been supported by many loyal citizens with the nation's best interests at heart throughout its history. One individual who embodies this image is Corporal Abraham Hamman, a man I am proud to have as my ancestor.

Hamman was a Virginia native who served as infantry in the Continental Army during the latter half of the Revolutionary War. He spent most of the conflict fighting the British in the Carolinas, engaging in at least four significant skirmishes. In the Battle of Cowpens, the Corporal was part of the patriot force that delivered a crushing defeat to the Redcoats under the leadership of Daniel Morgan. When General Greene attacked the withdrawing British at the Battle of Guilford Court House, Hamman became one of the 184 wounded when he took a musket ball to the shoulder. At least the British victory there was bought with a high casualty rate. After a short stint at the hospital, he returned to the fray during the Siege of Ninety-Six, although the enemy never capitulated. Finally, before our decisive victory at Yorktown, Hamman fought in the Battle of Eutaw Springs, leaving the British forces in the South too weak to provide any aid to Cornwallis and his troops.

Despite his meaningful contributions, Hamman asked for very little in return. As a member of the Continental Army, the Corporal was promised eight dollars a month along with rations. While he naturally accepted his rations, Hamman never took any of his earnings. Along with his food, all Abraham ever received for payment was a shirt from the Ladies of Baltimore and a brown jacket. After he finished fighting for our freedom from Britain, Hamman just went back home without requesting further compensation, eventually starting a family and moving to what is now Indiana. While serving without pay seems like a selfless action on its own, his patriotism went even further. As thanks for their wartime efforts, Revolutionary War veterans were offered an annuity by Congress after a period of time. On March 4th, 1831, Hamman became one of these pensioned individuals. However, he went out of his way, even appearing in a Court of Probate, to "relinquish every claim whatever to a pension or annuity," and declare "that his name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any State."

Clearly, every veteran is owed a debt of gratitude for protecting that which we take for granted. Nevertheless, there is something especially admirable about serving the nation without a single thought of self-interest. In this way, Corporal Abraham Hamman and many others are true patriots, only asking for the means to protect their beloved country: nothing more, nothing less.

(423 words)

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