

Divided Loyalties: A Revolutionary War Fifer's Story

Phyllis Hall Haislip

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It's the 1780s, Thomas Jefferson is governor of Virginia, the Virginia state capital is in Williamsburg, and the entire country is deeply divided. Patriot against Loyalist. Husband against wife. Eleven-year-old Teddy must somehow set aside his innocence and immaturity when his father decides to use him as a pawn. The plan is simple: Teddy must join a unit of the State Garrison Regiment. This will surely convince Mother to abandon her devotion to British rule. But the plan goes awry. Instead of enlisting to play the fife for the regiment stationed in Williamsburg, Teddy mistakenly joins the one headed directly for the Battle of Camden.

The author, who has written extensively on Virginia history, including young adult novels and the nonfiction book *Marching in Time: The Colonial Williamsburg Fife and Drum Corps*, creates a series of challenging events and circumstances for Teddy to endure. Shortly after enlisting, he finds that he will share a unit with the two people in Williamsburg who seem to hate him most, his former teacher and a young man named Matt Fowler. Despite disputes with Fowler, harsh living and working conditions, and the low morale of his unit, Teddy is dedicated to doing his part to defend the colonies against the British. Together, he and a slave named Josh work at becoming better fifers.

The concept of loyalty remains obscure to Teddy throughout the novel. He refuses to inform his commanding officer, Sergeant Major MacAllister, that he has joined the wrong unit because he believes that doing so will breach promises made to his father. Later, Teddy views MacAllister's loyalty to the Continental Army after deserting the British as a conundrum, though Benedict Arnold's traitorous acts seem clearer. It is not until he questions the sincerity of Josh's friendship, and experiences the extent of his mother's love, that he realizes the fluidity that sometimes exists around notions of loyalty and trust.

The attention to the details of the purpose and duties of fifers and drummers in the Continental Army are informative, as are the descriptions of historic Williamsburg. Residing in that town, the author has taken many of the photos of historic sites throughout the book, while others were acquired from various sources. Though Haislip's treatment of slavery, race, class, and gender issues does not seem fully developed or particularly convincing for the time period, this does not diminish the central ideas in each of the short chapters.

American history teachers and students, Virginians especially, will find this book a great addition to textbook accounts of the Revolutionary War. The back matter (headed "Author's Note," "Sample Document," "Glossary," "Resources," and "To Plan a Visit") will remind readers that *Divided Loyalties* is not just a fictional story, but a story grounded in American history and triumph.

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