



# November 2006 NewsLetter

## The Last Cantonment –NewWindsor



Painting by John Gould

The *Last Cantonment* of the Revolutionary War. General Washington and aides look over the more than 600 log huts at the New Windsor Cantonment. The camp held almost 8,000 troops.

The American troops left Verplanck's and traveled north up the Hudson, crossed the river at West Point, and marched on to New Windsor. Where they established their final encampment of the war. The 1,600 acre campground was about six miles down the road from Gen. Washington's headquarters. Standard procedure called for the senior officers (brigadier and major generals) to be billeted at homes of area residents, and the rest of the army at the encampment..



The New Windsor Cantonment and Gen. Washington's Headquarters are an easy drive from the Danbury area. About an hour's drive to visit the sites and take the tours provided by the NY State Parks Department.

The battle and American/French victory at Yorktown was the last major conflict of the Revolutionary War, but the war was not yet over. Commissioners from America, France and Britain would take two more years to hammer out the final proclamation of war's official end. The remaining British army holed up in New York City. The American and French divisions made their way back up coast to the Hudson River. A final joint show of force of the combined American and French forces took place at Verplancks Point near Peekskill. The army divided in late October. The French forces retraced their march through Connecticut and Rhode Island northward; but this time they traveled to Boston where the French fleet was waiting to pick them up for their journey home.

Gen. Washington was required to keep a standing army ready at arms until the official truce in 1783. He made his headquarters at the Hasbrouck house, a stone farm house on the banks of the Hudson River at Newburgh, NY.



The Hasbrouck house in Newburgh NY was used by Gen. Washington as his headquarters.

Construction of 600 huts, to house 8,000 men, were started at the end of October, 1782. The troops lived in their tents until the huts were completed in December. The huts were larger than those at the winter encampments in Redding in 1778; the huts at New Windsor were built to house 16 soldiers and contained two rooms each. These huts had wooden floors, which provided more comfort than the Redding huts. In addition to the troops, there were more than 500 wives, plus artificers, sutlers and medical personnel - all of which swelled the camp to even greater occupancy.

Washington was charged with maintaining a standing army until such time as a treaty was signed. He instructed his officers to maintain discipline and decorum at all times. Gambling and excessive use of alcohol were serious offenses. The men were required to assist in the construction of other public buildings used for camp activities, including "The Temple", which was a huge log structure which could hold several hundred persons. It was used for worship services and meetings.



## Badge of Military Merit

In August of 1782, while at his headquarters in Newburgh, Gen. Washington wanted to keep up morale of the troops. He established, on August 7<sup>th</sup>, the *Badge of Military Merit*. The award was meant to recognize “*instances of unusual gallantry ..... extraordinary fidelity and essential service.*” Now, for the first time, the common soldier could be eligible for a meritorious award. It should be noted that the original award did not require injury. Washington described the award as the “*figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding*”.



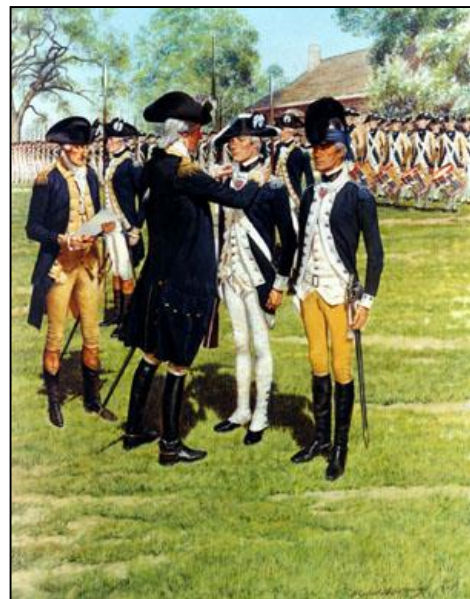
The one surviving Badge of Military Merit is displayed at the new National Purple Heart Hall of Honor at the New Windsor Cantonment.

Sgt. William Brown of the 5th CT Regiment, was awarded the badge for being the first person to enter the rampart on the famous raid of Redoubt #10 at the battle of Yorktown; the final straw that broke the British back.

The third and possibly the last award of the Badge of Military Merit was presented one month after the first two to 28 year old Sergeant Daniel Bissell of the 2<sup>nd</sup> CT Regiment, was awarded the badge for work done directly for the Commander in Chief in Washington's spy network; a very dangerous assignment to have (i.e., Nathan Hale).

The Badge of Military Merit was only awarded to three Revolutionary War soldiers, all from Connecticut, as far as can be determined via records.

Sgt. Elijah Churchill of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Continental Light Dragoons, was awarded for bravery in attacking enemy targets on Long Island.



Awarding of the prestigious Badge of Military Merit to the first of three recipients of the award. All of those recognized for the award were from Connecticut regiments.

## NATIONAL PURPLE HEART HALL OF HONOR

With the end of the Revolutionary War and the end of the standing army, the Badge of Military Merit was shelved until February 12, 1932, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's birthday, when it was reactivated by the War Department for army personnel. Instead of the perishable cloth badge, a new gold metal badge was designed with Washington's profile on it. This medal was retroactive to the 1917, WWI. Then, during WWII, Franklin Roosevelt expanded the award to include all branches of the service. The new Purple Heart was for soldiers who sustained “a wound which necessitates treatment by a medical officer and which is received in action with the enemy.”



The current Purple Heart Medal.



Gov. Pataki

Hall of Honor Opened Veterans Day On Friday November 10, 2006, the new National Purple Heart Hall of Honor was dedicated at the New Windsor Cantonment campus. NY's Gov. Pataki led the ceremonies attended by over 3,000 persons, at the start of Veterans Day weekend.

The hall contains computerized data bases that hold all Purple Heart recipients on record. Any bona fide award winner not in the system will be added.

Visit New Windsor  
Only about an hour's drive



The larger building on right houses the New Windsor Cantonment visitor center and museum. The grouping of buildings to the left are the new Purple Heart Hall of Honor location.



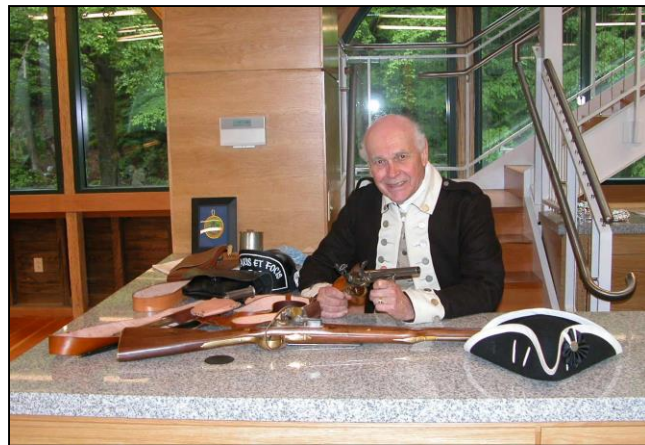
## November FAN's Meeting

To contact us: [friendsofputnampark@comcast.net](mailto:friendsofputnampark@comcast.net)



The November meeting of the Friends group was held on Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup> at the park visitor center.

1. All attendees agreed that this meeting was much more *enlightening* than last months gathering.
2. Opening remarks by president Jeanine Herman.
3. Treasurer's report – status by Rosemary Payne
4. 2007 Living History School Days status – Nancy Cowles
5. December Winter Walk 2006 – main meeting discussion. Tom Castrovinci from the 5CTRegiment attended to discuss plans for reenactors participation on 2 Dec. Dan Cruson, tour director, will coordinate plans with 5CR. Museum and visitor center will be open for event. Tour will gather at the visitor center and commence approx. 11:00am. The tour will go clockwise around the park and stop at the museum for so visitors can see artifacts etc. Then the procession will end up at the visitor center where coffee, cider, cookies and donuts will be served. See you at the park on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.
6. Also discussed potential dates for Living History Weekend for 2007 which could be a December date tie-in with the Winter Walk, and possible Ghost Walk Theme to be held at some other date.



The two park buildings attracting visitors since the opening of the park in May have closed for this season. The Putnam Park staff who manned the Park Museum and the Visitor Center for hundreds of hours this year, deserve a pat on the back for a job well done. Both venues will be open for the December Winter Walk on Saturday December 2<sup>nd</sup>.



**THERE WILL BE NO MEETING IN DECEMBER**

The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.

The meeting will start at **7:00pm.**

**225 Years Ago**

The famous attack on British redoubt #9 where American troops led by Alexander Hamilton overwhelmed the enemy allowing for the completion of the final siege line, and thus prompting Cornwallis to surrender.

**The Battle of Yorktown effectively ended the major fighting of the Revolutionary War, although it took another two years for the Diplomats on both sides to sign the treaty!**

Lord Charles Cornwallis did not show up for the formal surrender. He ordered his second in command, General O'Hara to stand in for him. Washington in turn directed O'Hara to pass the sword of Surrender to his second in command, General Benjamin Lincoln.