

NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

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THE

# FIGHTING GROUND

*One day  
can change  
everything*



April 3, 1778

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9:58

It was in the morning when Jonathan first heard the bell. He was standing in the warm, open field feeling hot, dirty, and bored. His father, not far off, limped as he worked along the newly turned rows of corn. As for Jonathan, he was daydreaming, daydreaming about being a soldier.

His older brother was a soldier with General Washington in Pennsylvania. His cousin had joined a county regiment. Jonathan kept waiting for his father to say that he too could join. He was, after all, thirteen. But his father only put him off.

Jonathan dreamed of one day taking up a gun

himself and fighting the enemy. For he had heard his father and his father's friends talk many times about the tyrannical British; their cruel mercenary allies, the German-speaking Hessians; and the hated Tories, those American traitors who had sided with the brutal English king.

But Jonathan's father no longer spoke of war. During the past winter he had fought near Philadelphia and been wounded in the leg. It was painful for him to walk, and Jonathan was needed at home. Though Jonathan kept asking questions about the battle, his father only shook his head, while his eyes grew clouded. Still, Jonathan could dream. So it was that at the sound of the bell they both stood still and listened.

The bell, at the tavern a mile and a half away, was used to call the men to arms. This time it tolled only once. Puzzled, they stood alert, straining to hear if more would come.

Jonathan looked over at the edge of the field, where his father's flintlock musket leaned against a stump. The cartridge box and powder horn were also there. The gun was primed, ready to be used. Jonathan knew how. Hadn't his father taught him, drilled him, told him that *everyone* had to be pre-

pared? Hadn't he said, "We must all be soldiers now"? And hadn't Jonathan talked with his friends of war, battles old and new, strategies fit for major generals? And, having fought their wars, they had *always* won their glory, hadn't they?

So when the bell stayed silent, Jonathan sighed with disappointment. His father turned back to work. The beating of his hoe against the earth made a soft, yielding sound, as if a clock had begun to count a familiar piece of time.

But as Jonathan resumed his tasks, his mind turned to uniforms, the new New Jersey uniforms. He pictured himself in a fancy blue jacket with red facings, white leggings, a beautiful new gun snug against his cheek. . . .

Softly at first, but with growing sureness, the bell began to ring again. Each stoke sliced away a piece of calm.

"What do you think?" Jonathan asked.

His father pulled off his black felt hat and mopped his brow with the back of his hand. He was looking south, worry on his face. Absentmindedly, he rubbed his wounded leg.

Seeing him yet undecided, Jonathan walked to the edge of the field to get a drink of water from

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**H**E MAY BE JUST THIRTEEN, but Jonathan knows he's ready to go to the war against the British. He can handle a gun. He yearns to battle for glory, just like his brother and cousin.

So when Jonathan hears the tavern bell toll, calling men to fight, he runs to join them. He doesn't realize that in just twenty-four hours, his life will be forever altered—by the war, by his fellow soldiers, and by the terrible choices he must make.

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—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

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**US \$5.99 / \$8.99 CAN**

ISBN 0-06-440185-5



**HarperTrophy®**

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

**Ages 8–12**

Cover art © 2004 by Robert Papp

Cover design by Hilary Zarycky

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