

Valley Forge

Albigeance Waldo



OVERVIEW

During the American Revolution George Washington and most of the Continental Army spent the winter of 1777 and 1778 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where they shivered in the cold without adequate clothing, boots, food, or other supplies. Men died by the hundreds. Surgeon Albigeance Waldo kept a diary of those difficult days.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What hardships does the doctor describe?
 - How does the author regard George Washington?
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Dec. 12th.—A Bridge of Waggons made across the Schuylkill last Night consisting of 36 waggons, with a bridge of Rails between each. Some Skirmishing over the River. Militia and dragoons brought into Camp several Prisoners. Sun Set.—We are order'd to march over the River—It snows—I'm Sick—eat nothing—No Whiskey—No Baggage—Lord—Lord—Lord. The Army were 'till Sun Rise crossing the River—some at the Waggon Bridge, & some at the Raft Bridge below. Cold & Uncomfortable. . . .

Dec. 14th.—Prisoners & Deserters are continually coming in. The Army who have been surprisingly healthy hitherto—now begin to grow sickly from the continued fatigues they have suffered this Campaign. Yet they still show spirit of Alacrity & Contentment not to be expected from so young Troops. I am Sick—discontented—and out of humour. Poor food—hard lodging—Cold Weather—fatigue—Nasty Cloaths—nasty Cookery—Vomit half my time—smoak'd out of my senses—the Devil's in't—I can't Endure it—Why are we sent here to starve and freeze—What sweet Felicities have I left at home;—A charming Wife—pretty Children—Good Beds—good food—good Cookery—all agreeable—all harmonious. Here, all Confusion—smoked Cod—hunger & filthiness—A pox on my bad luck. Here comes a bowl of beef soup—full of burnt leaves and dirt,—enough to make a hector spue—away with it Boys. . . .

See the poor Soldier when in health—with what chearfully he meets his foes and encounters every hardship—if barefoot—he labours him the Mud & Cold with a Song in his mouth extolling War & Washington—if his food be bad—he eats it notwithstanding with seeming content—blesses God for a good Stomach—and Whisles it into digestion. But harkee Patience—a moment—There comes a Soldier—His bare feet are seen thro' his worn out Shoes—his legs nearly naked from the tatter'd remains of an old pair of

stockings—his Breeches not sufficient to cover his Nakedness—his Shirt hanging in Strings—his hair disheveled—his face meagre—his whole appearance pictures a person forsaken & discouraged. He comes, and cries with an air of wretchedness & despair—I am Sick—my foot lame—my legs are sore—my body cover'd with this tormenting Itch—my Cloaths are worn out—my Constitution broken—my former Activity is exhausted by fatigue—hunger & Cold—I fail fast, shall soon be no more! . . .

Dec. 21st.—Preparations made for hutts. Provision Scarce. Mr. Ellis went homeward—sent a Letter to my Wife. Heartily wish myself at home—my Skin & eyes are almost spoil'd with continual smoke.

A general cry thro' the Camp this Evening among the Soldiers—"No Meat!—No Meat!"—the Distant vales Echo'd back the melancholly sound—"No Meat! No Meat!" Immitating the noise of Crows & Owls, also, made a part of the confused Musick.

What have you for our Dinners Boys? "Nothing but Fire Cake & Water, Sir." At night—"Gentlemen the Supper is ready." What is your Supper, Lads? "Fire Cake & Water, Sir." . . . What have you got for Breakfast, Lads? "Fire Cake & Water, Sir." The Lord send that our Commissary of Purchases may live on, Fire Cake & Water, 'till their glutt'd Gutts are turned to Pasteboard.

Our Division are under Marching Orders this morning. I am ashamed to say it, but I am tempted to steal Fowls if I could find them—or even a whole Hog—for I feel as if I could eat one. But the Impoverish'd Country about us, affords but little matter to employ a Thief—or keep a Clever Fellow in good humour—But why do I talk of hunger & hard usage, when so many in the World have not even fire Cake & Water to eat. . . .

Oppertunities, which have not offer'd themselves this Season; tho' this may be contradicted by many; but Impartial Truth in future History will clear up these points, and reflect lasting honour on the Wisdom & prudence of General Washington. . . .

Liberty by these little successes—and by the prudence—calmness—sedateness—& wisdom with which he facilitates all his Opperations. This being the case—and his having not wantonly thrown away the lives of his Soldiers, but reserved them for another Campaign—(if another should Open in the Spring) which is of the utmost consequence—This then cannot be called an Inglorious Campaign. If he had risk'd a General Battle, and should have prov'd unsuccessfull—what in the name of heaven would have been our case this Day—Troops are raised with great difficulty in the Southern States—many Regiments from these States do not consist of one hundred men. What then was the grand Southern Army before the N. England Troops joined them and if this Army is Cut off when should we get another as good. General Washington has doubtless considered these matters—& his conduct this Campaign has certainly demonstrated his prudence & Wisdom.