



The Florida Society of the Sons of the American Revolution Fort Lauderdale Chapter Newsletter



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President's Message

Dear Compatriots:

Happy New Year! It is hard to believe that yet another year has passed. The past year was a successful one for the Fort Lauderdale Chapter, with the addition of several new Compatriots. In addition, our chapter's efforts with the JROTC and Eagle Scout programs were noticed by the Florida Society.

2006 is already shaping up to be another stellar year. Our chapter currently has a number of new member applications that are in process, so our ranks are continuing to grow. At the Florida Society's Winter Board of Management Meeting recently held in Lakeland, the Fort Lauderdale Chapter was represented by three Compatriots: Jim Lohmeyer, Joe Motes, and I. Both Jim and Joe were kind enough to serve as judges for the Rumbaugh Oration Contest and assist me with the administration of that important event. Their efforts are to be commended.

I encourage all Compatriots to take an active role in our chapter and at the state level. Compatriot Motes has already answered that call and has been nominated to become Recording Secretary for the Florida Society. This important position will provide visibility for both him and the Fort Lauderdale Chapter. Congratulations to Joe on his nomination!

I appreciate everyone's continued efforts and support of the Fort Lauderdale Chapter.

Respectfully,

Ted Duay, President



Compatriot James Lohmeyer, President Ted Duay and Past President Joe Motes at the latest BOM meeting during the Friday night banquet.

NEXT MEETING - JANUARY 28th

"Flaming Pit"

*1150 N. Federal Hwy., Pompano Beach
(11 blocks north of Atlantic Blvd.)*

Time: 11:30AM social gathering; Lunch at noon

Buffet luncheon - \$12.00

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The Story of Valley Forge

continued from December issue

Much of the sickness was traceable to unhealthy sanitation and poor personal hygiene. Washington constantly complained of the failure to clear the encampment of filth, which included rotting carcasses of horses. The commander-in-chief even issued orders concerning the use and care of privies, but men relieved themselves wherever they felt.

"Intolerable smells" finally prompted Washington to issue orders that soldiers who relieved themselves anywhere but in "a proper Necessary" were to receive five lashes.

In the absence of wells, water was drawn from the Schuylkill River and nearby creeks. Men and animals often relieved themselves upstream from where water for drinking was drawn.

One of Washington's major worries was an outbreak of small pox. Inoculation was still relatively new and controversial, but the General was a firm believer in the procedure. The winter before at Morristown, N.J., he ordered inoculation for all those who had not already had the disease. A survey at Valley Forge showed many vulnerable soldiers. Some 3,000 to 4,000 men were vaccinated.

Knowing how unhealthy the congested the huts were, Washington ordered windows cut for circulation in the spring and even encouraged some to move from their squalid quarters into tents.

Just how many became seriously ill during the Valley Forge encampment and how many died of these illnesses is not known. Even in the mild weather of late spring, the medical department informed Washington that 1,000 men were too ill for combat. Those who died at camp or in hospitals has been estimated as high as 3,000.

• Things Improve •

In early March, the energetic and competent Gen. Nathaniel Greene was appointed quartermaster general, and soon things improve rapidly. Greene got down to business by dispatching engineers to improve bridges and roads between Valley Forge and Lancaster. Wagons began arriving with clothing and food.

Also in early March a baking company of some 70 men headed by Philadelphia gingerbread baker Christopher Ludwig arrived at camp. The German-born patriot refused to profit from his labor. Eventually, each soldier got the daily pound of bread promised by Congress. Ludwig, himself, baked for the headquarters staff and often spoke with Washington.

In April great schools of shad surged up the Schuylkill River to spawn. Thousands were netted, and the soldiers gorged themselves. Hundreds of barrels were filled with salted shad for future use. One soldier wrote, "For almost a month the whole camp stank and men's fingers were oily."

Despite Washington's daily orders, there was little real military discipline in the camp. General John Sullivan once commented, "This is not an Army; it's a mob."

There were no regular roll calls. Sizes of units that were supposed to be equal varied radically. Orders prohibiting gambling, fighting, selling Army equipment and wandering away from camp were routinely ignored.

While brave, Continental troops possessed few skills in the art of 18th century warfare. They didn't know how to march in ranks or maneuver on the battlefield. The bayonet - crucial to battlefield success - was used mostly to cook over a fire.

All this was about to change with the arrival in late February of Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin Stuebe, known to history as Baron von Steuben. The title was of his own making. He had served in the Prussian Army of Frederick the Great but rose no higher than captain. Now, at age 47, he was out of work and applying for military posts in several places. In Paris, Steuben impressed American envoys, Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, who provided the German with a glowing letter of recommendation. Some suggest that Franklin inflated Steuben's military credentials and coached him on how best to get an appointment.

Like the Marquis de Lafayette, the Baron said the right words when he spoke to members of the Congress and the Board of War: He would serve without a salary. He did, however, want his expenses paid. Both the War Board and Washington liked the man's modesty and viewed Steuben as a possible candidate for inspector general of the Army.

Steuben was appalled by what he observed during his first weeks at Valley Forge. Washington asked the German to study the situation and provide reports on camp defenses, troop morale and military readiness. Steuben's reports were detailed and astute. In a short time, Steuben was named acting inspector general. His primary mission involved training, and he attacked the task with dedication and zeal.

Washington liked Steuben immediately even though the Prussian could not speak English. But he could speak French, and Washington appointed two of his French speaking aides, Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens to work with the Prussian.

Steuben has been called history's only popular drillmaster. The men loved his gruff manner, his cursing in broken English and his hands-on-style of demonstrating every move personally. He insisted that officers drill with their men, and he pared down the officers' staffs of personal servants.

He created his own manual of arms and drill to fit the American situation. Simplicity was the keynote. The training started with a select group of 100. When these men knew what they were doing, he released them to teach others. Soon he was drilling large masses of entire regiments and brigades.

He constantly taught the use of the bayonet. He gave lessons in mounting guard and sentry duty. He insisted that every watch be synchronized with the headquarters' clock. And page-by-page Steuben wrote in French an army drill book that was then translated into English. "Regulation for the Order of Discipline of the Troops of the United States" was then copied by an officer in each brigade.

Within weeks, everyone could see a new proficiency and new pride among the formerly dispirited men.

There were other factors coming together to boost morale and send sagging spirits soaring. Most important, France entered the war as an ally of the new nation. America got the good news in April. Great festivities were held in camp on May 5. Along with prayer, parading and gun salutes, each man was issued a gill of rum. French-made uniforms and military gear soon began arriving in camp.

Back in March, an extra month's pay was issued to all in camp for having stuck it out through the miseries of the winter. Washington added a ration of rum for each soldier.

Farmers began bringing their produce to a camp market and fresh military units arrived at Valley Forge.

• An Anti-Washington "Cabal" •

Most historians agree that the so-called "Conway Cabal" was not a organized effort to replace Washington with Gen. Horatio Gates, the victor of Saratoga or some other general.

But there were some in the Army who felt they were better qualified than the Virginian and several politicians were critical of his performance.

The so-called "cabal" was a lot of mutterings and niggling criticism that finally broke out in the open with the help of an arrogant Irish-born, French-reared soldier of fortune, Thomas Conway. He was recruited in France by Silas Deane and was granted the rank of brigadier general. Washington and many other American officers took an immediate dislike to the boastful Conway.

It seems that Conway along with English Army veterans Charles Lee and Gates all felt they had better military credentials than Washington and would make better commanders.

In fact, with the exception of brilliant but minor victories at Trenton and Princeton, Washington had lost all his battles with the British. On the other hand, Gates' victory at Saratoga had resulted in the surrender of 6,000 British troops. In truth, Gen. Benedict Arnold and Daniel Morgan had saved the day at Saratoga with little help from Gates.

Washington's civilian critics included Philadelphia physician and radical patriot Dr. Benjamin Rush; New Englanders John and Sam Adams and Elbridge Gerry. The man most responsible for the supply problems at Valley Forge, Thomas Mifflin, was another loud critic.

The whole anti-Washington movement was brought to a head when an aide to Gates, Gen. James Wilkinson, revealed over drinks, details of a certain letter to Gates from Conway that was highly critical of Washington.

Washington was informed of the Conway letter by Gen. William Alexander "Lord" Sterling. Conway's letter allegedly stated, "Heaven has been determined to save your country; or a weak general and bad counselors would have ruined it."

Washington confronted Conway with the insult, which brought Gates into the fray and eventually the whole thing became a matter for Congress.

In the end, Washington emerged stronger than ever.

About a year later, Wilkinson and Gates engaged in a pistol duel, in which neither was injured. Washington admirer John Cadwalader, a Pennsylvania militia leader, fought another duel with the obnoxious Conway hitting him in the mouth. Conway recovered and returned to France.

In truth, most of the officers and men suffering at Valley Forge worshipped Washington. Many historians say the leader's calm, caring presence during those horrible winter months was the most important factor in preventing the Army from disintegrating.

• Leaving Valley Forge •

Philadelphia was a difficult place for the British to defend. Now that France was in the war, the city was also vulnerable to attack or blockade from the sea. It was decided to abandon the Quaker City and move British forces back to their base in New York City.

The British completed their evacuation on June 18th. An estimated 3,000 Tories left the city with the troops. Within hours, American cavalry arrived in the city.

Ready to move against the retreating British, Washington abandoned Valley Forge on June 9 by crossing the Schuylkill River and setting up camp a mile away. He ordered work parties to clean up the old campgrounds, filling the latrines and burying all garbage.

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