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Lillian Burrell  
Third Place

Thomas Nelson Jr. was born at Yorktown in Virginia on December 26, 1738. His father was a wealthy merchant, landowner, and he had five sons. Also, Nelson's father founded the town of Yorktown. Nelson was the oldest son and when just fourteen he was sent to England to do his studies. He started at a private school then went to Cambridge to Trinity College. He returned home at age twenty-two. After his arrival home Thomas Nelson Jr. married Lucy Grymes and together they had thirteen children.

When Nelson was twenty-six, he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. That same year he dumped several chests of tea into the York River as a sign of protest. This happened soon after the famous Boston Tea Party. The next year, 1775, he was a Delegate to the Continental Congress. He served there until 1777 and then again in 1779. I must say that I have not said one of, if not the most important things he did: the signing of the Declaration of Independence. On August 2, 1776 Thomas Nelson Jr. signed that letter of defiance against the king of England and all his officers. Nelson was the 44th signer of the Declaration and was described by John Adams as, "A fat man...alert and lively for his weight."<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, Nelson had a stroke in the spring of 1777 that did some cruel harm to his memory. He recovered slowly and in August of 1777 he was called into public service again. Governor Patrick Henry appointed Nelson brigadier general and

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from: Marilyn Boyer, *For You They Signed*, pg. 269. (Master Books, 2010).

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commander-in-chief of the militia of Virginia. Finally, in 1781 Nelson was the governor of Virginia. Nelson led the Virginia militia to the siege of Yorktown and resigned from the government in 1781.

During the war Nelson and George Washington wrote to each other. So, they were friends. Nelson wrote Washington a letter asking to leave the army. Here is Washington's reply: "Sir: I have been favored with your letter of the 7th... You plead so powerfully and urge so many reasons to leave the Army, that I cannot refuse your request...I suppose [the reason] is your marriage with Miss Cary. You will be pleased to accept my best wishes for your mutual happiness, and to make a tender of my compliments to your father and friends upon the occasion."<sup>2</sup>

Nelson would often pay the troops with his own money and one time even gave free money to the people who needed it. Nelson was generous and sacrificial. One time Nelson let the men of his militia destroy his residence in Yorktown in order to kill British officers. Over all, Thomas Nelson Jr. was a remarkable, generous, and sacrificial patriot. But also, he was religious and thought that one of the reasons we should go to war was because of it. He stated: "Unless we submit

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<sup>2</sup>Letter from George Washington to Thomas Nelson Jr., August 18, 1777, *Writings of Washington* vol. 9.( George Washington Bicentennial Commission) p.93.

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to parliamentary oppression, we shall not have the gospel of Christ preached among us, but let every man worship God under his own fig tree.”<sup>3</sup>

My Dearest friend Mrs. Lucy,

I am overwhelmed with sorrow to hear Mr. Nelson is deceased. I can't even imagine the grief you are experiencing. But, I believe that though he is in the grave, his name and honor should live on. He has done a great deal of good to this country through his time as governor, commander-in-chief, and his time in Congress. I remember seeing your husband gallantly lead his men to the siege of Yorktown and I think his nickname suits him well: Virginia's favorite soldier.

Mr. Nelson is like a key for a lock: he signed the Declaration of Independence, which led to freedom. Nelson helped free the nation from England's bonds and made it so that your children and your children's children can be free.

Sincerely Yours,

Elizabeth Cohan

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from: Marilyn Boyer, *For You They Signed*, pg. 269. (Master Books, 2010)

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## Bibliography

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