

Valley Forge and Patriotism

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Near the close of 1777, General Howe, the British commander, implemented his plan of attack; the army to the north, under Burgoyne, would invade New York from Canada while the Southern Army, under Howe, would capture our capital of Philadelphia, thus isolating the hotbed of patriot action in New England. Although Burgoyne was disgraced in the Battle of Saratoga with his surrender to General Gates, Howe had more success. He marched his army north to Philadelphia, from Maryland, where Washington stood ready to fight. However, after a few skirmishes, the British eventually found themselves between Philadelphia and the Patriots, so Howe relented his attack of Washington and retired to the undefended and comfortable capital. Thus, Washington ordered his troops to pull to the southeast and set up winter quarters at Valley Forge, in order to keep close watch on the British.

The terrible conditions of Valley Forge are especially what grants this topic great substance and importance. Our heroes suffered enumerable difficulties; from lack of proper sustenance and water, to the absence of effective winter clothing and shoes, the patriot forces languished in poor and adverse conditions. The most atrocious illustration of the anguish the patriots dealt with is the bloody footprints the troops left as they marched through the snow to Valley Forge. Almost all the men of the army lacked provisions and were obliged to rely on blankets as their only source of warmth. There were also days at a time when the entire encampment dragged on in training without any food, denying our soldiers a necessity of life and wrenching our hearts for the pain they went through. A quarter of the troops died from malnutrition, exposure, and diseases like smallpox and typhoid fever that rampaged through the base and even with all of these horrible conditions, the men did not desert. They supported Washington and the ideals of freedom which they were fighting for; their patriotism is what allowed them to remain loyal to the Revolution. But as these men suffered, the British dined and celebrated in the new born nation's capital, hindering British operating capabilities and thus compounding the belief that Valley Forge acts as a blessing in disguise, because, after the winter, the British were out of military practice, while the Americans were newly trained.

Baron Von Steuben deserves a great deal of praise for his actions during the Valley Forge winter. Going into the winter quarters, the American forces were only competent in the ways of fighting individually, but after, they were capable of operating in battle, maneuvering, and Steuben inspired the men to be more disciplined. Because of the training that Valley Forge afforded, the army learned how to be more professional, how to fight effectively as one unit, and how to carry out commands from the highest of positions. Steuben also taught the patriots how to fight with bayonets, which particularly aided the Americans, such as in the Battle of Stony Point, an engagement that would have surely been lost if it had not been for his training.

Valley Forge is the symbol for the great suffering that the soldiers coped with during the Revolution because they went without food and clothing and were forced to struggle everyday to survive. However, remembering and paying homage to that suffering, we should also take Valley Forge to represent the mettle and resilience and strength of our people, values we should not lose in this time.

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