

The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park

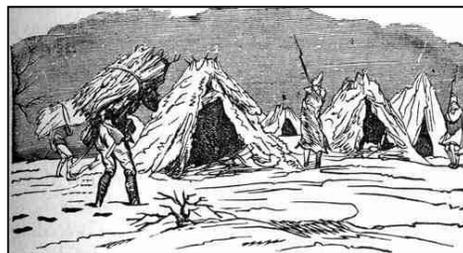


Bethel/Redding CT

January 2007 NewsLetter

Winter 1778-79 – Camp Reading

The recent Winter Walk at Putnam Park offered a flavor of what the army camp was like in December 1778. The soldiers' first task was to build their huts. Until they were finished the men lived in their tents which were freezing in the snow and rainy weather. The camp at today's Putnam Park location was occupied by Brig. Gen. Enoch Poor's brigade comprised of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd New Hampshire regiments, and Col. Hazen's 2nd Canadian regiment. Gen. Poor, Col. Cilley and other NH officers went home to NH for the winter. Lt. Col Henry Dearborn of the 3rd NH regiment was left as the ranking officer of the NH troops. Col. Moses Hazen of the Canadian regiment was the overall ranking officer of the camp and assumed the role of commander. As commandant of the camp, Hazen moved into the home of Col. John Read, about a quarter of a mile to the west. Dearborn, then, was the ranking officer at the campground itself.



Troops lived in their tents until huts were built



Most of the 116 enlisted mens huts were completed during December. Every soldier was required to work on his hut.

Listed here are some excerpts from Henry Dearborn's diary:

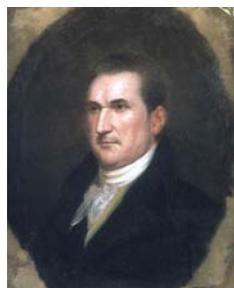
Decem^r. 1^l we are Looking out ground to Hut on.

3^d we are Laying out our Ground to Hut on.

4th we began this Day to build Huts.

5th at twelve at Night we were alarm'd by hearing that the Enimy are at TerryTown..In Consequence of which a Detachment of 1500 men from the three Brigades ware ordered to march.

9th we Return'd to Camp



Lt. Col. Henry Dearborn

10th we have a very Sevear Storm if Snow & Rain to Day. & we living in Tents.

11th the weather very Cold, the Snow about 6 inches Deep.

12th we are very busy at work upon our Huts, amongst the Snow.

13th a very heavy storm of Rain, - & no bread for two Days.

14th good weather

15th we are Covering our Huts.

17th a heavy Rain.

19th we are in our Huts.

21st the Brigade is Mustered to Day

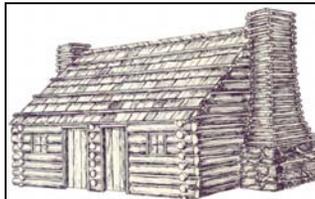
22nd a sevear snow Storm.

23^d Gen^l Poor Col^o. Cilley & a number of other officers set out for home to Day. The weather is very Cold.

Christmas Day. The weather is very Cold we take but very Little notice of the Day

26th we have a very Sevear Snow Storm

30th this is Thanksgiving Day throughout the Continent. – our men have Half Pint of Rum Each.



The site of Dearborn's double-ended officer's hut is thought to be at the location of the "old cemetery" which was misidentified over 100 years ago. Artifacts were found by our archaeologists several years ago

Soldiers In and Out of Camp

The month of December had the highest head count of troops in all three camps, due to all of the men building their log huts. But once the camp construction was completed, the troops were available for other assigned duties. Whether at drill, picket duty, fort construction, or firewood details, the soldiers were kept busy through the winter.

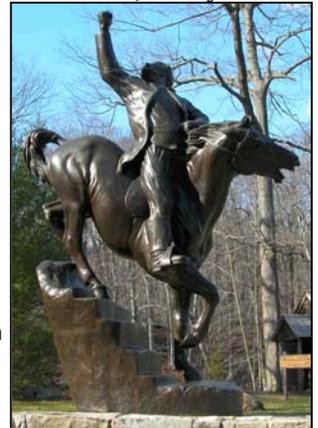
Another entry from Dearborn's diary reads,

January 4th – we have a Detachment of 200 men sent off to Day who are to be Considered as an advance Post to the Division. They are Stationed Near the Sound –

One of the main purposes of the army being stationed in the Danbury area was to offer protection from any British incursions into the state. The major army supply depot in Danbury was destroyed the previous year. The British patrols constantly came north out of NY City to harass the Americans plus gather any forage and supplies they could find. Picket posts were established near the sound for the entire winter. It was on one of these raiding parties that the British almost captured Gen. Israel Putnam in Horseneck (Greenwich). One of the objectives of that British raid was to destroy the salt pans at Cos Cob. Old Put escaped by riding his horse down a steep stairway that had been cut into a stone cliff. The stairway can still be seen on East Putnam Ave, today.



Putnam Cottage, or Knapp's Tavern as it was called then, is where Gen. Putnam spent the night while he was in the area checking the American picket posts.

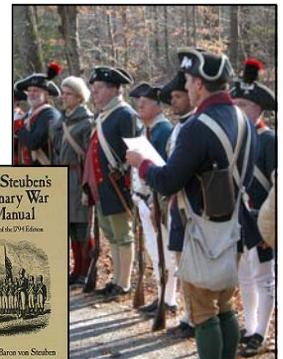
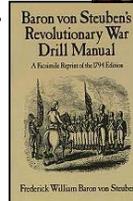


Another entry from Dearborn's diary - *Febuary 4th - I am ordered to take Command of 400 men who are Detach'd from Gen.rl Putnams Division, & March to New London. To garrison that Town –*



Troops from Camp Reading helped construct Ft. Griswold which protected New London harbor. A British raid led by the "turned" Benedict Arnold resulted in a massacre of many of the American troops on Sept. 6, 1781, while Washington and Rochambeau were enroute to Yorktown VA.

The troops which remained in the camps spent many hours being drilled, using the new manual of arms developed by the Baron von Steuben, the new Inspector General at Valley Forge the prior year.



The soldiers were detached for duty away from camp, from all three brigades; for picket duty and flanking patrols. Men from the Reading camps helped in the construction of Ft. Griswold in Groton (New London), which was the scene of one of the worst massacres of the entire war (Sept. 6, 1781).

Hessians Get Bad Rap

The December 2006 Newsletter contained a story on the Battle of Trenton on the day after Christmas 1776. The story mentioned that one of the elements of surprise was the fact that the Hessians were probably tired out and hung over from celebrating the Christmas holiday.

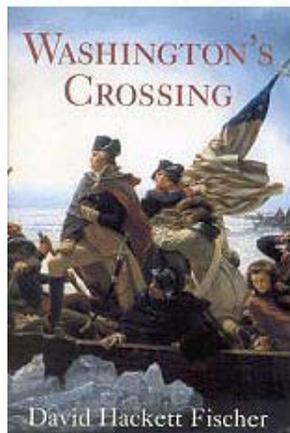
One of our FAN's members, a history expert and a reenactor in one of the most respected British units, fired off this letter to the editor:

“...the widely told American version Has the Americans suffering greatly the night before the battle in crossing the Delaware River and marching to Trenton. So far, so good. But then it strays from the truth by portraying the German commander as a drunkard who partied late the night before the battle and the German troops also partying through the night, getting drunk, and waking up with hangovers. All military protocols and decorum were discarded by the Germans, according to the popular American version of the events.

This is a tragic tale, though, because not only is it false but it also makes the events of the Dec. 25 and 26, 1776 so much less interesting. In fact, the German regiments at Trenton were seasoned professionals who were worn out by fatigue and a lack of provisions. They occupied an outpost in a hostile country far away from their home base and provisions in New York City. They were attacked on numerous occasions over the previous weeks by American rebels, conducting exhausting patrols on a daily basis under extreme adverse conditions, and often had to sleep “under arms”. In fact, they were sleeping “under arms” on Dec. 25 and 26. There is no contemporary record of their being drunk before the attack – highly unlikely for seasoned troops of well-respected regiments who had conducted patrols throughout the day and evening before the attack and were sleeping “under arms”. Their commander, Rall, was criticized by some of his junior officers after the battle for being lazy and a drunkard, but others said these accusations were without basis. He was dead, so criticizing him was easy. Later, all American writers packaged all the German troops as drunk and lazy. There's been considerable recent research and documentation of conditions for the Hessians at Trenton, including a few good, recent books on the battles of Trenton and Princeton. In fact McCulough's “1776” touches on these. Anyway, just wanted to present the other side's version of events to balance what you wrote in the newsletter.

Rob Doscher, Grenadier, 47th Regiment of Foot, Kings Army

Not only is our British Grenadier correct in his letter, but we, completely by chance, had a former curator of the Trenton Barracks (where many of the Hessians were quartered) attend our January FAN's meeting. The Hessians physical state at the battle was discussed. She said one of the biggest misconceptions about the battle was that the Hessians were fatigued from holiday excess celebration. Not so, the curator said, this was completely unfounded. The guides at the Trenton Barracks tell this to every group touring the battle site.



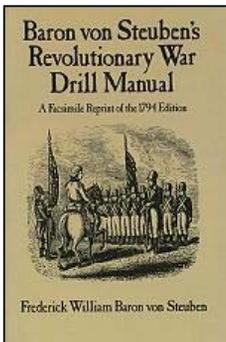
A recent book written by David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, entirely backs up Mr. Doscher's letter. There are even maps of the various raids upon the Hessian patrols. A great book for all rev war fans.

We welcome any feedback to articles in our newsletter. You can always reach us at our email address : friendsofputnampark@comcast.net



The Hessian regiments under Col. Rall were surprised by Gen. Washington's troops at the Battle of Trenton. Almost 1,000 of the Germans were killed, wounded or captured.

January FAN's Meeting



1. Jeanine Herman opened meeting.
2. Rosemary Payne gave the **Treasurers Report**. Rosemary will be going to Florida for the rest of the winter. Nancy Cowles will assume the Treasurer's duties for Rosemary.
3. **Membership status** was covered. We are going to ask all members who haven't paid their annual dues to do so. We will start paring down the newsletter lists accordingly at the end of March.
4. **Living History School Days** event will be held Mon. May 14th to Fri. May 19th this year. Chairperson Nancy Cowles, who heads up the event was out of town for this meeting. Will get a status update next month.
5. **Living History Event** for general public was rehashed again. The consensus was that we go ahead with a Fall event (Oct. 13 & 14). We will then go ahead with the December Winter Walk; and then let the 5th CT Regiment run their winter event at their timeframe. (Could be tied into Winter Walk, or held separately.)
6. **Newsletter** discussion. We have reached a level on our mailing list which is becoming quite costly to produce and mail. New member Steve Levine suggested we distribute the Newsletters via the internet. We will try out some testing and some format changes to fit the mailing to members via Adobe PDF files.



NEWSLETTERS VIA CYBERSPACE:

We're getting ready to start sending our monthly newsletter to you via e-mail. You'll be able to read the newsletter on your computer screen, or print-out a copy if you save them. All newsletters will be in full color!



Don't have a computer? Don't worry, we'll still mail you a hard copy via the regular US mail. This new system may take a couple of months to set up. In the mean-while, **please send us your e-mail**

address to our e-mail address below:

To contact us:
friendsofputnampark@comcast.net

The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening February 13th** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.
The meeting will start at **7:00pm**.