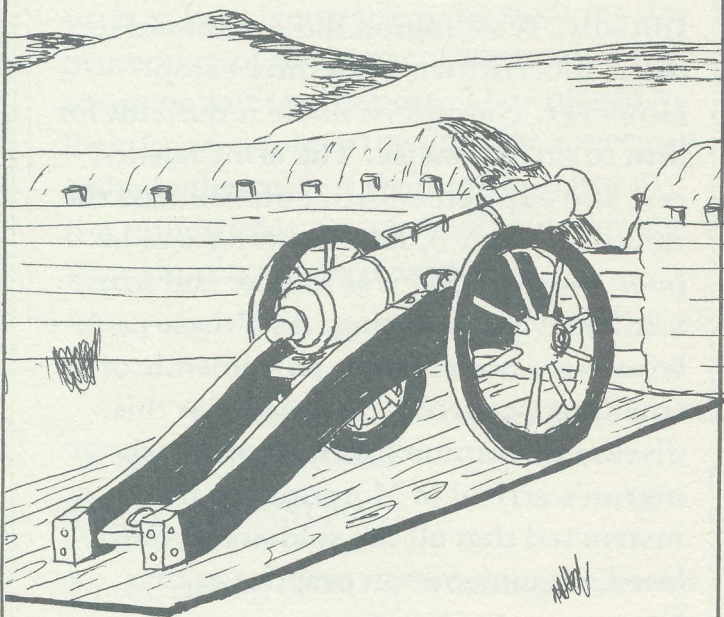

FORT

NONSENSE



Victorious at Trenton and Princeton, 5,000 fatigued soldiers of the Continental Army under the command of General George Washington arrived in Morristown on January 6, 1777. Aware of the relative security of the area which was protected by the Watchung Mountains and swamps to the east, Washington established camp.

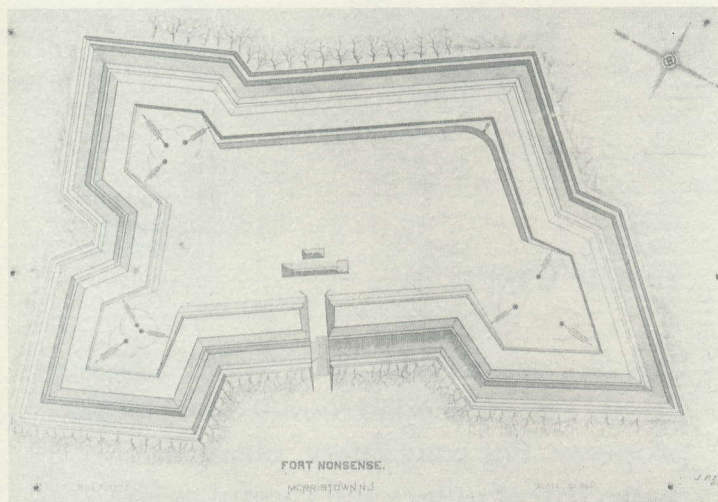
The Arnold Tavern near the Green became his 1777 winter headquarters. Rodney's Light Infantry was quartered across town at Colonel Ford's house. Other officers and men were quartered in private houses, barns, churches, and other buildings throughout the area.

Initially, Washington did not intend to make Morristown his winter camp. However, conditions made it difficult for him to do otherwise. The army needed rest and expired enlistments reduced the ranks to nearly 3,000. Clothing was in poor supply, food was scarce, and many soldiers were deserting. As if these problems were not enough, an epidemic of smallpox occurred. So dread was this disease that immediately upon Washington's arrival in Morristown, he instructed that all the soldiers be inoculated, an uncommon practice at that time.

The winter became a time of rebuilding the depleted ranks. By late May 1777, with sufficient arms and ammunition, the army had increased to more than 8,000 men in New Jersey.

FORTIFYING THE HILL

Before leaving for the Pennsylvania campaigns, Washington wanted to secure Morristown as a supply base and protect it from possible Tory uprising and British attack. On May 14 and again on May 28, 1777, he ordered the construction of a fortification with a redoubt on this hill adjoining Morristown, so “. . . that it may serve as a safe retreat in case of necessity.” A few soldiers were directed to remain to guard military stores and the hill.



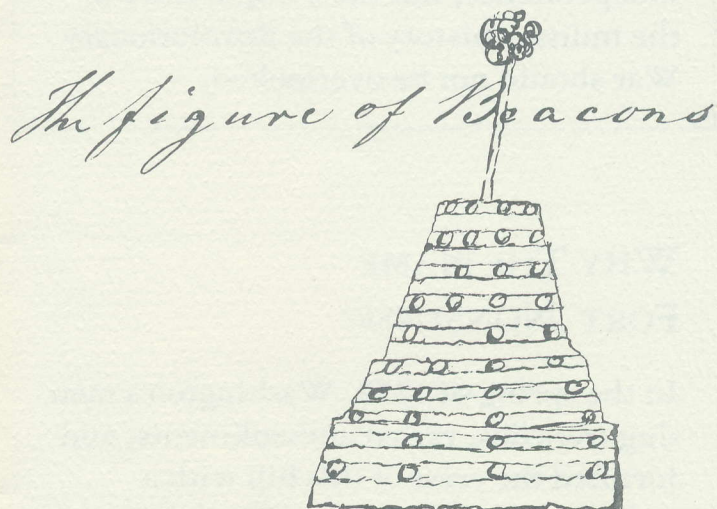
Plan of the original fort based on an actual survey of the ruins by U.S Army Major Joseph P. Farley in 1887

Originally referred to as the “Hill” or “Kinney’s Hill”, this place commanded the nearby country side. Cannons that were placed here protected the town below and guarded the main roads leading north and south. The British were not able to attack Morristown during the years that followed, and the fortified hill was never used in defense of the town.

CONSTRUCTING A BEACON

In addition to serving as fortifications, Fort Nonsense Hill was the location of a beacon in Washington’s important warning and alarm system. According to instructions given to Morris County Militia Colonel Sylvanus Seeley in April 1777, the beacon was to be 18 to 20 feet high and constructed of a loose cage of logs with combustibles filling the interior. When ignited, the local militia would assemble at predesignated locations to repel any invasion.

Beginning in the Hudson Highland of New York, the network of beacons extended south and west through New Jersey. By 1779, the alarm system had been nearly completed.

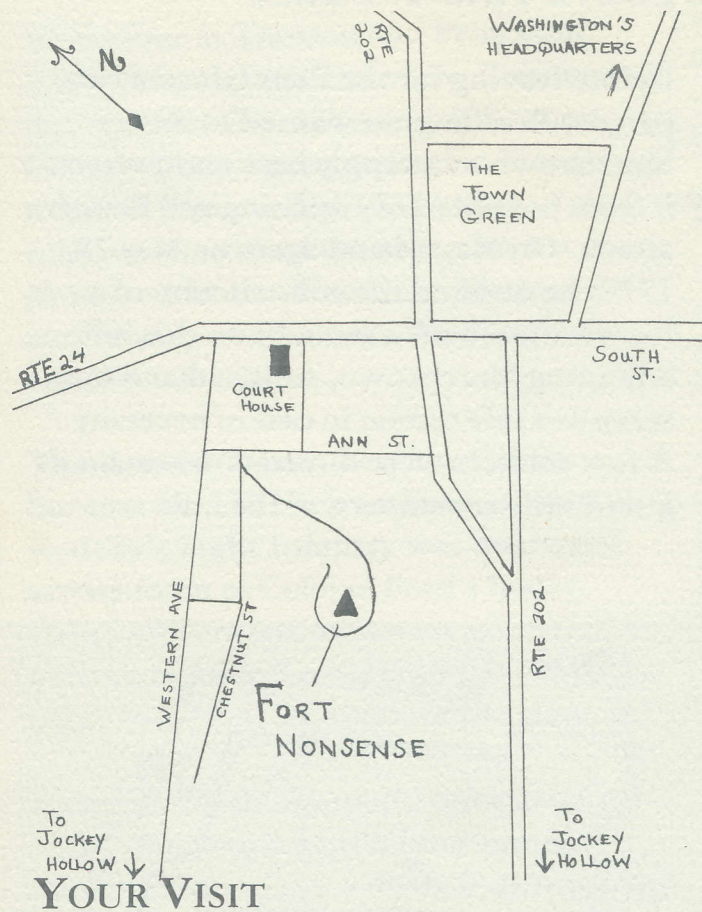


The system was used on June 7, 1780, and again on June 23, when the British invaded New Jersey with the intention of capturing Washington's supply base at Morristown. No written record exists, but it is likely that the Morristown beacon was fired on these occasions. Records do tell of militia from the area responding to alarms in June of 1780 and engaging the enemy at the Springfield battles. Beacons were again used on January 1, 1781, to sound the alarm to put down the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line in Jockey Hollow.

It was common for small fortifications such as Fort Nonsense to be built for the protection of military encampments and strategic military depots. They played a little known role in the fight for American independence, but their importance in the military history of the Revolutionary War should not be overlooked.

WHY THE NAME FORT NONSENSE?

In the spring of 1777, Washington's men dug trenches, raised embankments, and fortified the crest of this hill with a redoubt. As early as the 1790s the hill was known as Fort Nonsense. A legend evolved stating that the hill was Washington's way of keeping the troops busy and thereby avoiding indolence, depression, and desertion.



Fort Nonsense Hill is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. The park is surrounded by private property. For your safety, please be respectful of others and careful as you wander over the grounds.

ADMINISTRATION

Fort Nonsense is part of Morristown National Historical Park and is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A Superintendent, whose address is Morristown, N.J. 07960, is in immediate charge of the park.

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