

Name _____



Valley Forge - Winter of 1777-1778

By Jane Runyon

In 1777, the capital of the United States was Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The British army was convinced that the war they were engaged in with the colonial soldiers of America would be a short one. They had a superior army. The colonials were neither trained nor well equipped. In September of 1777, the British commander, General William Howe led his army of 15,000 to Philadelphia. He thought that if he captured the American capital, the war would be over. General Washington tried to stop the British troops at Brandywine, Pennsylvania, but he was outnumbered and outfought. Howe was able to capture Philadelphia without a fight.

Washington and his men tried to defeat the British at Germantown in October. Again they were defeated. It is easy to understand why. Washington had tried to surprise the British. His men had marched thirty-five miles to Germantown and fought a four hour battle all in one day. That was not an easy task at all.

By this time, it was getting late in the year. It was the practice in those days for an army to find a camp and stay there during the cold winter months. The British were warm and secure in the city of Philadelphia. Washington needed to find a place for his men. They were low on food. Their uniforms, the few there were, were torn and tattered. Many of the men had no shoes or boots. They had to find some place close so that they could regain their strength and try to get ready for the battles to come. Washington decided on Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. They arrived at Valley Forge on December 19. It had taken them eight days just to march thirteen miles. A snowstorm and icy rain had slowed their progress. They had to build a makeshift bridge to take the troops across the Schuylkill River.



WASHINGTON AND HIS ARMY AT VALLEY FORGE.

There are those who say that you could track the American army by the blood in the snow. The feet of those with no boots were cracked and bleeding. They tied rags around the bloody feet when they could. A day of Thanksgiving was declared by Washington when they were just a day away from Valley Forge. Their Thanksgiving feast consisted of a half cup of rice and a tablespoon of vinegar.

Conditions at Valley Forge that winter were horrible at best. The roads leading to the camp were in terrible shape. Huge ruts in the road made it extremely difficult for wagons to bring supplies to the camp. The man in charge of getting supplies to the soldiers, Quartermaster General Thomas Mifflin, didn't like his job, and he didn't really do much to make things better for the troops. Twelve men were put into 14 by 16 foot wooden sheds to live. There was a fireplace inside the shed. This was their only way to keep warm.

Health conditions in the camp were miserable. General Washington tried to force the men to make conditions better, but it didn't work. Washington was losing control of his men. That is when the man many say contributed the most toward American army discipline appeared on the scene. His name was Baron Friedrich von Steuben. Von Steuben was a no nonsense type of man. He took over the training of the Americans. He also put them to work cleaning up the garbage and **latrines** in the area. He couldn't speak any English, but he got his message across. By spring, the troops had a new pride and a new purpose in mind.

A new Quartermaster, Nathaniel Green, was appointed in the spring. He made it his purpose to get vegetables, meat, boots, and uniforms to the colonial army. It was also announced at this time that the French had decided to join the Americans in their fight against the British. The troops were ready to celebrate their change in luck. Washington ordered an extra month's pay and a ration of rum to all the soldiers who had stuck it out through the whole miserable winter.

That same spring, the British took a look at the area they were in. Philadelphia would not be an easy place to defend. General Howe decided it would be better if he took his troops back to New York. By June 18 of 1778, the British and 3,000 of their Tory followers had left Philadelphia. It's a good thing because Washington had taken his men out of Valley Forge on June 9. The American troops arrived a few hours after the British departure to retake the American capital. It had been a long, miserable, and costly winter. It has been estimated that Washington lost 3,000 men during the stay at Valley Forge. The men who survived came out of Valley Forge stronger.



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They were better trained and ready to tackle the enemy.

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Questions

- _____ 1. In 1777, the capital of the colonies was Washington, D.C.
 A. False
 B. True
- _____ 2. Who was the British commander in the colonies?
 A. Nathaniel Green
 B. William Howe
 C. George Washington
 D. Thomas Mifflin
- _____ 3. Where was Valley Forge located?
 A. Philadelphia
 B. New York
 C. Boston
 D. Pennsylvania
4. Why do you think it was the practice to make camp for the winter in those days?

- _____ 5. What kept the men from getting supplies regularly?
 A. The roads were too rutted for wagons to pass.
 B. The Quartermaster did not order any.
 C. The trains did not run there.
 D. The enemy captured them.

- _____ 6. Who took over the training of American troops?
 A. William Howe
 B. George Washington
 C. Thomas Mifflin
 D. Baron von Steuben

7. Why do you think discipline helped to make the army stronger?

- _____ 8. The Americans recaptured the capital in the spring.
 A. True
 B. False

Mark off a rectangular figure on the floor. Make two of the sides 16 feet long. Make the opposite sides 14 feet long. Gather eleven of your friends together. How would the twelve of you live inside the rectangular space? How would you sleep?
