

Continental Army Winter Encampments Morristown, New Jersey and vicinity

1779-80 Encampment (December 1, 1779 – June 23, 1780)

Headquarters - Ford Mansion (completed 1774—estate of Militia Colonel Jacob Ford, Jr.)

Col. Ford dies here in January 1777 of pneumonia after leading militia troops
During Washington's stay, home of widow Theodosia Ford and her four children.

Washington lives in the mansion from Dec. 1, 1779 to June 7, 1780—home provides living quarters and workspace for the Commander in Chief and his five aides-de-camp. The youngest of the staff is Lt. Col Alexander Hamilton.

The house as Headquarters becomes very crowded, with Washington, his wife, five staff and eighteen servants added to Mrs. Ford, her four children and their servants. (The number of servants working for Mrs. Ford is unknown.)

Visitors to Headquarters include Martha Washington, the French Ambassador (the Chevalier de la Luzerne) the Marquis de Lafayette and a three-member committee from the Continental Congress.

Across the road from the Ford Mansion were the **Commander in Chief's Guard**, the regiment (200-250 men) with the primary job of protecting Washington and his headquarters.

The **Artillery Brigade**, commanded by General Henry Knox, was also stationed in Morristown. They were located in and adjacent to present-day Burnham Park.

Some of the major events during this encampment:

Dec. 23 – Jan. 26	Court martial of Benedict Arnold (verdict announced April 6)
Dec. 31	Martha Washington arrived (stays in Morristown till mid-June)
Jan. 14-15. 1780	Raid on Staten Island by 2,500 American troops on 500 sleighs--failure
April 19	Arrival of the French Ambassador (the Chevalier de la Luzerne) and Spanish agent Don Juan de Miralles.
April 28	Death of Miralles – buried the next day with full honors.
April 29	Arrival of Committee of Congress
May 10	return of Lafayette
May 25	mutiny of two Connecticut regiments
June 7	Battle of Connecticut Farms (now Union, N.J.) Washington leaves Ford Mansion
June 23	Battle of Springfield, N.J

Jockey Hollow--Soldiers build a “log house city”

Eleven brigades--the “Main Army” under General Washington numbering approximately 10, 000 men-- encamp in and south of Morristown, building approximately 1,200 log huts.

First Maryland Brigade	made up of the 1 st 3 rd 5 th and 7 th Maryland Regiments
Second Maryland Brigade	made up of the 2 nd 4 th 6 th and Hall's Delaware Regiments
First Connecticut Brigade	made up of the 3 rd 4 th 6 th and 8 th Connecticut Regiments
Second Connecticut Brigade	made up of the 1 st 2 nd 5 th and 7 th Connecticut Regiments
New York Brigade	made up of the 2 nd 3 rd 4 th and 5 th New York Regiments
Hand's Brigade	made up of the 1 st and 2 nd Canadian Regiments and the 4 th and 11 th Pennsylvania Regiment

(continued)

First Pennsylvania Brigade	made up of the 1 st 2 nd 7 th and 10 th Pennsylvania Regiments
Second Pennsylvania Brigade	made up of the 3 rd 5 th 6 th and 9 th Pennsylvania Regiments
Stark's Brigade	made up of the 2 nd Rhode Island Regiment, Sherburne's Connecticut Regiment., Webb's Connecticut Regiment and Jackson's Massachusetts Regiment.
New Jersey Brigade (<i>huts south of Jockey Hollow</i>)	made up of the 1 st 2 nd & 3 rd New Jersey Regiments and Spencer's Regiment
Artillery Brigade (<i>near Morristown</i>)	1 st 2 nd 3 rd and 4 th Continental Artillery

The army rents space for generals and staffs in local homes: the soldiers and field officers live in log huts. General Arthur St. Clair (commanding the Pennsylvania brigades) and staff live with the Wick family in their farmhouse

Nine of the brigades live south of town in an area called "Jockey Hollow." Around 2,000 acres of trees are cut down by the troops to build log huts for shelter, and fuel for fires.

The "Hard Winter" The winter of 1779-80 is still believed to be the most severe winter known in early America—possibly the worst on record in the Northeast United States.

Various raids by each side: Americans raid Staten Island; British retaliate by burning buildings and capturing patriots in Newark and Elizabethtown.

Serious inflation of Continental Currency: Officers complain of incredibly high prices for clothing, horses, etc. Fifty dollars of paper money has buying value of one silver dollar.

Morristown – "Military Capital of the American Revolution"

At the time of the American Revolution, Morristown is believed to have approximately 250 inhabitants, and about 70 buildings. On and around the town center (the "Green") were the most significant structures, particularly the County Courthouse (which included a jail) and the Presbyterian and Baptist churches.

There was some level of military activity in Morristown for most of the American Revolution. At one time or another, the town served as a militia staging area, had military storehouses and hospital facilities, held prisoners of war in the town jail, and sheltered refugees after the British occupied New York in late 1776. Col. Jacob Ford, Jr. built a gunpowder mill on the outskirts of town in 1776. French troops marched through town on the way to Yorktown in 1781.

Why the army came here:

Resources for Survival:

Shelter: In 1777, officers stayed in homes, troops in various structures. In 1779-80, generals and staffs stayed in homes, Troops cut down trees for construction of log huts, as well as firewood. Homes, churches and homes were used at various times for hospitals.

Water: Local streams provided water for drinking and sanitation.

Transportation/roads: Morristown was a significant crossroads community—especially with a significant north-south link (today called Route 202) passing directly through town. Local farmers were hired as teamsters, providing wagons and animals to move supplies.

Defensive location: Being nearly thirty miles from British positions (New York City and environs) it would take an enemy force a good two days to reach Morristown. An added benefit were two significant natural barriers east of the camp—the Watchung Mountains, and the Great Swamp.

Army Encampments:

January 6 – May 28, 1777 Remnants of the American forces (2,000 – 4,000 troops) after the battles of Trenton and Princeton are billeted in homes and structures from Princeton to the Hudson Highlands. Washington stays in Arnold’s Tavern by Morristown Green.

General Washington had troops inoculated for smallpox—churches and homes used as hospitals/quarantine facilities.

Epidemics of smallpox and dysentery in Morristown.

Washington issues a proclamation demanding citizens choose sides—loyalty oaths exchanged.

State Committees of Safety have militia round up Loyalists for trials. Some are told to join American army or be executed—two men are hung on Morristown green. Properties are confiscated, freedom of speech and travel restricted.

Continental army enlistments now for three years—beginning of a new “regular” full-time professional army for America. The identity of the army changes—more men from the “lower sort” (poor, new immigrants, blacks, etc.)

July 4-10, 1777 Brief layover by the army.

December 1779 –June 1780 Major encampment during “Hard Winter” (see above)

November 28, 1780 – January 1, 1781 Pennsylvania Brigades return to Jockey Hollow (approximately 2500 troops) they reuse or move and reconstruct huts of other brigades from the previous winter.

Mutiny by troops on evening of January 1, 1781, mutineers march south toward Philadelphia to complain to authorities. Mutineers camp in Princeton, grievances negotiated.

Late January – July 1781 New Jersey brigade move into huts just left by Pennsylvania brigades.

These New Jersey troops had just mutinied in Pompton, N.J. – this mutiny was forcibly put down.

December 1781 - August 1782 New Jersey Brigade camps in Jockey Hollow

Two regiments with a combined strength of around 700 men, commanded by Col. Elias Dayton. It is believed they built huts south of the Wick House.

Thomas J. Winslow
Park Ranger/Education Specialist
Morristown National Historical Park
thomas_winslow@nps.gov

Quotes from actual participants in the Morristown encampment of 1779-80

On the 14th (of December, 1779, we) reached this wilderness, about three miles from Morristown, where we are to build log huts for winter quarters...The ground is marked out, and the soldiers have commenced cutting down the timber of oak and walnut, of which we have a great abundance. (*Dr. James Thatcher, Military Journal*)

I must confess that the [*soldiers*] would make a better appearance had they a sufficiency of *bats*, but as Congress don't seem to think *that* an essential ...part of uniform, they mean to leave us uniformly bare-headed—as well as bare-footed—and if they find that we can *bare* it tolerably well in the two extremes, perhaps they may try it in the center. (*General Anthony Wayne to General William Irvine, December 14, 1779*)

You will by date perceive that we are in camp, tho' expect, if good weather, to have the men's Hutts so far compleated (*sic*) that they may go into them on Sunday or Monday. The severity of the weather hath been such that the men suffer'd much without shoes and stockings, and working half leg deep in snow. Poor fellows, my heart bleeds for them as I damn my country as devoid of gratitude. (*Lt. Colonel Ebenezer Huntington of Col. Samuel Webb's Connecticut Regiment, Stark's Brigade, December 24, 1779*)

A long and severe storm dumps feet of snow on the winter camp, (January 3- 5, 1780) and large snowdrifts on the roads prevents supplies of food entering camp. At one time it snowed the greater part of four days successively, and there fell nearly as many feet deep of snow, and here was the keystone of the arch of starvation. We were absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals into my mouth for four days and as many nights, except a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood, if that can be called victuals. I saw several of the men roast their old shoes and eat them, and I was afterwards informed by one of the officer's waiters that some of the officers killed and ate a favorite little dog that belonged to them. If this was not "suffering," I request to be informed what can pass under that name. (*Nineteen-year old Private Joseph Plumb Martin, Connecticut Brigade*)

Our Army is without Meat and Bread: and have been for two or three days past. Poor Fellows! They exhibit a picture truly distressing. More than half naked, and above two thirds starved. (*General Nathanael Greene to Moore Furman, Morristown, N.J. January 4th 1780*)

The present situation of the army with respect to provision, is the most distressing of any we have experienced since the beginning of the war. For a fortnight (*two weeks*) past the troops, both officers and men, have been almost perishing for want. They have been alternately without bread or meat the whole time, with a very scanty allowance of either and frequently destitute of both. They have borne their sufferings with a patience that merits the approbation and ought excite the sympathy of their Countrymen. (*General Washington to the magistrates of New Jersey, January 8, 1780*)

Our Affairs are in so deplorable a condition (on the score of provisions) as to fill the Mind with the most anxious and alarming fears (Men half-starved, imperfectly Cloathed, riotous, and robbing the Country people of their subsistence from sheer necessity) (*General Washington describing the troops to General Irvine, January 9, 1780.*)

Such weather as we have had, never did I feel. For six or eight days it has been so extremely cold..., the snow it is also very deep, and much drifted. ...the army has been cut off from its magazines, [*supply storehouses*] and been obliged to fast for several days together. We have been alternately out of meat and bread for eight or nine days past, and without either for three or four. The distress of the army has been exceedingly great from the weather, want of clothing and provisions. But the soldiers have borne it with great patience and fortitude. They have displayed a degree of magnanimity under their sufferings which does them the highest honour.... (*General Nathanael Greene to an Unidentified Person, January 11, 1780*)

Those who have only been in Valley Forge or Middlebrook during the last two winters, but have not tasted the cruelties of this one, know not what it is to suffer. (*Major General John Kalb, February 12, 1780*)

The oldest people now living in this country do not remember so hard a winter as the one we are now emerging from. In a word, the severity of the frost exceeded anything of the kind that had ever been experienced in this climate before. (*Washington to the Marquis de Lafayette, March 18, 1780*)