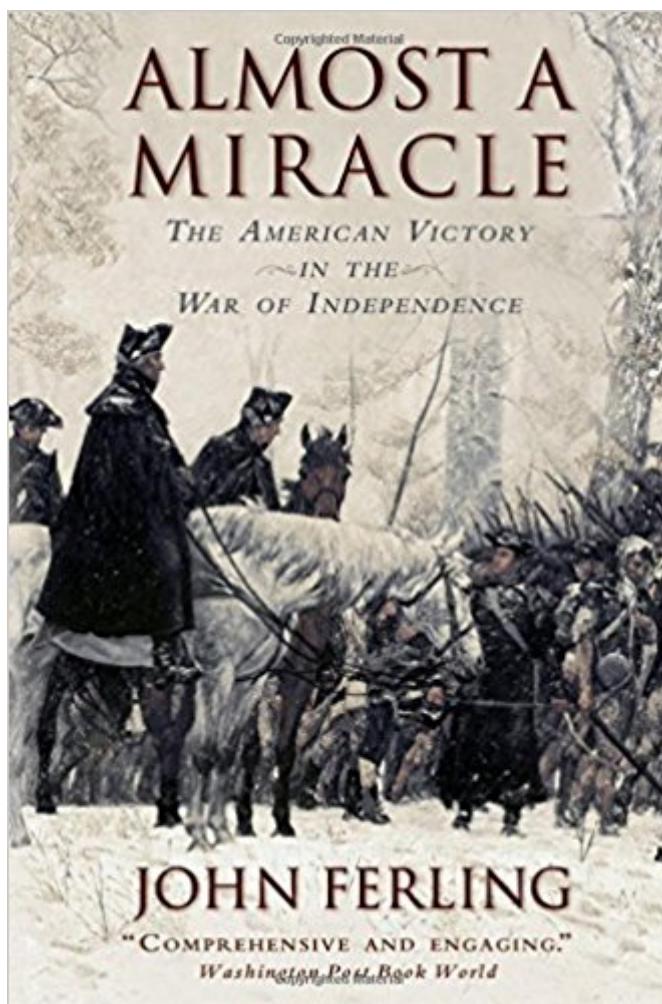


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# Almost A Miracle: The American Victory In The War Of Independence



## **Synopsis**

In this gripping chronicle of America's struggle for independence, award-winning historian John Ferling transports readers to the grim realities of that war, capturing an eight-year conflict filled with heroism, suffering, cowardice, betrayal, and fierce dedication. As Ferling demonstrates, it was a war that America came much closer to losing than is now usually remembered. General George Washington put it best when he said that the American victory was "little short of a standing miracle." *Almost a Miracle* offers an illuminating portrait of America's triumph, offering vivid descriptions of all the major engagements, from the first shots fired on Lexington Green to the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown, revealing how these battles often hinged on intangibles such as leadership under fire, heroism, good fortune, blunders, tenacity, and surprise. Ferling paints sharp-eyed portraits of the key figures in the war, including General Washington and other American officers and civilian leaders. Some do not always measure up to their iconic reputations, including Washington himself. The book also examines the many faceless men who soldiered, often for years on end, braving untold dangers and enduring abounding miseries. The author explains why they served and sacrificed, and sees them as the forgotten heroes who won American independence.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Starred Review. Ferling, professor emeritus at the University of West Georgia, caps his distinguished career as a scholar and popular writer on the colonial/revolutionary period with

arguably the best, and certainly one of the most stimulating, single-volume histories of the American Revolution. Exhaustively researched and clearly written, it stresses the contingent aspects of a war where victory depended on making the fewest mistakes. Despite chances to end the war in battle, by negotiation or by international conference, Britain failed for lack of manpower, the decision to wage limited war and an ineffective central government— and above all, comprehensive underestimation of American military effectiveness and political resolve. America's cause, ironically, nearly foundered on reluctance to support a standing army, and a government that wasn't strong enough to plan and execute a concerted war effort. That popular enthusiasm never broke owed much to a stable French alliance and to George Washington, who was a good diplomat, a better politician and an excellent judge of character. Steadily growing into the responsibilities of commander in chief, he achieved legitimate iconic status by the war's end. Ultimately, Ferling demonstrates that independence was won through the endurance of the American people and their soldiers, who held on for that last vital quarter of an hour. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ferling, a history professor, is the author of nine books on the American Revolution and early American wars. In his new book, he posits that the War of Independence was so vast that hardly anyone living east of the Appalachian Mountains was untouched. Many civilians were killed, including Indians and the residents of some coastal towns, both of whom were deliberately targeted, and countless others fell victim to diseases that soldiers on both sides spread unwittingly. He points out that his book seeks to explain why America won the war and why the British, despite their many advantages, lost it. One of the book's many well-developed themes is that the war came much closer to ending short of a great American victory than many now realize. It also looks at how wars were waged in the eighteenth century and explores how soldiers and civilians experienced the war. Ferling admits that he came to see both more flaws and greater virtues in Washington's leadership, that he gained a deeper appreciation of General Nathanael Greene, and that he saw General Charles Lee as a tragic figure. George CohenCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

After reading Foote's incredible history of the Civil War last summer, I figured I would plunge into the American Revolution. I've been studying and teaching the French Revolution and I wanted to also get a deeper sense for what was happening a little before it in the US, and the French involvement, etc. I

bought a highly recommended book, published by an excellent publisher (Oxford), but I must say that I am not very impressed. Ferling is not a great writer. Most of his phrasing and description sounds like it was borrowed from earlier statements on the issues. When I was reading Foote, every page was a revelation: new scenarios, new descriptions of personal reactions, and strong, clear characters. In Ferling, I really don't get a sense for the character of any of the actors. About half way through, I started to get a sense of who Washington was, but almost nobody else. In Foote, I felt like I got a great idea about the siege of Vicksburg, where I was practically chewing off my fingers waiting to see what happened. But in Ferling, I never really got a clear sense about what happened in Burgoyne's attack from Canada and the battle on Lake Champlain. The maps are also lacking and he puts spoilers on some of the maps indicated who died there, before we even come to it in the text! I never really got a clear sense of the battles around Saratoga in NY, either. Ferling's description was good there, but without enough detail. In any case, I have learned some of the details I didn't know before - especially regarding the role of Spain and France. But, overall this book lacks luster, emotion, and originality.

Years ago I read Shelby Foote's fantastic, comprehensive trilogy on the Civil War. An extraordinarily detailed, exhaustive account of the Civil War, it was just too exhaustive in some respects. It was not easy to read and at times it was just plain dull. I'm a military buff, though, so I enjoyed reading it for the descriptions of the battles and the personalities of the various military personnel. "Almost a Miracle" is in the same vein but covers not the Civil War but the American Revolution and focuses mostly - but not entirely - on the military aspects of the war. Unlike Foote's effort, "Almost a Miracle" is never dull and it really helps you understand the various battles and the armies that fought them. I was born and raised in this country, but "Almost a Miracle" taught me a lot that I didn't know about the American Revolution. I learned a lot about Washington, Gates, Lee, and Cornwallis - among many others - that I didn't previously know. Thanks to this book I have a far better appreciation of the war in the southern states, battles that have been virtually ignored in history classes that were too focused on Trenton and Yorktown. I had never heard of General Greene before I read this book and what a shame that was. I agree that the author is far too kind to Gates, who really was not the general responsible for the victory at Saratoga. But I do appreciate that while he shows Washington's glaring errors in strategy and tactics he nevertheless concludes that Washington was indeed the right man at the right time. Highly recommended. This should be mandatory reading in history classes!

If you want to buy one book about the military aspects of the War of Independence, you would be hard pressed to find a better book. Almost a Miracle is well written, engrossing, exciting, and full of fascinating information and incisive analysis. It tells the full story of the war, not just the high points, and excels at breaking down the strategic choices made by each side in each year of the war. The battles are well done and easy to follow with excellent maps, though of necessity somewhat brief. Ferling also paints compelling portraits of each of the various armies and spends time discussing issues such as logistics, recruitment, soldier's life, prisoners of war, and other ancillary aspects of the conflict. There is also one lengthy chapter dealing with the war at sea. As this is primarily a military history, less time is spent on political, ideological, economic, or diplomatic issues, but the high points of each are also covered. I think this book excels in its understanding of the importance of the Southern theater, the impact of the French alliance, its careful consideration and evaluation of various generals including Washington, and in the manner it makes clear just how close the Americans came to losing the war, or at least gaining a less than desired peace, on multiple occasions. I also enjoyed its very detailed analysis of British strategy, tactics, and wartime experiences. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in the Revolutionary period.

I've read a few of Ferling's books and they are generally very good. This is another good one, but it's dense and almost like a textbook with its detail. Certainly one of the best books out there if you want to know all there is to know about the American Revolution. Very good and well written, but not a light read.

I have lately become infatuated with the American Revolutionary War, and this book has to be the best one-stop all-inclusive history of this pivotal moment in American history. The style is light, yet detailed, and not pedantic or intellectual. In reading it, I discovered that I was short on general knowledge of the war and its major players. It has also been a springboard to other books, including biographies of our founding fathers and books of specific battles. In short, I thoroughly enjoyed the book and will reread it in the future. I purchased this on Kindle, and I may actually buy this in hardback to have on my shelf. It's that good. Highly recommended. I will be reading more John Ferling.

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