



The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park



"Connecticut's Valley Forge"

July 2008 NewsLetter

Bethel/Redding CT

Welcome To Camp Redding – December 1778

One of the main reasons we recommend that visitors come to our annual December Winter Walk (1st Saturday of each December) is to witness the huge weather change at this time of year. Most visitors come to the park in the summer and

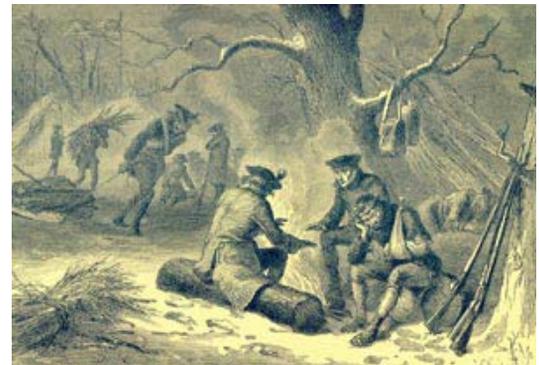
fall. It is hot and muggy. The visitor sees the long lines of firebacks and learns how each one of those piles is the site of one army hut that held 12 soldiers. While it is certainly more comfortable learning the Revolutionary War history at this time of year, one completely misses the feeling of cold frigid temperatures, hungry troops, and terrible living conditions. When the troops first arrived they had to build their own log hut (teams of 12). Many of the tents had not arrived, so the first days and nights were open-air. Freezing air!



Most of the troops marched into the three Redding camps during December.



The troops arrived in the midst of snow storms. Even when the tents did arrive, the tents did almost nothing to keep the men warm. Most of the troops were seriously in need of clothes and blankets. Some regiments were without shoes.



The first task at hand was to build the log huts. Each hut held 12 soldiers. Those 12 men built their own 12'X16' hut to strict specifications. Each hut had a fireplace for warmth and for cooking. Most of the troops were in their huts by New Years Day.



The best that can be said for the huts is that the men at least got some warmth from the fire, and a dry place out of the freezing stormy weather. Gen. Parsons who commanded the middle camp wrote Gen. Washington that some of his regiments were still without blankets – after 18 months!



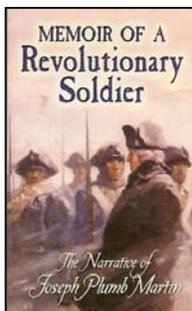
No food again

Added to the deprivations of the men was the fact that the food supply became critically short. Much of the food supplies were stored at the Danbury Supply Depot, but the wagon teams couldn't get through because of the snow. New England had suffered a terrible draught during the previous growing season and flour had to be supplied from New York State. Not only did they run into transportation problems, but other army posts along the way, like at Bedford NY, were commandeering the supplies destined for the Redding camps. Add hunger to the list. Cold, half naked, shoeless in many cases, no blankets in many cases, the problems at the Redding camps were not over.

'The Winter Campaign of Starving'

Private Joseph Plumb Martin who came into Gen Parsons middle camp at Redding along with 8th Regiment Connecticut Line during the week before Christmas, described the situation: " *They were busy building their winter huts that were ready in about a week. They had nothing extraordinary, either of eatables or drinkables, to keep a new year or housewarming. Now came on the time again between grass and hay, that is , the winter campaign of starving*".

Go to: [FANs new Web site at](http://FANs.new.Web.site.at)
www.putnampark.org



'Private Yankee Doodle' or the 'Memoir of a Revolutionary Soldier' is one of the best diaries written about a private soldier in the Continental Army. Joseph Plumb Martin became one of the typical soldiers in Washington's new permanent army vs. the extremely limited service performed by the various militia companies which began the American Revolution.

Private Joseph Plumb Martin camped in Redding's middle camp ...

The New Army vs. the Old

Justin Ewers, the senior editor of U.S. News & World Report, wrote one of the articles in the July edition which featured the Revolutionary War. Mr. Ewers discussed the fact which most Americans don't realize about just who were the soldiers fighting in the war. The war began with the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord in April of 1775. The American military units (dating back to the 1600's) were the various town militias. Service in these militias was mandatory. The men comprising these militia units were farmers, merchants, businessmen – many of whom were the heads of families. When the alarm went out around Boston that the British Regulars had opened fire on Americans ... over 20,000 militiamen from all over New England rallied to the cause and came to Cambridge ready to fight the British, and many of them did. The first full scale battle of the war was at Bunker's Hill that June. Once again, it was the militias that did the fighting. **Patriotism** was at an all time high! One of the commanding officers there was our own Israel Putnam. The British were forced to leave Boston the following March.

The next site of major warfare was at the battles of Brooklyn and then Manhattan. Even though the Continental Army had been created back in Cambridge, the lion's share of the battles in New York City were still fought with militia units. This is when a serious flaw was confirmed in the new infant American fighting force. The militia soldiers were not trained as a regular standing army. They had farms or businesses back home which needed tending. Many of them had families back home. The initial short terms of enlistment (3 mos., 6 mos. etc.) saw the militia troops leaving to return to their homes, sometimes via desertion. Washington was furious at the shrinkage of his army and the militia's tendency to turn and run in the face of battle. Washington wrote, " These men are not to be depended upon for more than a few days, as they soon get tired, grow impatient and ungovernable, and of course leave the Service." Washington's 1776 began with almost 30,000 troops ... and ended retreating across New Jersey with fewer than 3,000. In fairness, there were some superb militia units, and these made major contributions.

The new army would be manned by soldiers who enlisted for either 3 years or for the duration of the war. The new army was made up mostly of poor, propertyless laborers, unmarried men in their early 20's who took up arms not to defend some abstract ideal but because they were offered money and land. Let's face it, many of these young men had no alternative. Money included a nice sign-up bonus, the promise of 100 acres of land, new clothing, shoes and uniforms; and free room and board. They even had a list of the daily food rations for each soldier. What more could a young man want?

The perfect picture of camp life of the "new" full-time Continental Army soldier. Food, clothing, shelter, money and land ... in return for three to seven years enlistment in the army.

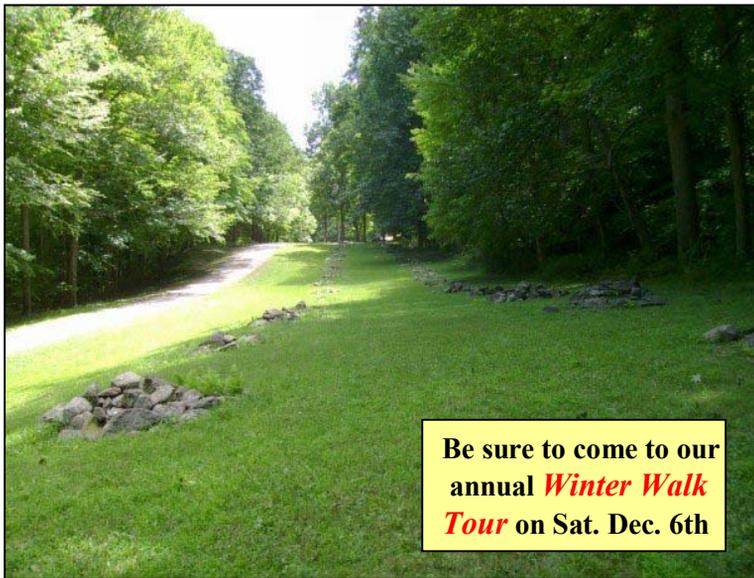
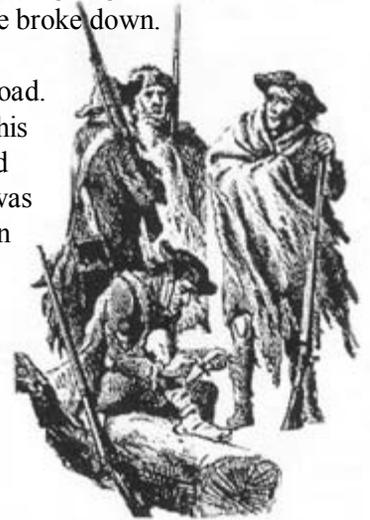


Troops Driven To Despair

A series of events had been deteriorating long before the troops reached the Redding camps in December of 1778. Aside from the facts that troops were seriously ill-clothed, they were extremely hungry and ill-fed and they were suffering from the elements of the winter. The one other area which was originally an attraction to the soldiers was **money**. Congress had jerked the economy and budgets around so much that the Continental Currency was almost worthless. The script that the troops were paid in wouldn't buy but a fraction of its value back in early 1776. But that didn't really matter because the troops were not being paid at all. The government was months in arrears of paying the troops. Despite the new demographics of the army, there were still many men and officers who had families back home who depended on financial support. Now this, too, was gone. Even though some of the Redding senior officers predicted what would occur, they held off until the very last of December. The Connecticut troops under Brig. Gen. Huntington's brigade, the western camp, decided to **mutiny**. They were going to march to Hartford where the Connecticut General Assembly was in session. All military discipline broke down.

Word of the mutiny reached Gen. Putnam at his headquarters on Umpawaug Road. He rode to the Huntington camp and confronted the mutinous troops. He gave his now famous "My brave lads, wither are you going?" speech. The troops backed down, mostly in respect for the salty old general, and returned to their huts. It was later found that the troops in Gen. Parson's middle camp were also ready to join the mutiny, but likewise backed down after hearing of their brother regiments to the west.

The ring leaders of the mutiny were taken away to the guard house. One man tried to escape and was shot to death by a sentry. Gen. Putnam wrote to Gen. Washington asking if he could avoid executions for the guilty soldiers. So much time expired for the return answer, that the men were given reprieves.



Be sure to come to our annual **Winter Walk Tour** on Sat. Dec. 6th

The double line of firebacks that stretch out for almost a quarter of a mile. Each stone pile is the remains of one of 116 log huts. Each hut held 12 enlisted soldiers who suffered through the long cold winter.



The "Guard House" standing near the visitor center. For years there was a sign in front telling the story about the prisoners, and how one of them was shot by a sentry as the prisoner attempted escape. Though hand-me-down lore says this was the site of this camp's guard house (we are not certain of that) it definitely was not the guard house where the prisoner was killed while escaping. That guard house was the division detention facility near Putnam's headquarters on Umpawaug Rd. (Near Topstone Rd.)

The troops of Putnam's three brigades in Redding that year were literally pushed to the limits. How much deprivation can be heaped upon men? It's hard to determine especially while taking a walk through the park today while it's warm and sunny. Redding was not the only place where mutinies took place. Thousands of other troops from different states were under similar pressures. Washington and his officers understood the circumstances of these flare ups, but at the same time were forced to maintain decorum and strict military discipline. Putnam had other serious problems during the Redding encampment period which led to executions; but that's a story for another day.

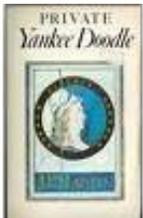


The July meeting was held at the visitor center on Tuesday, June 10th, 2008.

Notes from the prez ...



1. **President's Opening:** Steve opened the meeting.
2. **Treasurer's Report:** T.G. outlined our financials. T.G. reported he will be looking into purchasing a Vacuum Cleaner as a gift to the Park from FANS as well as re-ordering gift items for the FANS "Store".
3. **Membership Report:** As our paid "Member" roster has fallen, and we've only attracted very few "new" members over the past year, we discussed ways to increase membership. Ideas offered included putting a sign in the Visitor Center promoting FANS, adding info on the Maps that are distributed, giving materials to Real Estate agents for new people in the community, etc. I think that at the 230th Re-enactment we should make a concerted push to sign members and this should be discussed at the next meeting
4. **State Park Update:** Nate said that the design for the Pavilion scheduled to be built this summer/fall went back for some changes. Otherwise, park grounds are being maintained.
5. **Visitor Center Update:** Harry, passed along good news regarding new displays. Al and Nicole from the DEP presented a more concrete plan for construction of standing boards that will tell the story of the park's history. The goal is to have them in place and open to the public for viewing at the 230th Re-enactment weekend.
6. **Archaeological Field Session:** Dan outlined plans for an archaeological excavation of one of the hut sites beginning in September and going through November. Students from WestConn will participate. He said the dig will operational during the 230th re-enactment adding another "event" for the public to see.
7. **Bylaws update:** Steve said that he and the other officers (T.G.-Treasurer, Harry-VP) met to discuss the FANS Bylaws and would have some recommended changes to it at the next meeting. While much of the Bylaws were still very applicable there were some updating such as changing the fiscal year to a calendar year and other items to reflect the current make-up of the group.
8. **Committee Chairpeople:** While several committees have chairs, Steve asked several other members to be active chairs. They are: Public Relations-Brent; Re-enactments-Jim; Income Resources-T.G.; Historical-Dan; Membership-Buzz; Programs-Nancy.
9. **August Colonial Crafts Demonstrations:** Nancy set up the program where a different demonstration will be held each weekend in August. Harry distributed very nice flyers to be placed in public places in the community. Jeanine will update the sign to place by the road outside the park. The info is also posted on the park website.
10. **230th Anniversary Event:** Brian outlined a re-enactors program for the weekend that got everyone in the meeting very excited! The tentative schedule is for a series of activities for Saturday from 9:30am-4:30pm (including camp set-up, a march from the other encampments, battle re-enactment, tacticals, etc.). A dinner will be provided by FANS then followed by a "Ghost Tour" at around 7:00pm. We are still waiting to hear details from Tom and the 5th CR on this. Sunday will be from 10am-3pm where the public is invited to visit. While there is still much work to be done in securing re-enactor commitments, we should begin promoting the event to the public. Please forward any info to Brent so that he can begin securing media and website calendar listings, write-ups, etc. I'm personally counting on Jeanine to help on logistics, ie the details of manning tables, parking, securing straw, bathrooms, etc etc.



The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday, September 9th**
at **7:00PM** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.



NO MEETING IN AUGUST