



Eight years and a few million musket balls

The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park

“Connecticut’s Valley Forge”



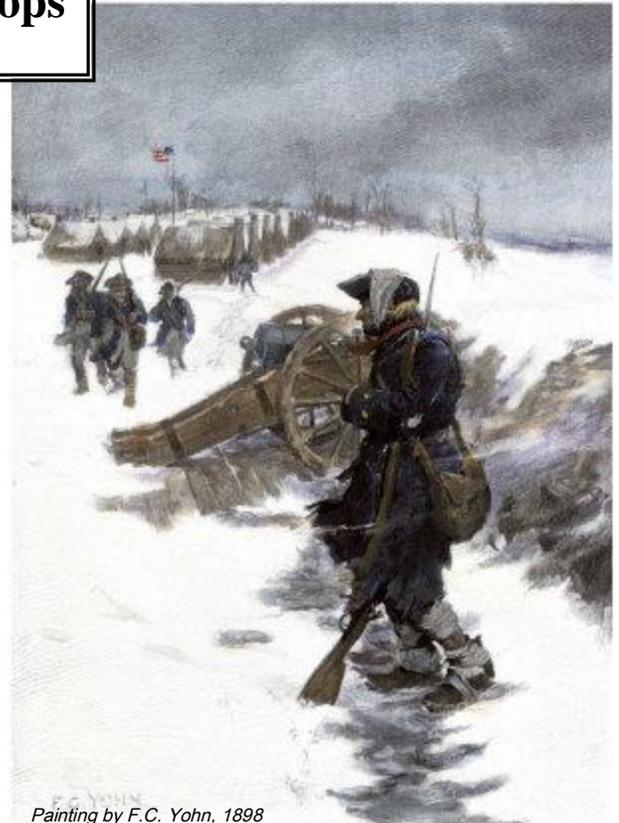
Bethel/Redding CT

January 2011 NewsLetter

The Eight Winters of Washington’s Troops During The American Revolution

This picture (on the right) of a picket guard waiting for his relief, is one of the best representations of a Continental Soldier on duty at one of the eight winter encampments during the Revolutionary War. The actual camp in this painting is Valley Forge, but the same scene would fit any of the cantonments.

Most people asked to list the 10 or 20 top-of-mind names, places or events of the war (go ahead and try it) would probably include Valley Forge. Valley Forge was featured in school texts for years, even though other camps were just as important. Other camps were purposely not highlighted in the years following the war, because of the negative information about the infighting and politics and outright neglect by the Continental Congress. If you think our Congress today is dysfunctional, you would have thrown up your hands at the “war” Congress. Try and do some research on this Congress. It is very hard to find any information on the 2nd Continental Congress. Its 56 members literally ran the war and were in charge of the army. Gen. Washington had to go through this group when trying to run his army. Washington gave his total commitment



Painting by F.C. Yohn, 1898

to leading the troops. He returned to his home in Virginia only on two brief occasions during the entire eight years of the war. On the way to Yorktown. And on the way back north from Yorktown.

Continental Army Winter Camps

Many people think that the war ended with the Battle of Yorktown. Lord Cornwallis surrendered ... and the war was over in October 1781. Not at all. The British forces still occupied Charlestown and Savannah [11,000 combined troops], in addition to New York City [17,000 troops]. King George III, who was obviously upset, wasn’t quite ready to throw in the towel. Two more years would pass before the treaties were signed. Washington had to keep a standing army in place until the ink was put to the treaties.



No winter encampment was a good time. Shortages of food, clothing, shoes and blankets lasted until 1783.

This past year, more articles and books have been published about some of the other winter camps. Of course proof was offered up about how much *worse* a camp was compared to Valley Forge. So the battle of the coldest, or most sickly, or most starving troops goes on. We list here for your information, the eight winters of the war. **1775 - 1783**

Cambridge, Mass. - 1775/76

1 Thousands of New England militiamen gathered in Cambridge after the battles of Lexington and Concord. Washington took over and formed the Continental Army from this pool of men.

Other states sent their units in from PA, NY, VA, NJ and MD. The Continental Army was started *after* the famous Battle of Bunker Hill. While the British won that day, they incurred the highest casualty rate of all battles of the entire war.

Washington's troops set up fortifications around Boston where the British were kept under siege right through the winter. Troops were housed in Harvard College buildings and barracks built in and around Cambridge Common.

Henry Knox brought in a huge train of artillery captured from the British Ft. Ticonderoga. The guns were mounted on top of Dorchester Heights and aimed directly at the town of Boston. The British evacuated the town on March 17th 1776. The next theatre of war would be New York City.

Morristown, NJ – 1776/77

2 1776 was one of the worst years of the war for Washington and his army. Terrible losses were incurred by the Americans at the Battles of Long Island, Manhattan, Ft. Washington and Lee. Many American prisoners were taken by the British – not to mention artillery and tons of supplies which were confiscated. The British chased the Americans across New Jersey. One of the highlights was the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th.

In December, the General faced the fact that most of his troops would leave the army at the end of the month when their enlistments were up. The war could have ended right then. But two surprise attacks on the British forces turned the tide. The army crossed the Delaware River on Christmas and captured Trenton from the Hessian Army. Several days later they marched to Princeton and captured that position from the British. These victories saved the army. Washington brought the small remnant of his army to Morristown in January. The troops were quartered in peoples homes and barns. The tattered army was devoid of all of its field supplies - even tents. The troops were spread out over a wide area (5 in this house, 3 in that house, 12 in that barn, etc. A new catastrophe hit the army – smallpox! Washington ordered all troops, on a rotating basis, to be inoculated. All new recruits thereafter were inoculated for the rest of the war.

Valley Forge, PA – 1777/78

3 Washington shadowed the British forces during 1777 on their march to Philadelphia. Washington's modus operandi was to not face the British head on.. Instead he made raids on detachments of British troops. The battles at Brandywine PA, Germantown, Fort Mifflin and Red Bank preceded Washington's leading the troops to Valley Forge, PA. Meanwhile, up in the northern theatre, the British made an inland incursion to destroy the American Army Supply Depot in Danbury. Many of the town's homes and barns were torched by the British in their efforts to destroy the military supplies. The Battle of Ridgefield took place when Gen. Arnold tried to cut off the British from their route to return to the Sound from Danbury. And, by far, the biggest American victory took place at Saratoga NY when Horatio Gates and Benedict Arnold defeated the British Army coming down from Canada.

This was the first "formally-planned" winter encampment. Quartermasters laid out plots of land for each of the brigades and regiments staying at the winter encampment. The 12,000 troops had to cut logs and then construct 16x14' huts. 12 men occupied each hut. They lived in their tents until the huts were finished.

The weather was cold and snowy. (No matter what "worst camp" marketing people say. Washington sent letter after letter to the Continental Congress complaining of almost no supplies coming in for his men. Congress couldn't believe his cries of woe, so they sent a committee to the camp to verify the problems. The reply was almost immediate – "The conditions are worse than the general has reported!" 2,000 soldiers died at the camp that winter from disease, malnutrition, weather, and clothing concerns. The one high point of the winter was the outstanding troop training accomplished by Prussian officer Baron von Steuben.



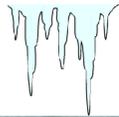
Middlebrook NJ/ Redding CT – 1778/79



British Gen. Wm. Howe resigned (or was relieved) while in Philadelphia. The army was turned over to Gen. Henry Clinton, who decided to take his army back to New York City via a march across New Jersey. The huge column, which included Philadelphia Loyalists, stretched out for miles. Perfect for Washington's harassment raids. The Americans went after the baggage train and rear guard. Finally, the British stopped, reversed direction and engaged the Americans with all their forces. At the end of the day, the battle came to a draw. The Brits escaped during the night to NYC. Baron von Steuben's training in tactics and discipline had paid off in spades. The Brits saw first hand a "new" foe on the battlefield.

Washington took his army north to White Plains and then to Fredericksburgh NY for the fall. His top priority of the war was to protect the Hudson Highlands and to keep the British hemmed in New York. The general divided up his army for this year's winter encampment. He took the main part of his army to Middlebrook NJ (south of Morristown near today's Bound Brook). He left some regiments in the Highlands, and placed three brigades of Connecticut and New Hampshire troops (along with Hazen's Canadian Regiment) in Redding CT under Maj. Gen Israel Putnam. Putnam's troops were positioned partly at the request of CT governor Jonathan Trumbull to protect the supply depot in Danbury, after being destroyed a year ago, and re-established. Once again the troops had to build their huts during the December snow storms. The day after Christmas the camps were buried in heavy snow (much like we witnessed this year).

Morristown, NJ – 1779/80



The Coldest Winter of the Eighteenth Century



Photo: Kristen Miller

This photo was taken of reenactors on the frozen Hudson River just of Constitution Island in February 2003 (Across from West Point). The 5th CR was part of the reenactors crew taking part in the filming a film about the Great Chain. The Hudson freezing over is very rare.

The main fighting during 1779 was concentrated in the South. Gen. Sullivan did spend the summer destroying Indian villages and crops across upstate NY. This was in retribution for them aiding the British in war operations in the North. British general Tryon (the one which led the attacks on the 'Burning of Danbury' and Ridgefield battle), burned the towns of Fairfield and Norwalk CT. He tried to burn New Haven, but was repulsed.

Washington once again pulled his main army into Morristown NJ for winter camp. He again left a brigade in the Danbury area for the winter (Poor's NH Brigade camped near Blue Jay Orchards on Old Hawleyville Rd. in Bethel).

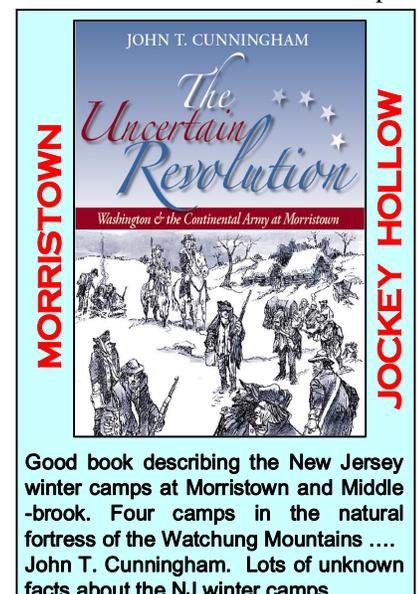
From Ray Raphael's book, *Founding Myths*, "In January 1780, fighting in the Rev War came to a standstill as Mother Nature transformed America into a frigid hell. For the only time in recorded history, all of the saltwater inlets, harbors and sounds of the Atlantic coastal plain, from North Carolina northeastward, froze over and remained so for a month or more. All rivers and harbors turned to ice....". Military tactics changed immediately because the enemy could now attack across the ice. Like Valley Forge and Middlebrook/Redding camps, the lack of supplies caused tremendous hardships on the troops - in addition to the record cold snap..

Morristown, NJ, Hudson Highlands – 1780/81

Then, for the winter of 1780-81, while he spent the winter in New Windsor, New York, Washington sent 2,500 men, a substantial force ~ about half his main army ~ back to Morristown for yet another winter. The Pennsylvania Brigades were at Morristown. Like the two previous winter camps, the PA line threatened to mutiny. Congress did not have the money to pay. NY and New England regiments spent the winter in the Highlands.

Hudson Highlands, Southern Colonies - 1781/82

7 The French brigades under Comte Rochambeau were still in Newport, having wintered over there in 1779/80. The French joined the Americans at Verplank's Point on the Hudson in late summer of 1781; where they began their march to Yorktown VA. After the Yorktown battle, the French forces wintered over in Williamsburg, while the Americans marched back north. The New England regiments were quartered in and around the Hudson Highland forts and redoubts down to Verplank's Point at the Kings Ferry, protecting the "Key to the Continent". New Jersey regiments were assigned to Morristown again to keep watch over the British in NYC. For the fourth year in a row, there were near- mutinies started due to pay being withheld.



Good book describing the New Jersey winter camps at Morristown and Middlebrook. Four camps in the natural fortress of the Watchung Mountains John T. Cunningham. Lots of unknown facts about the NJ winter camps.

January 2011 FANs Meeting

To contact us:
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The January meeting was held at the visitor center on Monday, January 10th, 2011.

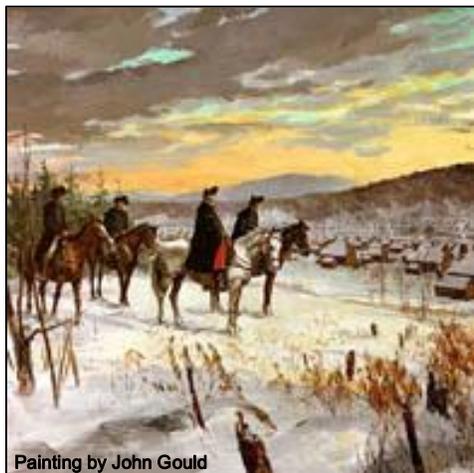
Notes from the prez ...

1. **President's Welcome** – Scott
2. **Treasurer's Report:** Reviewed balances .
3. **Park update:** Nate said that Nicole inputting artifacts on tracking system PAST PERFECT SYSTEM
4. **Membership Update** – Buzz – 45 replies to membership mailing.
5. **2011 Events:** School Days packet on disk -- Nancy. Almost complete. Need to improve museum portion. .
6. **VC/Museum:** Restore Putnam on Horse painting. (TG trying to find sponsor)
Fire Marshall to visit and give Occupancy Rate on both . - Nate to send email
7. **Other/New items:** FANs to join State FAN organization – Jeanine to give info to TG
Connecticut State Parks Day at Capitol Wed. March 2nd - Scott and Jeanine to lead effort and also attend event.



New Windsor, NY – 1782/83

8



Painting by John Gould

"The Last Cantonment – 1783" Gen. Washington and his aides survey the log hut city holding over 7,000 of his troops during the 1782/3 winter.

When Washington left Yorktown, he spent a short time at Mt. Vernon, then stopped for a couple of months in Philadelphia to meet with Congress. In the Spring, he went to his new headquarters in Newburgh NY. In October, the general ordered the main portion of his troops to nearby New Windsor, where they erected more than 600 large log huts to house the 7,000 plus army. Over 500 women and children accompanied the troops. These huts would be the final ones erected during the war. They were larger and all had wooden floors. Building in October certainly was preferred to the usual December and January routines they were used to in past years.

The army was dismissed in August of 1783 after another terrible winter of wrangling with Congress over back-pay, pensions, and other substitute terms offered to the troops, like land in the Western Reserve. The troops departed for home, in most cases unhappy with their discharge terms, but otherwise glad the war was finally over. Many of these men had been with Washington for 4, 5, or even 8 years.



One of the large double huts which housed the men at New Windsor.

New "Camp Reading" Book Underway



DAN CRUSON, FANs historian is writing a book about Putnam Memorial State Park.

Charles Burr Todd. Todd was one of the instrumental people behind the creation of Putnam Memorial Camp Grounds back in 1887. A lot has transpired since the first of the 20th century. Research, archaeological digs, diaries of men who were there, and even data sharing with other winter camps in the east, have all added up to new volumes of information about the army camp, the park, and the current thrust of the park staff and volunteers that promote school events, public reenactments, military and colonial crafts and operations, and history tours. The top historian of the Putnam Park scene is Dan Cruson. History and archaeology teacher at Joel Barlow HS in Redding for 35 years. President of the CT Archaeological Society, author of nine history books in our region. Directed 10 years of archaeological excavations at the park. Dan is writing right now!

The last book, written for the public, about Putnam Park and the 1778-79 Continental Army winter camps (there were three), was back in the early 1900's by historian

The next FAN's Meeting will be on Monday, **February 14th, 2011**



at 7:00PM at the Visitor Center at Putnam Park.