



Washington Reviewing his Troops at Valley Forge. From the painting by W. T. Trego. Courtesy Valley Forge Historical Society.

Crucible of Victory

"To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lie upon, without shoes . . . without a house or hut to cover them until those could be built, and submitting without a murmur, is a proof of patience and obedience which, in my opinion, can scarcely be paralleled."

George Washington at Valley Forge, April 21, 1778

Of all the places associated with America's War for Independence, none conveys more the impression of suffering, sacrifice, and ultimate triumph than Valley Forge. No battles were fought here, no bayonet charges or artillery bombardments took place, but during the winter of 1777-78 hundreds of American soldiers died here nonetheless. Valley Forge is the story of an army's epic struggle to survive against terrible odds, against hunger, disease, and the unrelenting forces of nature.

The campaign that resulted in the Valley Forge encampment began in late August 1777 when Sir William Howe, commander in chief of British forces in North America, landed his veteran army at the upper end of Chesapeake Bay. His objective: Philadelphia, the patriot capital. The American commander, George Washington, maneuvered his Grand Army into position to defend the city. Howe's skillful tactics, combined with errors made by Washington's army, led to a British victory at the Brandywine and a draw at Germantown. The Continental Congress fled and the British occupied Philadelphia.

With the winter setting in, the prospects for further campaigning were greatly diminished, and Washington sought quarters for his men. Though several locations were proposed, he selected Valley Forge, 18 miles northwest of Philadelphia. It proved to be an excellent choice. Named for an iron forge on Valley Creek, the area was close enough to the British to keep their raiding and foraging parties out of the interior of Pennsylvania, yet far enough away to halt the threat of surprise British attacks. The high ground of Mount Joy and Mount Misery, combined with the Schuylkill River to the north, made the area easily defensible.

A light snow covered the ground on December 19, 1777, when Washington's poorly fed, ill-equipped army, weary from long marches, struggled into Valley Forge. Cold winds blew as the 12,000 Continentals prepared for winter's fury. Grounds for brigade encampments were selected, and defense lines were planned and begun. Within days of the army's arrival, the Schuylkill River was covered with ice. Snow was six inches deep. Though construction of more than 1,000 huts provided shelter, it did little to offset the critical shortages that continually plagued the army.

Soldiers received irregular supplies of meat and bread, some getting their only nourishment from "firecake," a tasteless mixture of flour and water. So severe were conditions at times that Washington despaired "that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place . . . this Army must inevitably . . . Starve,

dissolve, or disperse, in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can." Animals fared no better. Gen. Henry Knox, Washington's Chief of Artillery, wrote that hundreds of horses either starved to death or died of exhaustion.

Clothing, too, was wholly inadequate. Long marches had destroyed shoes. Blankets were scarce. Tattered garments were seldom replaced. At one point these shortages caused nearly 4,000 men to be listed as unfit for duty.

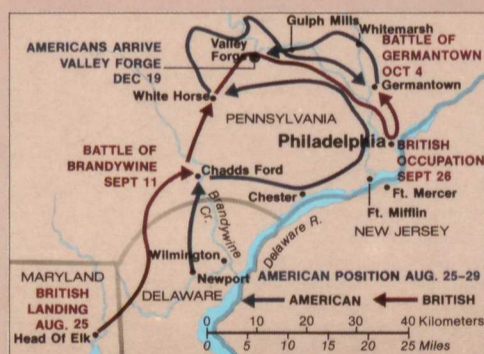
Undernourished and poorly clothed, living in crowded, damp quarters, the army was ravaged by sickness and disease. Typhus, typhoid, dysentery, and pneumonia were among the killers that felled as many as 2,000 men that winter. Although Washington repeatedly petitioned for relief, the Congress was unable to provide it, and the soldiers continued to suffer. Women, relatives of enlisted men, helped to alleviate some of the suffering by providing valuable services such as laundry and nursing that the army desperately needed.

Upgrading military efficiency, morale, and discipline were as vital to the well-being of the army as was its source of supply. The army had been handicapped in battle because training was administered to the units from a variety of field manuals, making coordinated battle movements awkward and difficult. The soldiers were trained, but not uniformly. The task of developing and car-

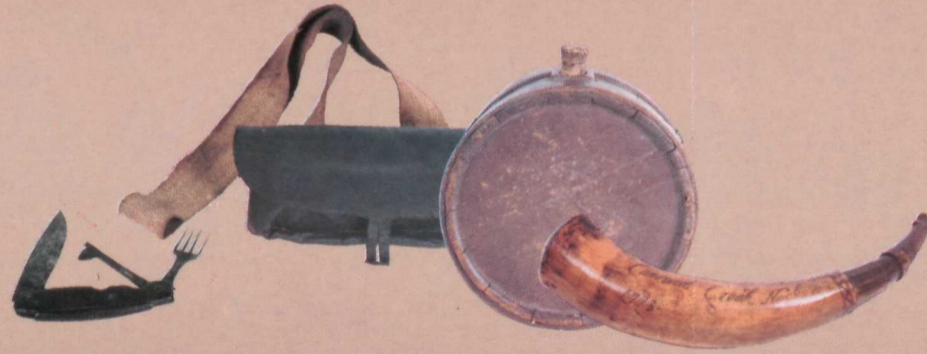
rying out an effective training program fell to Baron Friedrich von Steuben. This skilled Prussian drillmaster, recently arrived from Europe, tirelessly drilled and scolded the regiments into an effective fighting force. Intensive daily training, coupled with von Steuben's forceful manner, served to instill in the men renewed confidence in themselves and their ability to succeed.

The passing weeks of winter saw the army, under Washington's inspirational leadership, undergo a dramatic transformation. Slowly but steadily the endurance, bravery, and sacrifice of the soldiers began to tell. Increasing amounts of supplies and equipment came into camp. New troops arrived. Spring brought word of the French alliance with its guarantees of military support. Now a strong, dependable force, well-trained and hopeful of success, drilled on the Grand Parade.

Soon word of the British departure from Philadelphia brought a frenzied activity to the ranks of Washington's Grand Army. On June 19, 1778, six months after its arrival, the army marched away from Valley Forge in pursuit of the British who were moving toward New York. An ordeal had ended. The war would last for another five years, but for Washington, his men, and the nation to which they sought to give birth, a decisive victory had been won—a victory not of weapons but of will. The spirit of Valley Forge was now a part of the army and because of it the prospects for final victory were considerably brighter.



Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia



Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Campaign of 1777

After landing at Head of Elk, Md., Sir William Howe's British army marched north to capture Philadelphia. Washington tried to block Howe at the Brandywine but

failed. The British occupied the patriot capital and the Americans established winter quarters at Valley Forge.

Commander in Chief

From the day he took command of the Continental Army in 1775, George Washington's faith in the moral righteousness of the American cause never wavered.

The character and purpose that helped sustain him and his soldiers at Valley Forge and secure aid from France for the struggling United States is reflected in Charles

Willson Peale's 1780 portrait of the general (above). Peale also painted a version of this portrait for the Count de Rochambeau, leader of the French allies.

Links to the Past

Historical artifacts help establish relationships between past and present. The visitor center at Valley Forge contains a variety of objects designed to show what life

was like in the 1777-78 encampment. Thanks to a cooperative agreement with the Valley Forge Historical Society, one of the key artifacts on display at Valley Forge

National Historical Park is the sleeping marquee used by George Washington during the Revolution, perhaps at Valley Forge.

Drillmaster von Steuben

A large part of General von Steuben's success in training the soldiers of Washington's army at Valley Forge was achieved by his reliance on the power of example. He

formed a model company of 100 selected men and undertook its drill in person, as depicted above in Edwin Austin Abbey's well-known painting. The rapid prog-

ress of this company under von Steuben's skilled instruction made an immediate appeal to the imagination of the whole army.

The Making of An Army

On December 19, 1777, when Washington's army marched into camp at Valley Forge, tired, cold, and ill-equipped, it was lacking in much of the training essential for consistent success on the battlefield. On June 19, 1778, after a six-month encampment, this same army emerged to pursue and successfully engage the British army at the Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey. The ordered ranks, martial appearance, revived spirit, and fighting skill of the American soldiers spoke of a great transformation having occurred amid the cold, sickness, and hardship that was Valley Forge.

The man most responsible for this transformation was Friedrich von Steuben, onetime member of the elite General Staff of Fred-

erick the Great of Prussia. No longer in the Prussian army, indeed without employment of any kind, von Steuben offered his military skills to the patriot cause. When he arrived at Valley Forge from France on February 23, 1778, he was armed with a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. Washington saw great promise in the Prussian and almost immediately assigned him the duties of Acting Inspector General with the task of developing and carrying out an effective training program.

Numerous obstacles threatened success. No standard American training manuals existed, and von Steuben himself spoke little English. Undaunted, he drafted his own manual in French. His aides, often working late into the night, then translated his

work into English. The translations were in turn copied and passed to the individual regiments and companies, which carried out the prescribed drill the following day.

Von Steuben shocked many American officers by breaking tradition to work directly with the men. One officer wrote of von Steuben's "peculiar grace" as he took "under his direction a squad of men in the capacity of drill sergeant." From dawn to dusk his familiar voice was heard in camp above the sounds of marching men and shouted commands. Soon companies, regiments, then brigades moved smartly from line to column, column to line; loaded muskets with precision; and drove imaginary redcoats from the field by skillful charges with the bayonet.

When the Grand Army paraded on May 6, 1778, to celebrate the French alliance with America, von Steuben received the honor of organizing the day's activities. On that day the Grand Parade became a showplace for the united American army. Cannons boomed in salute. Thousands of muskets fired the ceremonial "feu de joie," a running fire that passed up and down the double ranks of infantrymen. Cheers echoed across the fields. The good drilling order and imposing appearance that the troops presented during the Alliance Day ceremonies demonstrated their remarkable progress in developing as a fighting force in the short time since von Steuben's arrival. Washington, with von Steuben's aid, had made an army of the Continental troops. With their French allies, the Americans could now proceed with the war.



- 1 Visitor Center**
Start your tour here, located at the junction of North Gulph Road and Pa. 23. No admission fees or reservations are necessary. An audio-visual program and exhibits will introduce you to the story of the 1777-78 winter encampment. Park staff are available to help you plan your visit.
- 2 Muhlenberg Brigade**
Reconstructed huts mark the site where Gen. Peter Muhlenberg's Brigade anchored the outer line of defense. Here interpreters in period costume demonstrate conditions of soldier life.
- 3 Memorial Arch**
The National Memorial Arch, a dominant feature of the park, was dedicated in 1917 and commemorates the "patience and fidelity" of the soldiers who wintered at Valley Forge in 1777-78.
- 4 Wayne Statue**
The bronze equestrian Wayne Statue stands in an area where Pennsylvania troops commanded by Gen. Anthony Wayne were encamped. The statue faces toward the general's home in nearby Chester County.
- 5 Headquarters**
The focal point of camp activities was the Isaac Potts House, Washington's Headquarters. Also in this area are the Dewees House and the reconstructed huts that housed the Commander in Chief's Guards.
- 6 Redoubt 4**
Redoubt 4 helped to guard the northern approaches to the encampment. The area around this work was occupied by troops commanded by Brig. Gen. Jedediah Huntington.
- 7 Redoubt 3**
Redoubt 3 anchored one end of the inner line of defense. Overlooking one of the encampment roads, this work defended the southern approaches to Valley Forge.
- 8 Artillery Park**
Most of the cannon brought to Valley Forge were massed in the Artillery Park. Here, under the command of Brig. Gen. Henry Knox, artillery was stored and repaired and gun crews were trained and drilled. In the event of an attack, the cannon could be dispatched from this central location to wherever they were needed.
- 9 Varnum's Quarters**
This early 18th-century farmhouse, which overlooks the Grand Parade, served as quarters for Gen. James Varnum. Nearby stands a statue of General von Steuben, who led the training of the Continental Army.
- 10 Chapel and Museum**
Located on private property within the park are the Washington Memorial Chapel and the Museum of the Valley Forge Historical Society. The museum contains artifacts relating to the Revolution. Fee charged.

About Your Visit

Valley Forge is perhaps the best-known place name associated with the American Revolution. To truly enjoy the park, it is important that you understand the significance of the events associated with the winter encampment of 1777-78. The National Park Service provides various programs, tours, and other interpretive activities to help you grasp more fully the dramatic story Valley Forge has to tell. Park rangers make every effort to accommodate all visitors in these presentations. It is the goal of the National Park Service to make the park accessible to all visitors.

The recommended first stop is the park's visitor center. There, a 15-minute film, shown every 30 minutes, provides an introduction to life during the encampment. The George C. Neumann

Collection, an extensive collection of firearms, swords, and accessories, is the focal point of the exhibit area. Information on restaurants, overnight accommodations, and other attractions in the greater Valley Forge area is available at the Pennsylvania travel desk in the visitor center. The building also contains a bookstore with a wide range of publications.

A self-guided tour route, keyed to numbered stops on the map, will take you past extensive remains and reconstructions of major forts and lines of earthworks, the Artillery Park, Washington's Headquarters, quarters of other officers, and the Grand Parade where General von Steuben rebuilt the army. These, plus reconstructed huts, memorials, monuments, and markers, help to tell

the story of the men who, at Valley Forge, helped to write an imperishable chapter in the history of America's struggle for independence.

You may wish to take advantage of the regularly scheduled bus tour offered from May to September. For a fee, the tour, featuring a taped narration, allows you to spend as much time as you wish at historically significant areas in the park.

The park has three picnic areas: Varnum's, Wayne's Woods, and Betzwood. No open fires are permitted, but the Betzwood area has grills that may be used for fires. Picnicking is on a first-come, first-served basis and reservations cannot be made. There

is no camping in the park. There is a six-mile bike/foot trail and ten miles of horse trails. Bicycles may be rented during the summer months. Please do not picnic or engage in recreational activities near historic sites and buildings. Drive and park vehicles only in designated areas. We hope that you have a pleasant visit. If you have any questions, contact a park ranger or write the Superintendent, Valley Forge National Historical Park, Valley Forge, PA 19481.

Valley Forge National Historical Park is a designated fee area.

