



## To Try Men's Souls

*Newt Gingrich , William R. Forstchen , Albert S. Hanser*

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After two bestselling series examining the Civil War and WWII, Newt Gingrich and William R. Forstchen have turned their sharp eye for detail on the Revolutionary War. Their story follows three men with three very different roles to play in history: General George Washington, Thomas Paine, and Jonathan Van Dorn, a private in Washington's army.

The action focuses on one of the most iconic events in American history: Washington crossing the Delaware. Unlike the bold, courageous General in Emanuel Leutze's painting, Washington is full of doubt on the night of December 25, 1776. After five months of defeat, morale is dangerously low. Each morning muster shows that hundreds have deserted in the night.

While Washington prepares his weary troops for the attack on Trenton, Thomas Paine is in Philadelphia, overseeing the printing of his newest pamphlet, *The Crisis*.

And Jonathan Van Dorn is about to bring the war to his own doorstep. In the heat of battle, he must decide between staying loyal to the cause and sparing his brother who has joined up with the British. Through the thoughts and private fears of these three men, Gingrich and Forstchen illuminate the darkest days of the Revolution. With detailed research and an incredible depth of military insight, this novel provides a rare and personal perspective of the men who fought for, and founded the United States of America.

### To Try Men's Souls Details

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## From Reader Review To Try Men's Souls for online ebook

### K J says

Even if you're not a history buff, take the time to explore history with these two wonderful historians and storytellers. Gingrich & Forstchen weave a spellbinding and vivid account of Washington's crossing the Delaware. Thomas Paine and Jonathan Van Dorn add dimension and perspective to this inspiring story. You'll find yourself right in the midst of a bleak, cold, valiant and desperate fight for your new country!

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### Ray says

This book describes Washington's crossing of the Delaware and the Battle of Trenton, along with the writings of Thomas Paine and the common Revolutionary War soldier. The basic facts involving Washington's crossing of the Delaware are fairly well known, and this book attempts to fill in some of the blanks of the story by giving the reader an idea of what may have transpired on a personal level of some of the leaders and soldiers. The dialogue crafted was a little melodramatic, so I thought the book might have been written as Young Adult historical fiction. Apparently, it was not, but I think it would be a good read for that age group. It describes the hardships of the campaign, but doesn't go into the terror or gore that some modern books contain. While the historical aspects of the story were good, the dialogue created was a little too much of a Disney or Brady Bunch story for me.

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### Charlene says

This book is about George Washington and his men; and what transpired during those weeks before they crossed the Delaware. This novel is written in the voice of Gen George Washington, Thomas Paine and that of a lowly Jersey Militia man Jonathan. We read of the incredible suffering these men endured, how they did not let anything including the many defeats leading up to the struggle to get across the Delaware where they were finally victorious. They were a rag tag army of men who would not give up. It was definitely awe inspiring. It makes me very proud to be an American to see such courage from our forefathers. What they did for freedom. I think this book is a book well worth reading. We need to read about our heritage and acknowledge that anything worth something is worth fighting for, and it's not about what we can get for free, but about the journey (work) to achieve our goal.

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### Sarah Grace Grzy says

DNF

Read the first chapter or so, and there was already more language than I am comfortable with, and being in George Washington's pov was really throwing me. ;) I \*might\* come back and give this a try someday, but I am just not feeling it right now.

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## **Daniel Threlfall says**

I wish I could have liked this book more. There was a lot going for it, but it just didn't have the strength and inspiration that I was expecting from Forstchen.

The plot struggled to stay afloat, and the character development seemed forced. I appreciated the details and insight regarding the revolutionary conflict, but I couldn't get engaged due to some of the novelistic contrivances.

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## **Andrew Toy says**

As a Revolutionary War fanatic, I was extremely excited to read To Try Men's Souls by former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and author William Forstchen.

Sadly, this post is a first on AdoptingJames. It is my first negative review.

I asked Sarabeth if I should even write a negative review since I've taken it upon myself to shed light on the great books/movies I discover. But my last book review shed light on dark patches on an otherwise raving review. Perhaps I'm heading in a new direction.

So here goes.

I dreaded every time I picked up Gingrich's novel about Washington's crossing the Delaware River. I tried to like it at first. Then I tried to tolerate it. The further I read, I tried to push through it. With twenty pages left I tried not to just cheat and close the book and declare it finished. But I made it. Truly.

And I'm not sure it was quite worth it.

First off, the author(s) jump sporadically between December 24th back to November 11th, to November 23rd, and at some point I'm sure they took us back to the previous summer of 1776, right back up to Christmas Eve. The chronology was jittery and had no real flow.

Now, consider this for a minute. George Washington is one of my ultimate favorite people who has ever walked the earth. I have been known to idolize him in a way Christians ought not to idolize any man. But Gingrich's portrayal of the Great General did nothing for me. If you want a truly great testimony to George Washington's life and character, check out instead, *George Washington: A Life* by Ron Chernow.

The surrounding fictional (and some other non-fictional) characters were also plastic-y and lacked depth and/or development. Though the writing was smooth (which I assume was composed mostly by Forstchen, who's novel *One Second After* I greatly enjoyed), it lacked story, which made the writing talent inconsequential.

It felt like a movie that covered a topic of great interest, with clever and artistic cinematography, but filled with bad acting who's lines were constructed by sloppy screenwriters.

To be fair, *To Try Men's Souls* received an astonishing 4.4 stars on Amazon. So the chances of you loving this book is completely in your favor. The ratings prove that I'm actually in the minority that just couldn't appreciate the book on any level.

Now, here's the catcher. I had already received the sequel, Valley Forge, for Christmas two years ago. So I feel I am obligated (and damed) to read its successor. I wonder if Valley Forge will be worse. After all, so many chapters in Souls were spent in endless descriptions of the plight of the patriots trudging through the snow toward Trenton. At least there was a goal they were after. But in Valley Forge, historically speaking, the soldiers just all sort of sat there and froze all winter.

Well, I am an optimist when it comes to books. So I will attempt to read it, though I'm sure it will be like climbing Everest. I'll let you know how it is in several months if I ever finish it (or start it).

Join me. If there's a book that's been sitting on your shelf collecting dust because you are just too afraid to touch it, let's do it together. Who knows... maybe one of us will be surprised.

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## **Carol Storm says**

A Patriotic epic of Revolutionary Combat -- what's not to like?

Well, there's no combat to speak of, till the last fifty pages. About three quarters of the book is Washington crossing the Delaware -- but it's all men tripping, falling, cursing, muddy trails, snow down the back of the neck, endless paragraphs about innocent farm boys shivering uncontrollably and dying slowly. I mean, I get it -- heroes make sacrifices. But I've seen William Forstchen write novels where the combat action is red-hot and never lets up. That's not the case here.

Then there's Tom Paine. A lot of his sections are meant to be stirring but come across as silly or even unintentionally funny. "Paine grabbed the rum bottle and drank deeply, trying desperately to stir the creative fires to life. Damn King George! He had to write, had to speak. Yet his body craved alcohol, craved it even more than freedom." The whole alcoholic patriot thing really didn't work for me. I kept waiting for Jim Morrison -- I mean, Tom Paine -- to shout "Hey King George! We want the world and we want it now! No one here gets out alive!" And then he could just slip on a pair of leather pants and start crooning "show me the way, to the next whiskey bar . . ."

Now George Washington . . . sigh. What can you do with a man like General Washington? He keeps musing on those soft Virginia nights, with Martha. And now and then he dreams about sneaking away for a little hunt. Only he never mentions that dusky gal down in the slave quarters! What I'm trying to say is, this guy is presented as the plaster saint we all remember from the first grade -- and there had to be more to the man than that, good or bad.

Oddly enough, the only interesting character in the whole book is Rall, the Hessian commander. His analysis of how Frederick The Great would have handled the rebels was both chilling and fascinating.

I can't really recommend this book -- but I love William Forstchen. Everyone should read his LOST REGIMENT series right away!

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## **Stephen says**

**Holy "Wholly Unexpectedness, Batman!"**...Newt has written an historical fiction novel...and it's

Fan....tas....tic.

Having not previously read any of the historical fiction novels by Newt Gingrich and William Forstchen (who I assume does much of the “in the trenches” work on this), I was very pleasantly stunned by how terrific this novel was. The story is engaging and very well written and it’s clear that it was also painstakingly researched. Yet, despite the significant amount of historical detail included in the story, the authors do a wonderful job of never (or at least not often) bogging down the narrative with expositions that are overly **long on wind**.

### **PLOT SUMMARY:**

The story concerns one of the most iconic moments in U.S. history; the crossing of the Delaware by George Washington on Christmas Day in 1776 prior to the Battle of Trenton. This was the battle that, more than any other, helped turn the tide of the Revolutionary War in favor of the upstart Americans. The lens through which the narrative of this momentous occasion unfolds alternates between three distinct characters: George Washington, Thomas Paine (who was in Pennsylvania creating “The American Crisis”) and Jonathan Van Dorn, a young private in Washington’s army.

### **THOUGHTS:**

Unlike the majestic figure of Washington we see in the famous painting of “the Delaware Crossing,”

the Washington of this story is portrayed as brimming with doubt and uncertainty after suffering months of painful, humiliating defeats at the hands of the British army. Nonetheless, Washington’s determination never wavers and his commitment to the fight at hand remains unshakeable. That continuing on and not faltering despite unimaginable hardships is what I found most compelling in this portrayal.

In addition to General Washington, we see through the “far more human” eyes of Thomas Paine who has been working on The American Crisis in Philadelphia while battling the twin demons of **alcohol** and **self doubt**. Through the course of the story, we come to see Paine slowly awaken to an understanding that he has a vital role to play in the revolutionary cause by stirring the passions of the American people and keeping alive **hope**, that most fragile and necessary component, during these times that “Try Men’s Souls.”

Finally, through Private Jonathan Van Dorn, we are given a first hand look at the staggeringly brutal conditions that Washington’s army faces in preparing for the fateful crossing of the Delaware. More than anything else in the novel, it was these descriptions that broke through my calm “historical” detachment and sucked me into the narrative while I was reading. Soldiers suffering from malnourishment and rampant diseases (Dysentery, Cholera and others) marching mile after mile after mile after mile through frozen, snow covered ground (many with no shoes) only to cross (and eventually wade through) near frozen water in the dead of night to then battle with no rest a far superior force in the Hessian Army. As the authors describe in the afterwards, it is a battle that is almost impossible to imagine Washington winning and yet, against all odds, the battle was won and the tide of the Revolutionary War changed.

It’s the kind of moment you want to stand up and applaud after reading.

I found this to be an incredibly, powerful and moving experience and also, (for the most part) an enjoyable read. There were some parts where the narrative gets bogged down and others that could certainly be called “slow” moments in relation to the faster, breath-stealing passages. However, overall it was excellent, truly excellent, historical fiction.

I was duly impressed.

4.0 stars. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

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### **Corey Holst says**

I've always been fascinated by Revolutionary American History and with a story about Washington crossing the Delaware River on Christmas Night before retaking the town of Trenton, New Jersey it sounded perfect. I wanted to LOVE it..... but didn't. I was half-way through it and still hadn't hit upon any story. Most of it is personal thoughts, fears and LOADS of self-doubt, which is ok up to a certain point. There were MANY flashbacks that held more suspense than the "present" timeline. But after a while, you start hearing the same phrases over and over and over. Yes, they're freezing, yes, their joints ache, Yes, every breath feels like fire, we get it..... now move on with the story already! It seemed like every chapter held repeated bits of the previous chapter (in case you forgot about it). Just too much repetition, not enough story.

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### **James says**

Wow! A great book for Revolutionary War students. Authors have outdone themselves. I could feel the soldiers' pain. "To Try Men's Souls" brings this most important conflict to life. I am going back and finishing, if not beginning again, "John Adams" by David McCullough.

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### **Tim Kubiak says**

Going in I was concerned that today's politics might slip into the story line. Other than a few jabs at the continental congress being self serving and treacherous noting else smacked of modern politics. The story which is "historical fiction" was well told and had a recurring series of characters who were both well known names (Washington, Hamilton) and endearing everyman who believed in and suffered for the American cause.

Highly entertain but in my case at least will force me to do some more scholarly reading based on the actual facts of the battles and real individual contributions of the described battles. On that note the one thing missing that I have seen in a few other historical fiction titles was a suggested additional reading list for the actual history.

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### **John says**

I've read several books about Washington crossing the Delaware and the Battle of Trenton, but this is the best. The style is similar to the writings of Michael Shaara. The story told from the viewpoint of the participants, American and Hessian. It really does a great job of portraying the hardships endured by those soldiers. The freezing sleet and snow, most of the men without shoes and winter clothing, the bloody footsteps in the snow. The Americans had suffered defeat after defeat and the army had dwindled down from over 20,000 to barely 2,000, and their enlistments were coming to an end in a matter of days and Washington

feared that he would lose his entire army. The password was "victory or death" and that was what it had come down to. If this battle had been lost we would likely still be British subjects. I also liked the inclusion of Thomas Paine as a character. His writings in *The American Crisis* played a big role in inspiring the men when he wrote: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now deserves the thanks of man and woman..." The few remaining soldiers that Washington lead into this battle were not summer soldiers or sunshine patriots and they proved it as they endured the hardships and accomplished the impossible, defeating the dreaded Hessians, the best soldiers in the world, and preserving the cause of Liberty. Highly recommended.

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## **WC Beaver says**

George Washington was truly a God inspired man. "To Try Men's Souls" details the trials and tribulations of the leader of the Continental Army during its escape from New York to Pennsylvania and across the Delaware to encamp at McConkey's Ferry. Washington's resolve and spirit to attack the Hessians soldiers at Trenton on Christmas Day are beyond comprehension.

This excellent historical fiction account of the year 1776 features iconoclastic personality Thomas Paine, the rascalion author of *The Crisis*, the pamphlet that served to further spur the effort for independence, and the writing of this account, no doubt; Henry Knox, brilliant artilleryist and former book store owner, Jersey patriots Jonathan Van Dorn and Peter Wellesley, and the ever present Billy Lee, Washington's faithful servant, contribute to the mind-boggling effort to restore faith in the Revolution

Gingrich and co-author William R Forstchen possess the foresight to write history as it truly was, obviously realizing that today's politically correct history texts largely ignore the unsurpassed contributions of the father of our country and his fellow patriots.

We all would do well to remember him. A must read, especially for those who inexplicably forgot that Washington was a true leader of men. Where are they today?

We also would do well to reread *The Crisis*, which folks had no trouble comprehending in 1776.

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## **Nan says**

I am relearning and adding to my knowledge of American history. You can't protect the freedoms that you have unless you know how we started as a country, A Republic, what we represent, and where we have been as a people. All of that should direct us on the proper path ahead. I would classify this book as an historical novel. It is excellent. Relive crossing the Delaware River on Christmas Eve, in the midst of an ice and snowstorm, with George Washington. I'm almost half way through it.

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## **Brad Stevens says**

When I discovered a copy of this book tossed into a sale bin, I considered it no great risk to invest in it. After a cursory review of the jacket, I fully expected a well-researched setting for an interesting story. I got that and more.

What I did not expect was that this reader, who is hyper-critical of construction and grammar and judgmental of a writer's craft, would find himself reading through tears, not once, not occasionally, but again and again as the story unfolded, revealing the deep devotion of a generation of young heroes the likes of whom are almost completely forgotten by this present generation. Gingrich not only developed characters who were sympathetic but managed to spin into them a presence and passion both attractive and inspiring, even as they would have never identified themselves as heroes on any field. I closed the back cover with a profound sense of pride and patriotism and a certain satisfaction for having participated in the sharing of this amazing story.

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