



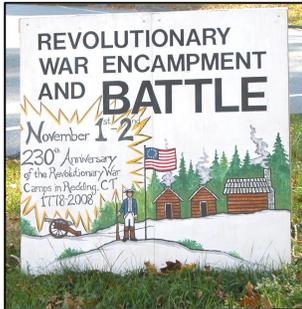
The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park



"Connecticut's Valley Forge"

November 2012 NewsLetter **Bethel/Redding CT**

Rolling The Weather Dice



NOV. 2008

November 1 & 2, 2008 ... temperature in the 60's. Sweaters and T-Shirts.



NOV. 2010



November 6 & 7, 2010 ... temperature in the 60's. Sweaters and T-Shirts.

234th Anniversary of the Revolutionary War Camps

**NOV. 2012 - 2012
CANCELED**



November 3, 2012 ... storm damage in park and surrounding towns. Power outages across Connecticut. Communications with reenactors across the state almost impossible. Decision made to CANCEL.



Running any event at Putnam Park involves betting on *Mother Nature*. The Living History School Days for hundreds of kids during the first of May is warm, but can be wet. Reenactors, craftspeople and volunteers



and teachers and students can all get cold and wet, as we did for three or four days back in 2005. The first summer concert we held was wiped out by a huge rain and windstorm several hours before show time; and one of our annual December Winter Walks was knocked off the calendar by a blizzard one year.

The November Battle Skirmish is held every two years; but planning was already started at last week's monthly FANs meeting to hold a reenactment next November - 2013.

Trip Back To 1778-79 – Camp Reading

A recent issue of British History Magazine contained a fascinating article about what it would be like to go back to the Elizabethan era (late 1500's). What it would be like for one of us to visit five or six hundred years ago. The article stresses how we would be totally baffled by the huge difference in what our sensory organs would experience versus someone back in that time. For example, the array of sounds that we are used to like, cars, trucks, airplanes, sirens, machines, media – including radio, TV, smart phones ... and on and on, were absent. Back then, it was almost a void in sounds. Super quiet. During the recent power outage for six days (second Halloween in a row), this sensory void became evident. Almost zero sound. This got me thinking on how it must have been in the army camp back in the winter of 1778-79 ... today's Putnam Park.

SIGHT:

During the winter the sun is down by 6:00 pm and does not shine again until the next morning at 6:00 am. There were no street lights, or other light other than that provided by fires. The inside of the huts were almost completely dark in the daytime, let alone after sundown. At night, blackness took over. The 12 x 16' huts held 12 soldiers each. There were 4 sets of 3-tier bunk beds. The bunks had straw or hay for insulation and some comfort (i.e., a mattress) and hopefully a blanket. Outside of the fireplace in each hut, candles and lamps were not only scarce, but dangerous. A wooden hut stuffed with straw or hay was an A-1 fire hazard (see picture at right).

There were some fires outside used for cooking, and probably some fires which were kept going throughout the night which marked the senior non-coms locations in case instant communications were necessary. These fires were the closest thing to 'street lights'. The weather probably dictated whether the soldiers wanted to remain outside the huts at night fraternize or 'hit the hay' early and sleep. Of course at some point in time all the troops were out on guard duty during the night ... that involved other sensory factors.

SMELL:

Let's go back to the part above that says there were 12 soldiers packed into each hut. The soldiers basically had one set of clothes – the ones they wore. Many of the troops had worn-out and frayed clothing (they did have new regimental coats). The enlisted men's hut line stretched out for almost a quarter mile. While there was water available from several streams and springs, when the temps were below freezing or precipitating, washing clothes, or their own persons, were not a high priority. Hygiene and rules and regulations were important to the army, but actual enforcement were up to the officers and non-coms within the regiments or companies.

If you have ever seen an old fashion smoke house where meat was, and still is, cured by slow smoking; well, these huts were only one step away from a smoke house. Living in a single closed and unventilated room heated by a smoky fireplace just added another coat of grime on our troops. The odor of the hut and the men within was quite strong.

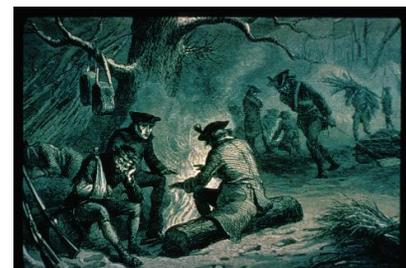
One regulation which was enforced was that of the required use of the outdoor trench latrines. The trenches were dug and maintained about 50 yards from the hut line. The trip to the open-pit trench as natured called, forced each soldier to make the trip out and back in all kinds of weather. When the wind was right ... another tremendous odor engulfed the camp.



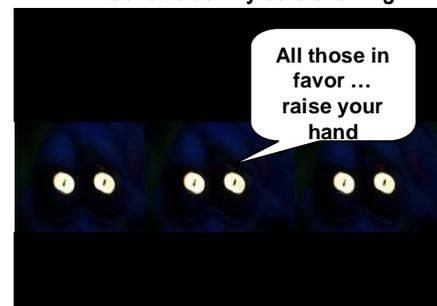
One hut per 12 soldiers



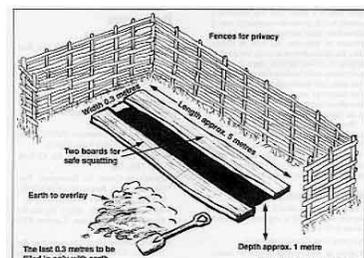
No light at night except the fire



Out side activity before turning in



Hut meetings at night



Conventional trench latrines cater for short term community requirements, before family or communal pit latrines are built. **Trench latrines**

Sensory Levels At Camp Reading 1778-79 Cont'd.

Taste :

The army had published lists of food, and portions, that a soldier would be issued on a daily basis. Often the list tasted better than the food actually doled out. We know that Camp Reading had a bake house, with at least one oven. When flour was available this crew would turn out loaves of bread for the whole camp (1,000 to 1.300 men). If the bakers didn't bake bread the troops would be issued flour. Each would rotate cooking duty, usually two for the 12-man huts. They would mix the flour with water and salt .(Often times there was no salt). They formed flat cakes out of the dough mass and cooked them on hot rocks by the fire. The fire cakes were almost tasteless, but did help in satisfying the stomach's plea for food. During some of the storms, the troops went up to a week with no food.

The best meals would include fresh beef or pork. But most of the meat would issued out of barrels of salted cuts. Salted not for flavor, but rather to preserve the meat ... before it start growing little additions. The only thing that was guaranteed at Camp Reading, was water. There was plenty of that.

Touch:

The sense of touch, or feeling, was heightened during the winter months at Camp Reading. The three or four weeks in December were spent with the troops constructing their log huts. It snowed off and on for the whole month, with a major storm at the end. The soldiers lived in their un-heated tents until they were able to move into their huts ... and get some relief from the fire.

The troops were kept busy during the day with camp chores, like hauling firewood for their huts, going to the commissary to get their food rations for their mess mates, cleaning their huts and immediate camp areas. Hauling in water for cooking, washing, shaving, and drinking. Drill instruction was also very important at this stage of the war. Baron von Steuben's manuals were well used. They all were subject for picket duty at some points on rotating scheduled. Standing guard duty in stormy and freezing weather just exacerbated the cold numbing effects on their bodies. Their clothes were not made for the winter conditions, and many men suffered through these periods.

Hearing :

Sound, as we pointed out above, was almost non-existent except for speech and noise made from activities in the camp. A horse, a wagon going by, or even the just the crackle of the fire in the hut at night. There was no electricity, no motors, radios, TV's , or cell phones. How did they ever get along without texting messages? Almost no music. The army used drum calls, and later fifes for signaling troop commands ... which all soldiers were required to memorize. So as not to confuse command signals with recreational music, there was no drumming allowed, except on an occasional basis. Personal flutes etc. were probably permitted during certain times as well as singing. Sleep depended on how many snored!



Campfires when there was food to cook.



Barrels of salt pork.



'Fire-Cake'



The troops got itchy and even buggy at times.



Picket Duty



Fife & Drum



Enlisted Mens Row at Camp Reading.

November 2012 FANs Meeting

To contact us: Friends of Putnam Park
P.O. Box 736
West Redding, CT 06896



The November meeting was held at the visitor center on Monday, November 12th, 2012

Notes from the prez ...



1. President's Welcome – Scott Stetler
2. Covered the cancelation of November Battle Skirmish (See Front Page).
3. Covered upcoming Annual December Winter Walk on December 8th.
4. Covered the discontinuation of the Monthly Newsletter, effective December 31st.
5. Will make plans for future communications through the FANs Web site.
6. Will make plans to establish a new FANs E-Mail Address.

Annual December Winter Walk on the 8th

This newsletter attempted to paint a picture of the trials and tribulations, and sometimes suffering, which the soldiers of 1778-79 endured at Camp Reading (today's Putnam Park), Don't forget that there were also two other camps in Reading that winter – all part of Gen. Israel Putnam's Division.

Most visitors to the park come during warm weather, while the troops were there during the opposite season. The troops arrived at the camp at the first of December 1778. It took roughly a month for them to construct the 116 log huts, in which they would live for the four to five months. Yes, it was cold and often snowed ... and it is this reason why we hold the annual history walk at this time of year. To give you a better sense of what it felt like during the cold weather.

Dan Cruson, the park's historian and archaeologist, leads this tour each year. No one is as expert on the knowledge of the winter cantonments in Reading during 1778. He has led excavations for more than a decade, and uncovered information that adds to the story of Putnam Park.

This is a once a year opportunity to hear the historical story of Camp Reading. Join us on the 8th!



The Annual Winter Walk

Saturday, December 8th

* Tour leaves from Visitor Center at 11:00am
* Visitor Center will open at 10:00am

Learn about the History of the Park & the Revolutionary War Camps at Redding, Connecticut



The Winter Walk is led by Dan Cruson, a local author and historian and the park's archaeologist. Dan's knowledge of the park and its history is vast and each year he shares new findings on this tour. He has been actively digging excavations at the park for the past ten years, and has stories to tell about the various digs. The 5th Connecticut Regiment will accompany Mr. Cruson and read journal entries from actual diaries of soldiers that were stationed in Redding 233 years ago.

Visit www.putnampark.org for full details.



Putnam Memorial State Park, Redding, Connecticut
Corner of Route 107 & Route 58

Sponsored by the (FANS) of Putnam Memorial State Park in Cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

There is no monthly Meeting in December, so join us at **7:00PM** at the Visitor Center On **Monday, January 14th, 2013** for the next meeting

