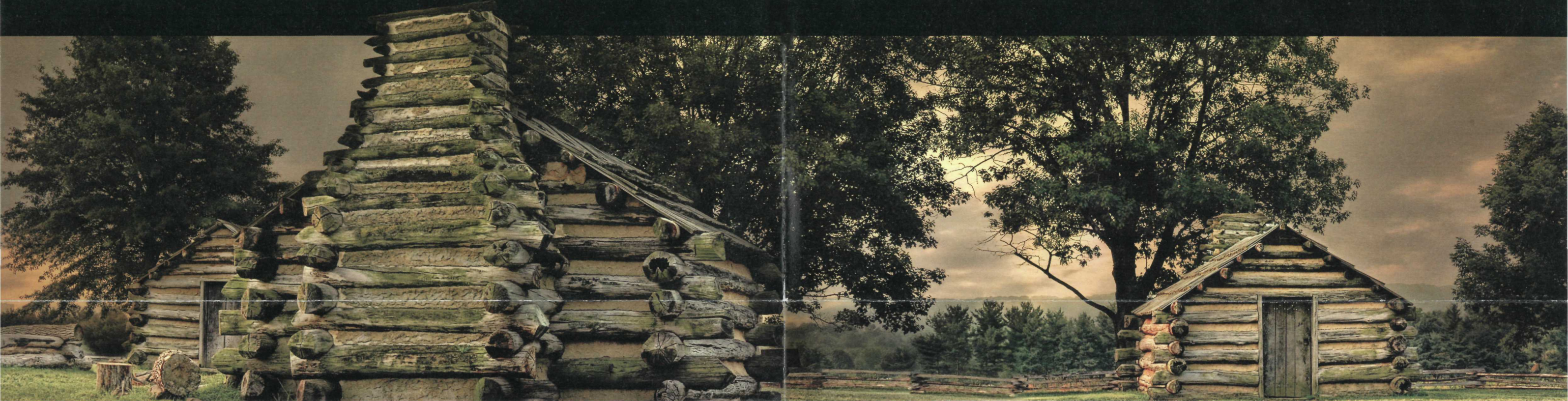


Valley Forge

Valley Forge
National Historical Park
Pennsylvania

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Replicated huts mark the encampment site of Gen. Peter Muhlenberg's brigade.
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Skilled and Capable

Ask someone to think of Valley Forge and they will nearly always envision an anonymous group of soldiers struggling against winter's fury and clothed in nothing but rags. Certainly hardship did occur at Valley Forge, but the encampment experience could be characterized as "suffering as usual," for privation was the Continental soldier's constant companion. The reason many Americans picture Valley Forge as the pinnacle of misery is that this early and romanticized version of the encampment story became an important parable to teach us about American perseverance. The portrayal of starving troops, however, has kept us from getting to know the people of the Continental Army—who they were, why they joined the army, and what they accomplished at Valley Forge.

To better understand and appreciate what happened at Valley Forge it is helpful to know how the encampment fits into the context of the American Revolution (1775–1783). In 1777 British strategy included a plan to capture Philadelphia, the patriot capital. To accomplish this, the British commander in chief, Sir William Howe, landed nearly 17,000 of His Majesty's finest troops at the head of Chesapeake Bay. To oppose them, Gen. George Washington marched his 12,000-man army from New Jersey.

People often picture the Continental Army of 1777 as a ragtag bunch of inexperienced fighters. But Washington's men fought with skill and were often on the offensive while campaigning against superior numbers of professional soldiers. Although they

lost two key battles, as well as Philadelphia, to the British, Washington's soldiers emerged from these experiences with a renewed confidence in their fighting abilities. They only needed a little more training to reach their full potential.

As wintry weather approached, armies often withdrew to fixed camps. Transportation problems made large-scale winter operations infeasible. In choosing a site for quarters, Washington had to balance the Continental Congress's wish for some type of winter campaign aimed at dislodging the British from the capital against the needs of his weary and poorly supplied army. By mid-December he had decided to encamp at Valley Forge. From this location, 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia, the army was close enough to maintain pressure on the British yet far enough away to prevent a surprise attack.

While the soldiers who entered camp on December 19, 1777, were not well-supplied, they were not downtrodden. This is attested to by an anonymous observer who recounted his visit to Valley Forge in the *New Jersey Gazette* on December 25:

"I have just returned from spending a few days with the army. I found them employed in building little huts for their winter quarters. It was natural to expect that they wished for more comfortable accommodations, after the hardships of a most severe campaign; but I could discover nothing like a sigh of discontent at their situation. . . . On the contrary, my ears were agreeably

struck every evening, in riding through the camp, with a variety of military and patriotic songs and every countenance I saw, wore the appearance of cheerfulness or satisfaction."

Army records and eyewitness accounts speak of a skilled and capable force in charge of its own destiny. Rather than wait for deliverance, the army located supplies, built log cabins to stay in, constructed makeshift clothing and gear, and cooked subsistence meals of their own concoction. Provisions, though never abundant in the early months of the encampment, were available. Shortages of clothing did cause severe hardship for a number of men, but many soldiers had a full uniform, and the well-equipped units patrolled, foraged, and defended the camp.

The sound that would have reached your ears on approaching the camp was not that of a forlorn howling wind, but rather that of hammers, axes, saws, and shovels at work. Under the direction of military engineers, the men built a city of 2,000-odd huts laid out in parallel lines along planned military avenues. The troops also constructed miles of trenches, five earthen forts (redoubts), and a state-of-the-art bridge over the Schuylkill River.

Disease, not cold or starvation, was the true scourge of the camp. Army returns (reports) reveal that two-thirds of the nearly 2,000 men who perished died during the warmer months of March, April, and May, when supplies were more abundant. The most common killers were influenza, typhus, typhoid, and dysentery. Dedicated

surgeons, capable nurses, a smallpox inoculation program, and camp sanitation regulations limited the death tolls.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the encampment was the army's maturation into a more professional force. The Continental Army was primed and ready to move on to the next level just as a charismatic former Prussian army officer, Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben, arrived in camp in February 1778. Von Steuben's hands-on training program helped the army become a more proficient marching machine. The Baron inspired a "relish for the trade of soldiering" that gave the troops a new sense of purpose and helped sustain them through many trials as they stuck to the task of securing independence.

On May 6, 1778, the army joyously celebrated France's alliance with and formal recognition of the United States as a sovereign power. The expected arrival of the French greatly altered British war plans and triggered their evacuation of Philadelphia in June. Washington rapidly set troops in motion to bring on a general engagement with the enemy. On June 28, at the Battle of Monmouth, N.J., Washington's men demonstrated their improved battle prowess when they forced the British from the field. By summer Washington could claim that the war effort was going well. Valley Forge was not the darkest hour of the Revolutionary War; it is a place where an already accomplished group of professionals stood their ground, honed their craft, and thwarted one of the major British offensives of the war.



Campaign of 1777

After landing at Head of Elk on Chesapeake Bay, Sir William Howe's army marched north to capture Philadelphia. Although the Continental Army lost the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, and al-

lowed the British to capture the patriot capital, it had performed well and gained confidence. The move to Valley Forge prevented the British from making inroads into Pennsylvania's interior.

Commander in Chief

Gen. George Washington's faith in the moral rightness of the American cause never wavered. At Valley Forge he attempted to balance the wants of hungry soldiers and dissatisfied officers

against the nearly incessant demands from political leaders that he pursue the war more aggressively against the British occupying the patriot capital—all while operating in a disputed area where

friend and foe were difficult to distinguish. The character and purpose that helped sustain him and his soldiers is reflected in Charles Willson Peale's 1780 portrait of the general (above).

Links to the Past

Historic artifacts help to establish relationships with the past. The visitor center exhibit, "Determined to Persevere," featuring objects from the park's Neumann Collection, will bring you into

closer contact with those who served at Valley Forge.

The Continental Army used the rolling terrain of Valley Forge intensively in laying out defense lines and living and working areas. When

the army left in June 1778 the land was devastated. On a visit 10 years later, however, Washington saw few remaining traces of the encampment. The land had recovered. Today, in addition to its beauty (reflected

above in this photograph of the Grand Parade near the Maurice Stephens house), Valley Forge provides important habitat for animals and exceptional recreational opportunities for visitors.

Drillmaster von Steuben

Baron Friedrich W.A. von Steuben, of Prussia, volunteered his services to the revolutionary cause. Much of his success in training the soldiers of Washington's army at Valley Forge was achieved by his reli-

ance 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 Abbey's well-known painting. The rapid progress of this

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

Common Ground

From New England, there arrived a company of soldiers, composed of whites, blacks and a few Stockbridge Indians. —A Moravian farmer from Bethlehem, Pa., who observed recruits heading for Valley Forge, spring 1778.

By the end of 1776 a series of reverses made it apparent that an army based on the militia-type system of short enlistments could not compete against the British. In order to put the army on firmer footing, the Continental Congress allowed General Washington to recruit soldiers for three years or the duration of the war beginning in 1777. In return for such arduous service Congress offered land bounties and monetary bonuses. The men who answered this call formed the bulk of a standing army that fought for the rest of the war and represented a large slice of Revolutionary War society.

The troops who came to camp included men from all 13 original states and regiments from all except South Carolina and Georgia. The encampment brought together men, women, and children of nearly all ages, from all walks of life, from different ethnic backgrounds, and from various religions. While statistically most were of English descent, the ranks also included persons of African, American Indian, Austrian, Dutch, French, German, Irish, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Prussian, Scottish, Spanish, and Swedish descent.

Motivation for enlistment varied, but many who joined in the fight sought to secure their own blessings of liberty while fighting to gain their country's independence from Britain. Many recent European arrivals sought fortune and honor by enlisting in the regiments of the

middle states they now called home. In fact, two-thirds of the troops from Pennsylvania were foreign-born. Women followed the army to be with their husbands and contribute to the cause. Women present at Valley Forge included hundreds of enlisted men's wives who followed the army year-round and some general officers' wives on extended visits. The army compensated full-time women followers for rendering valuable services like sewing, laundering, and nursing.

Promises of freedom motivated thousands of enslaved African Americans to join Continental and British forces. In the Continental Army, bound individuals yearning for liberty and wages served alongside freemen in search of a better life. Continental regiments were integrated and most included patriots of African descent. In order to pre-

serve their culture and prevent encroachment upon their rich western domain, most American Indians sided with the British. Political, religious, and personal ties, however, led some tribes to support the patriots. Hundreds of Indians enlisted in the Continental Army and many others engaged as scouts in specialized units. One of the most notable contributions came from the Oneida, who sent aid and a contingent of warriors to Valley Forge. Roman Catholics and Jews, though representing a small portion of the Revolutionary War era population, aggressively supported the patriot cause out of a desire to defend both homeland and religious freedom. The successful conclusion of the Revolution marked only the beginning of the struggle for some individuals for personal liberty. As the sound of combat grew fainter, the battle for individual rights began.

Exploring Valley Forge

The name Valley Forge comes from the iron forge built along Valley Creek in the 1740s. By the time of the American Revolution, a sawmill and gristmill had been added, making this place an important American supply base. The British burned the forge and other buildings shortly before the Continental Army arrived.

The park offers programs, tours, and activities to help you understand the significance of the events associated with the 1777–78 encampment and with the park's natural history. Exhibits and artifacts show what life was like during that difficult winter. For details visit www.nps.gov/vafo.

Accessibility The visitor center, exhibits, restrooms, most walkways, and picnic areas are wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are welcome.

Lodging, Food, and Other Attractions Ask at the visitor center about these services and other attractions in the Valley Forge area.

Self-guiding Tour A self-guiding tour route (see map below) takes you to the remains and replicas of forts and lines of earthworks, Artillery Park, Washington's Headquarters, and the Grand Parade, where General von Steuben trained the army. Memorials, monuments, and reconstructed

huts tell the stories of the people who helped write an enduring chapter in the history of America's struggle for independence.

Many nearby farmhouses became officers' quarters. Political feelings in the area were divided; most residents wanted to be free from the conflict, but the Valley Forge occupation brought the war home. Some quarters still stand, although altered over the years; some are on the tour. You can see traces of historic roads and the site of Sullivan's Bridge, a temporary structure based on a Roman design and built early in the encampment to link Washing-

ton's army with northern supply and patrol areas. A flood washed out Sullivan's Bridge shortly after the army abandoned camp. A marker on River Trail, accessible from the north side of Schuylkill River, notes the bridge's location.

Walking Tours Ranger-led tours (free) exploring historic stories and sites start at the visitor center and Valley Forge Station. Offered seasonally.

Trolley Tours Guided tours (fee) explore significant areas. The Encampment Store at the visitor center offers guide services seasonally. For information or to reserve tours call 610-783-1074.

Cell Phone Tour Look for the cell phone tour icons. Call 484-396-1018 for the prompts (free).

Picnicking The picnic areas at Varnum's, Wayne's Woods, and Betzwood are first-come, first-served; no reservations taken. Open fires are prohibited, but Betzwood provides grills for charcoal fires.

Safety and Regulations Remember, your safety is your responsibility. • Camping is not allowed. • Use of skates, skateboards, and in-line skates is prohibited. • Mountain bikes are restricted to marked trails and park roads. Cross-country use through fields and wooded areas is prohibited.

• Do not picnic or engage in recreational activity near historic sites and buildings. • Park vehicles in designated areas. • Pets must be leashed and attended. • For firearms and other regulations check the park website. • All plants, animals, and natural or cultural features are protected by federal law. **Emergencies call 911.**

More Information
Valley Forge National Historical Park
1400 North Outer Line Drive
King of Prussia, PA 19406-1009
610-783-1077
www.nps.gov/vafo



1 Visitor Center

Start at the visitor center at the junction of Pa. 23 and North Gulph Road, for information, a film, exhibits, and a bookstore. It is open daily except Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and Janu-



2 Muhlenberg Brigade

ary 1. Staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. Ask about seasonal programs, special events, activities, and tours (see above right).



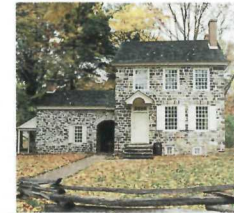
3 National Memorial Arch

This arch, dedicated in 1917, commemorates the "patience and fidelity" of the soldiers who wintered at Valley Forge in 1777–78.



4 Wayne Statue

This statue stands in an area where Pennsylvania troops commanded by Gen. Anthony Wayne encamped. It faces the general's home in nearby Chester County.



5 Headquarters

Washington's Headquarters, in the Isaac Potts house, was the focal point of camp activities. **Begin your tour at Valley Forge Station** (see map below).



6 Redoubt 3

Redoubts 3 and 4 anchored the right and left flanks of the inner, or second, line of defense. A trench connecting the redoubts formed a line against a British attack that might overrun the



7 Artillery Park

Cannon were massed in Artillery Park. Gun crews trained and drilled under Brig. Gen. Henry Knox's command. If the British attacked, cannon could be dispatched from here.



8 Varnum's Quarters

Gen. James Varnum occupied this early-1700s farmhouse overlooking the Grand Parade. Nearby is a statue of General von Steuben, who supervised the Continental Army's training.



9 Washington Memorial Chapel

The chapel, on private property within the park, has an active congregation. The beautiful interior of this early-1900s church honors George Washington's service to his country.



More Things To Do

Have you noticed the park's many trails and natural features? Ask at the visitor center about recreational and learning opportunities. Or visit www.nps.gov/vafo.

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