



Ghost Soldiers

They Passed This Way:

An account of the many long forgotten marches and fatigues of the Continental Army from the Battle of Brandywine to the winter encampment at Valley Forge presented to commemorate the 225th anniversary of this 1777 campaign that took place in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

By Marc A. Brier

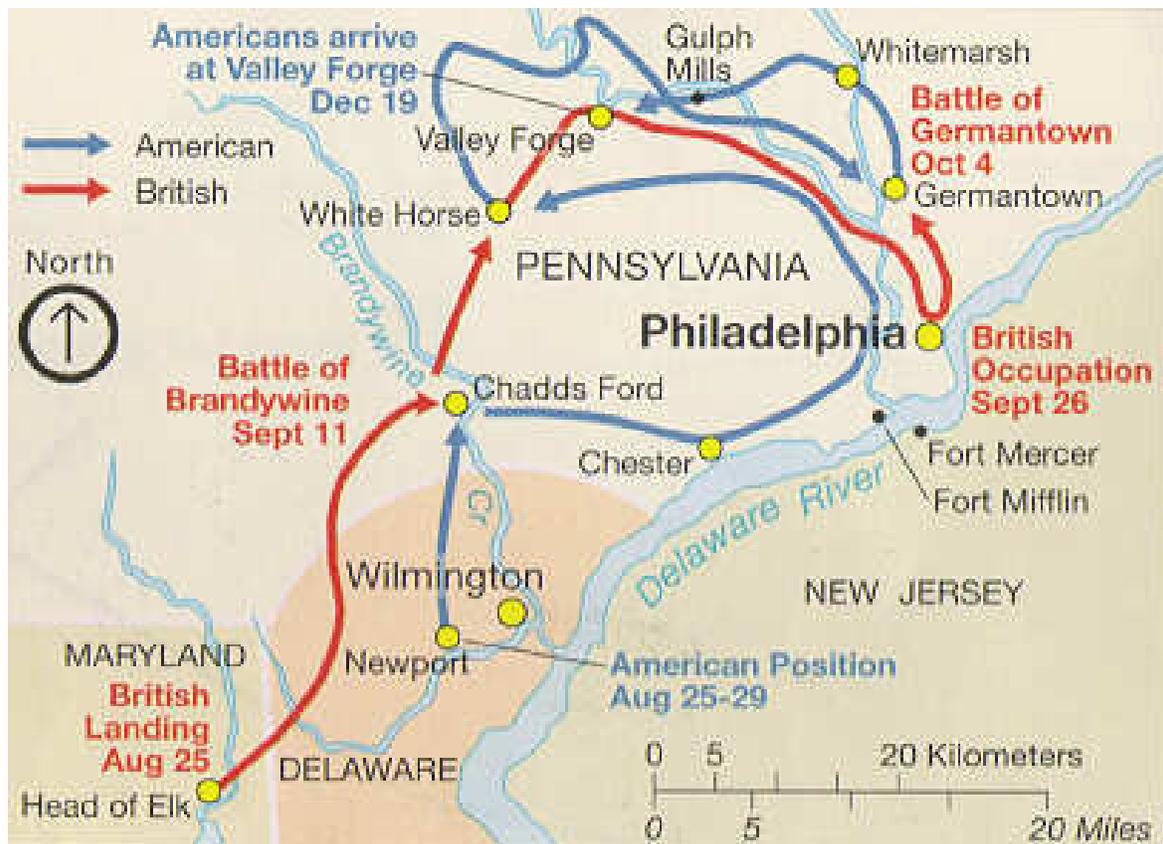
Valley Forge National Historical Park - September 2002

We may remember the 1776 crossing of the Delaware and the Valley Forge encampment as events that tested the mettle of the patriot forces, but the continental soldiers triumphed over scores of other hardships at places lesser known. In the fall of 1777, the Continental Army fought two key battles and marched hundreds of miles through all types of terrain and in all sorts of weather. Often deprived of food, sleep, and comfort, the soldiers deserve recognition for what they endured during this campaign for the cause of liberty. Images of Philadelphia area historic sites, a map, and eyewitness accounts of the participants will bring these seldom-celebrated events to life.

A Word about Eighteenth Century Roads and Place Names

The residents of the Philadelphia region may be surprised to learn that their daily travels take them over some of the same routes that the American and British armies used in the fall of 1777. Many of the modern thoroughfares in Southeastern Pennsylvania roughly parallel the eighteenth century roads taken by the troops. In some cases, roads and localities retain their original names. When names from the past do not correspond with modern ones, contemporary road and place names are given in parentheses.

Campaign of 1777



Campaign to Valley Forge Map

Background to the Campaign

British strategy for the third year (1777) of the eight-year long American Revolution included a plan to capture the patriot capital at Philadelphia. To accomplish this objective, the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir William Howe set sail from New York City in July with nearly 17,000 of His Majesty's finest troops on board transports. After some rough weeks at sea, the British expeditionary force landed at the head of the Chesapeake Bay (Elkton, Maryland). General Washington marched his 12,000-man army from New Jersey to oppose Howe.

On the march south, Washington paraded the American army through Philadelphia to impress the various factions among the citizenry with the prowess of the patriot force. Though commonly conceived of today as a rag tag bunch of inexperienced fighters, in 1777, the Continental Army was battle-tested and capable of standing up to the British. Against superior numbers of professional soldiers, Washington's men fought hard and were often on the offensive. One observer of the march through the city that summer prophetically stated that

[The men] though indifferently dressed, held well burnished arms, and carried them like soldiers; and looked, in short, as if they might have faced an equal number with a reasonable prospect of success.

Captain Alexander Graydon 24 August 1777

A Note about the Linear Warfare of the Eighteenth Century

In order to fully appreciate the maneuvers and battles of the 1777 campaign, one must understand that the contending armies fought in linear formation. The primary weapons of the American Revolution were smooth bore field artillery and flintlock muskets equipped with bayonets. In order to maximize the firepower of these moderately accurate and slow firing weapons, the soldiers stood in a close order linear arrangement.



Short Battle Line



Long Battle Line

Battle of Brandywine: the First Key Battle of the Campaign

At the Battle of Brandywine (Chadd's Ford) on September 11, 1777, faulty American intelligence and reconnaissance allowed a main wing of the British army to outflank Washington's force. The outnumbered Americans put up a strong defense, and engaged the British with such ferocity that many experienced European officers recalled this part of the engagement as the most intense fight that they had ever experienced. The American retreat left the British as the official victors in command of the battlefield at the end of the day. However, the severe casualties inflicted on the English forces combined with the confidence

that the Continental Army gained by standing their ground gave hope to the Revolutionaries. One American officer remarked that

The victory was ours, and the ground the enemy's.

Major William Wilcox, Aide de Camp to William Alexander, Lord Stirling (commander of the New Jersey forces) 25 September 1777

After the Battle of Brandywine, the British encamped near the closing action of September 11 at Dilworth.

The Americans retreated **fourteen miles** from the fighting at Brandywine and reorganized at Chester, Pennsylvania. They arrived there around midnight on September 12. Because the head of a marching column of soldiers would reach their destination hours before the tail, arrival times given are approximate.

Marching Order

During the American Revolution, armies generally marched in long columns when in route. Although the dimensions of a column of a specified number of troops naturally varied with terrain and road width, the 12,000 man-strength Continental Army's march through Philadelphia on August 24, 1777 gives a good measure of the time interval required for the strike force of an army to pass by a certain position.

They marched Twelve deep, and yet took up above two Hours passing by.

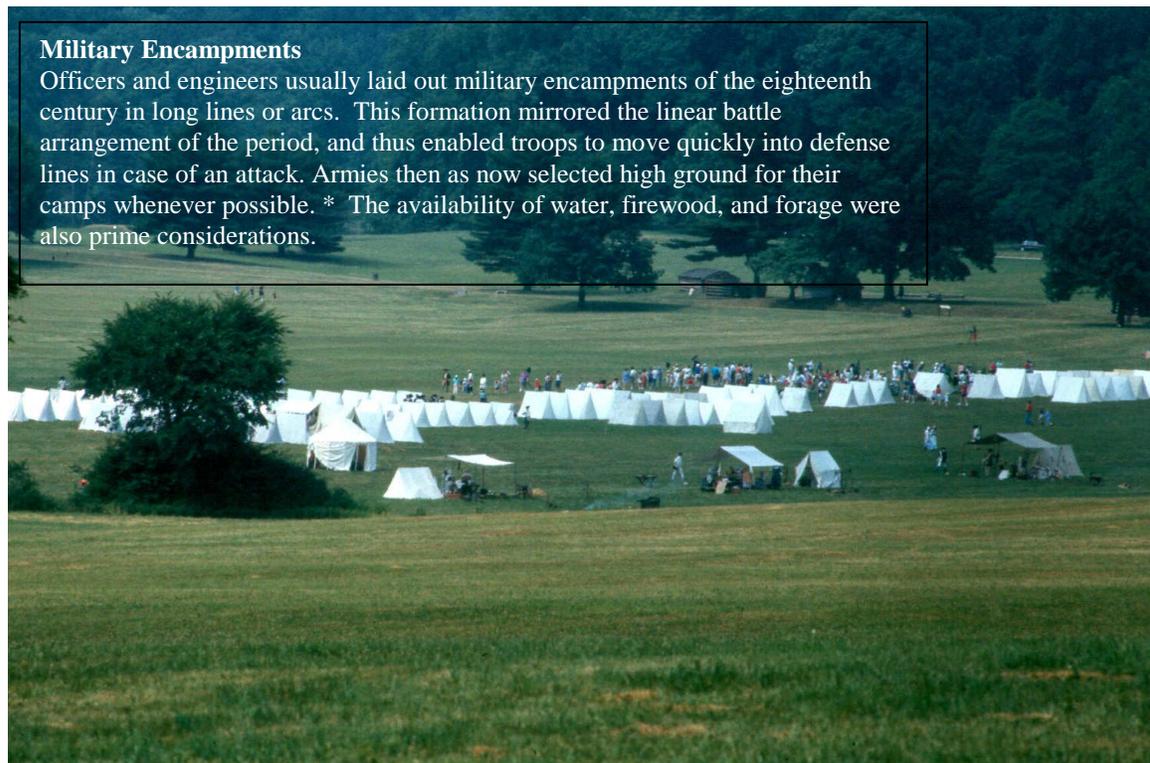
John Adams to Abigail Adams 24 August 1777

[The army] were upwards of two Hours in passing with a lively smart step.

Henry Marchant to Nicolas Cooke 24 August 1777.

The baggage train, made up of the army's male and female campfollowers, and baggage wagons containing food, tents, ammunition, and other equipage, often reached its final destination many hours after the fighting troops arrived.

While the British stayed in place near Brandywine, Washington wisely protected the American army by directing it to the side of the Schuylkill River opposite the enemy. So, on September 12, the Americans marched from Chester, crossed the river at the Middle Ferry Bridge (Market Street Bridge, Philadelphia), and encamped at The Falls of the Schuylkill (East Falls). They covered **nineteen miles** that day.



Military Encampments

Officers and engineers usually laid out military encampments of the eighteenth century in long lines or arcs. This formation mirrored the linear battle arrangement of the period, and thus enabled troops to move quickly into defense lines in case of an attack. Armies then as now selected high ground for their camps whenever possible. * The availability of water, firewood, and forage were also prime considerations.

Tent Encampment

*During the campaign, a local resident once spied some of the Continental Army generals scouting out a camp location.

My son Benjamin writes on [October 1, 1777] that most of the Generals were viewing the hill near his house, in order, if occasion [required them to] make a stand.

Christopher Marshall's Diary 4 October 1777

After a brief rest, Washington placed the Continental Army on the offensive. On the fourteenth and fifteenth of September, the American forces crossed back over the Schuylkill at Levering's Ford (Green Lane Bridge at Manayunk), and then gained the Lancaster Road (Old Lancaster Road/Conestoga Road/Route 30), on their **twenty-one mile** march to the Warren Tavern near Malvern. Washington's front stretched for three miles here, from the Warren Tavern to the White Horse Tavern. Because of the long frontage armies presented when in battle or encampment position, all march distances given are approximate.

British Advance on the Schuylkill River Fords

On September 16, the British advanced on the Schuylkill River fords (low water crossing points), intending to cross to the north side of this body of water and capture Philadelphia. The British advanced from Turk's Head (West Chester) in three columns along Paoli Pike, Boot Road, and (Route 100). The two armies met on the sixteenth, and began to engage in battle near present day Immaculata College (King Road, west of Malvern), when a hurricane-driven rainstorm hit. This eighteen-hour downpour put an end to the encounter today known as the "Battle of the Clouds."



Battle of the Clouds: where the Americans drew up lines south of King Road



Battle of the Clouds Marker on Grounds of Immaculata College

An extraordinary thunderstorm occurred, combined with the heaviest downpour in the world. This terrible rain caused the roads to become so bottomless that one not wagon, much less a gun, could get through.

Captain Johann Ewald, Hessian jaeger forces (ranger company*) serving under General Howe
16 September 1777

*The jaegers were armed with accurate rifles and swords instead of muskets and bayonets. They served as scouts and skirmishers. The other special forces accompanying the British army included the light infantry and the grenadiers.

After the fighting ended, the American troops slid down the slopes of the South Valley Hills into the Great Valley and continued west **nine miles** over sodden roads to Yellow Springs (Chester Springs).



Great Valley from the South Valley Hills



Great Valley Looking South Down Route 202

We marched till 2 oClock thro' the heaviest rain I ever felt, and when halted we had to remain under arms till Dawn of aurora --This for excessive fatigue Surpassed all I ever underwent.
Lieutenant James McMichael, thirteenth Pennsylvania regiment 16 September 1777

On the road which [was] in very bad condition, [a] man of the enemy's fell into our hands, broken down and exhausted.

General Wilhelm, Baron von Knyphausen, Hessian Commander, and General Howe's second-in-command

American Camp Warwick

On September 17, the American army marched **fourteen miles** following along Kimberton Road, then west along Ridge Road, until they came to Warwick and Reading Furnaces. They encamped here in order to replenish supplies ruined by the severe rainstorm with fresh ones from their nearby depot at Reading. At this position, the Americans were close enough to oppose a potential British river crossing. The recent torrential rain had raised the level of the Schuylkill, made the river temporarily impassible to foot soldiers and wagons, and bought time for Washington to re-supply.

British Camp Tredyffrin

On September 18, the British moved from the Battle of the Clouds area to a camp located at Tredyffrin (Berwyn). The King's troops encamped in two lines south of Lancaster Road (Route 30) and north of Swedesford Road starting at Baptist Road (Route 252) on the east and ending at Howell's Tavern (Howellville) on the western side.



Camp Tredyffrin from Chesterbrook Boulevard

We marched through the Great Valley to Tredyffrin. They call this region Great Valley because there are chains of high hills covered with woods on both sides of the valley. The Valley Creek, part of which flows through our camp, has the best water I have tasted here in America.

Baron Friedrich von Muenchhausen, Aide de Camp to General Howe



Valley Creek

September 18: British Raid on Valley Forge

While exploring the Valley Forge area fording locations, the British found thousands of barrels of flour and many valuable tools cached in the buildings of the Valley Forge ironworks situated on Valley Creek (along Valley Creek, Route 252 in Valley Forge National Historical Park). On September 18, a contingent of British light infantry and cavalry caught a small group of Americans in the act of salvaging the forge stores.

At the junction of Gulph and Baptist Roads (near Artillery Park in Valley Forge National Historical Park), eighteen-year-old Sarah Stephens had seen the approach of the British horse troops

“moving in the most perfect order, their horses being so trained that they made but little noise in their march.”



Gulph Road Looking towards Artillery Park
The deep road cut of this portion of Gulph Road that is preserved as part of Valley Forge National Historical Park is typical of eighteenth century roads.

A skirmish broke out between the British and the American party that included George Washington's Aide-de-Camp Alexander Hamilton, Valley Forge's Iron Master and Colonel of Militia William Dewees, and Robert E. Lee's father "Light Horse" Harry Lee. Finding themselves outnumbered, Hamilton, Dewees, and their men rowed their barge towards the safety of the north bank of the Schuylkill. Lee and his dragoons (calvary) pushed their horses across the bridge over Valley Creek in their retreat. Lee later recalled that the British had trained their guns upon the fleeing Americans, and heard

volleys of carbines discharged upon the boat, which were returned by guns singly and occasionally.
Captain Light Horse Harry Lee

The British fire killed one man and wounded another. Hamilton and a British officer also lost their mounts in the exchange of gunfire. The British would burn the forge and destroy what supplies that they could not carry off when they departed Valley Forge.



British Raid

On the nineteenth, the newly supplied American army marched east on Ridge Road (Route 23 in Chester County), and at 2 p.m., began to cross the Schuylkill River at Parkersford (Linfield).



Parkersford

**We cross'd the Schuylkill at 2 oclock P.M. at Parker's ford where we had Strip and wade.
Lieutenant McMichael**

After the two-hour crossing, the troops proceeded down Linfield Road to Trappe, and entered onto Ridge Pike (Montgomery County) at Augustus Lutheran Church.



Augustus Lutheran Church

Pastor Henry Muhlenberg, whose son Peter Muhlenberg was an American brigadier general, observed the procession of soldiers from his house, and said that



Muhlenberg Home

His Excellency General Washington was with the troops in person, who marched past here to the Perkiomen. The procession lasted the whole night, and we had numerous visits from officers, wet breast high, who had to march in this condition during the whole night, cold and damp as it was, and to bear hunger and thirst at the same time. This robs them of courage and health.

Reverend Henry Muhlenberg 20 September 1777

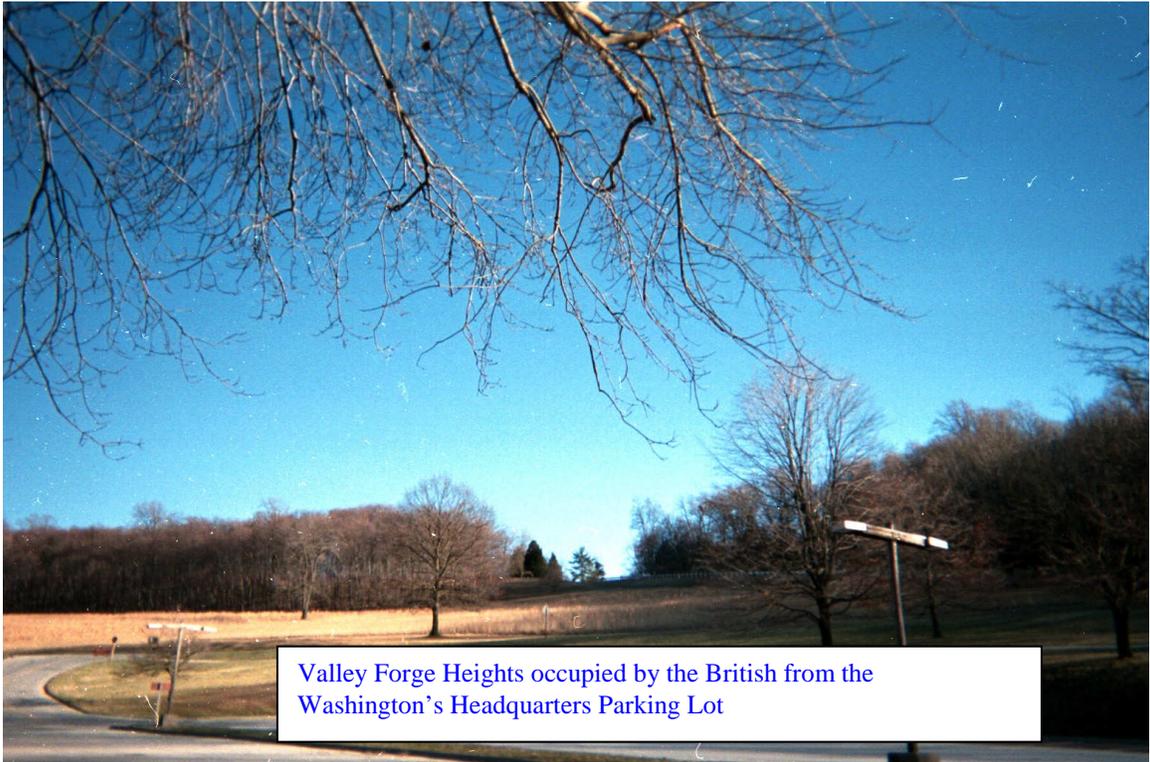
(Camp Providence September 19 - 22: Continental Army based from Evansburg, but spread out along the river fords on September 20)

The American Army continued past Trappe, forded the Perkiomen Creek, and encamped on the eastern bank. Later in the day on September 20, the army moved closer to the Schuylkill in order to prevent the British from crossing. They covered **eight miles** on the first part of the march, and **six miles** on the second leg.

At 4 AM marched from the Perkiomen, proceeded down the great road, crossed the Skippack, and thence to Pauling's Ford in the Providence (Lower Providence) township, where we encamped.

Lieutenant McMichael 20 September 1777

Meanwhile, the British reinforced the troops holding the heights east of the Valley Forge (near Gulph Road and Inner Line Drive, Valley Forge National Historical Park), which commanded the terrain near the Fatland Ford.

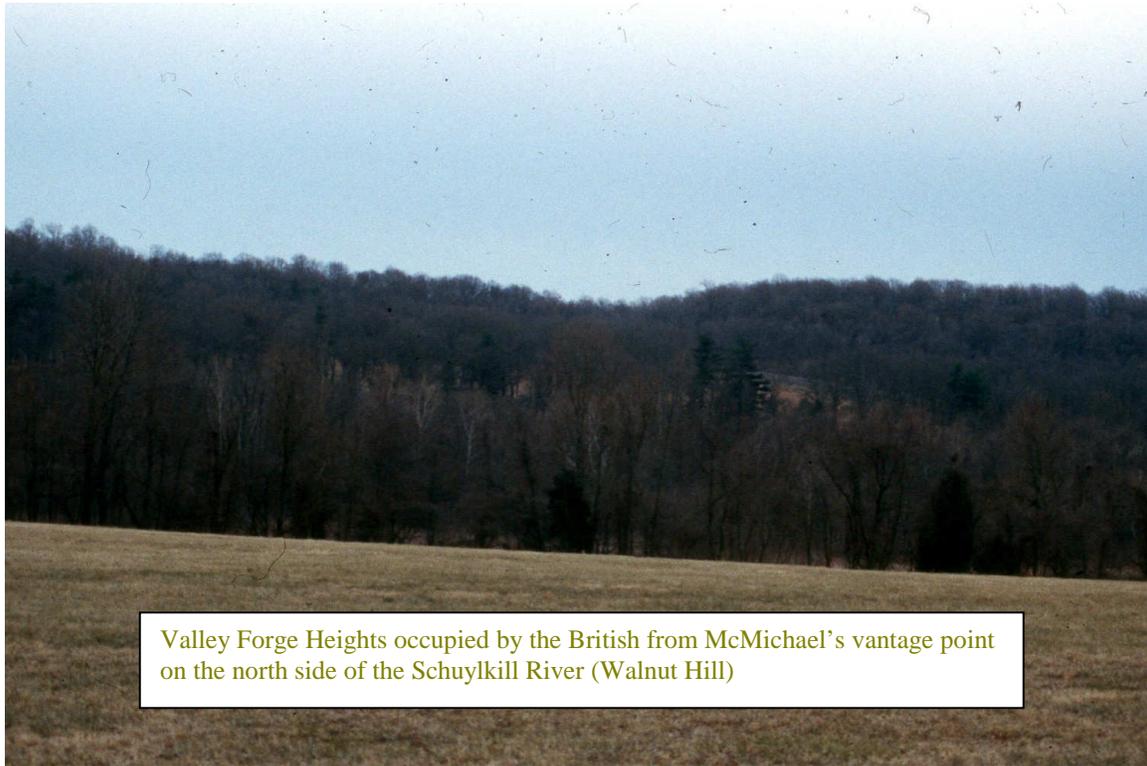


Valley Forge Heights occupied by the British from the Washington's Headquarters Parking Lot



British Light Infantryman

Lieutenant McMichael could see the enemy from his vantage point on the opposite side of the river.



Valley Forge Heights occupied by the British from McMichael's vantage point on the north side of the Schuylkill River (Walnut Hill)

We had a fair view of the enemy's encampment, being only separated from us by the Schuylkill and a small hill.

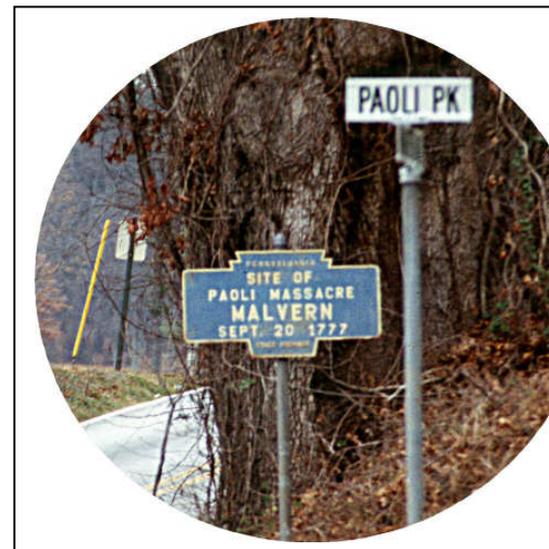
Lieutenant McMichael 20 September 1777

Battle of Paoli: Early Morning of September 21

As part of General Washington's plan to oppose a British crossing, he had left his trusted subordinate Anthony Wayne and his crack Pennsylvania troops on the south side of the Schuylkill River. Wayne's instructions were to harass the British and attack their vulnerable column formations when they attempted to cross the river. At midnight on the twenty-first the British attacked Wayne's camp at Paoli. General Charles Grey conducted a successful bayonet assault against General Wayne with an overpowering force of 5,000 troops formed from the second light infantry battalion, and the forty-second and forty-fourth (Blackwatch) regiments. With Wayne's force neutralized, the British were one step closer to achieving their goal of capturing Philadelphia. Out of Anthony Wayne's 1,500 men, at least fifty-three men were killed, and another 200 were wounded or captured.



Paoli Monument



British Camp Charleston

On September 21, the British moved the rest of their force from Camp Trediffryn to the Valley Forge area. Captain Muenchhausen noted that

We passed Valley Creek without being opposed by the rebels, whom we could see very clearly.

Captain Friedrich von Muenchhausen 21 September 1777



British Troops Marching

The British marched via Baptist Road (Route 252), turned left on to Gulph Road (Valley Forge National Historical Park) and turned left again onto Nutt Road (Route 23). The main American and British armies now faced each other across the river. The camp that the British established at Charlestown stretched from the heights where Gulph Road and Innerline Drive meet to where the town of Phoenixville lies today.



British Marker in Phoenixville

***Yankee Doodle* Rallies the Troops**

Evidence demonstrating the lack of awe that the Americans held for the King's troops can be found in some verses written by Lieutenant McMichael about this standoff between the two armies. McMichael set his words to the tune of *Yankee Doodle*. Like McMichael's doggerel, many verses composed for this famous tune and sung by the troops poked fun at the British and served as morale boosters for the Revolutionaries.

**Just when we came unto our camp, an army did appear,
They were on an adjacent hill which was to us quite near,
They travers'd all the hill about, as tho' we were their foes
And seem'd quite uneasy the secret to disclose.
But we with mirth and jolity did seat ourselves to rest
Upon the hill right opposite tho' they seem'd quite distress'd.
Then taking Carnaghan's canteen, which had in it some rum,
We took to us a little draught, my rhyme to end did come.**
Lieutenant McMichael 26 September 1777

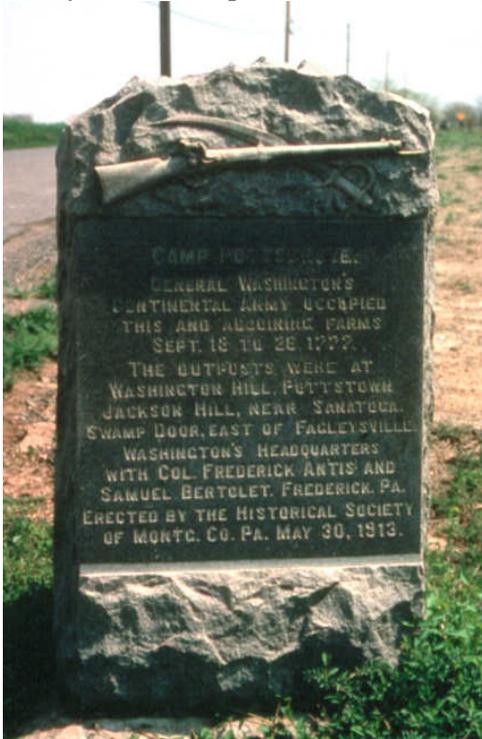
General Howe used the Charlestown encampment as a pivot point. From here he outmaneuvered Washington and secured a gateway to Philadelphia via the Fatland Ford.



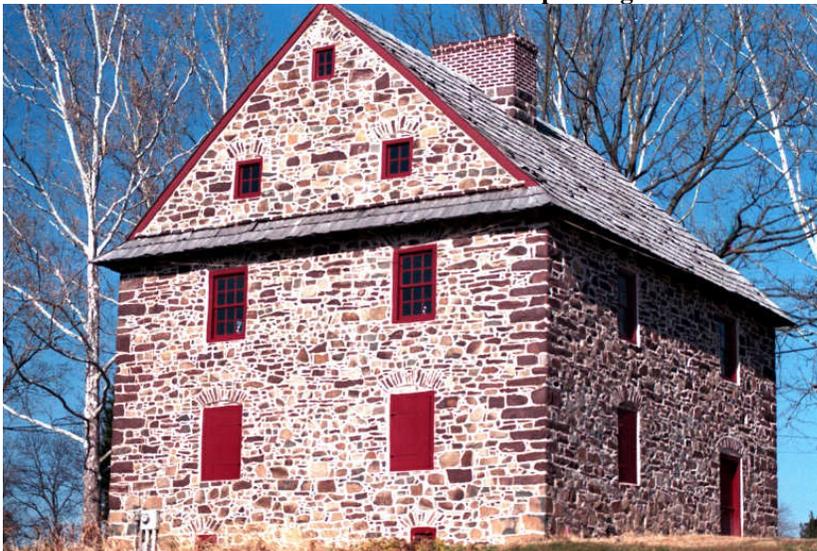
Baptist Road (Road to Fatland Ford) in Valley Forge National Historical Park

On September 22, General Howe made several diversionary attacks on the river crossings northwest of Valley Forge. The Phoenixville area fords that the British assailed were: Gorden's (near French Creek), Richardson's (Bridge Street), and Long's (Long Ford Road, Oakes). Washington perceived these thrusts as a threat to his precious supplies held at Reading, and responded by moving his army westward along Ridge Pike through Trappe. When the army reached Limerick, they turned right onto Faulkner Swamp Road and

encamped near Fagleysville. They remained in a defensive position here at **Camp Pottsgrove from twenty-second of September until the twenty-sixth.**



Camp Pottsgrove Marker



Washington's Headquarters at Camp Pottsgrove, the Frederick Antes House

After their feints had succeeded in convincing Washington that the English army intended to take Reading, the British reversed their direction of march and came back east on Nutt Road (Route 23). They began to cross the receding waters of the Schuylkill River at the now undefended Fatland Ford (Valley Forge National Historical Park) at moonrise (10 p.m.) on the twenty-second.



Fatland Ford where the British Crossed

And on the 23rd, crossed the Schuylkill below Valey Forge without encountering the smallest resistance from the enemy ... The Schuylkill forms a small island at the spot where we crossed it, the water went up to the soldiers' knee-bands in the deepest places. General Washington has retired more than 20 English miles in the direction of Lancaster.

Unknown Hessian officer to Lieutenant General von Ditfurth

After halting to dry their clothes, the English forces marched along Egypt Road (Lower Providence Township), bore right onto Ridge Pike, and set up camp in Norriton (Norristown/West Norriton Township). The British camped at **Norriton from September 23-25**. Their encampment stretched along a line that nearly follows Route 202 from Manatawny Road (Ridge Pike/Main Street) to the Philadelphia Road (Germantown Pike).

While at Norriton, the American militia must have harassed the British, for Captain Montessor exclaimed that

This township of Norriton is very rebellious.

Captain Montessor

The English army met with little resistance however, as it marched in two columns along Ridge and Germantown Pikes en route to Germantown on September 25. On September 26, Philadelphia fell into British hands.

At half past eight, this morning, Lord Cornwallis with two battalions of British Grenadiers marched in and took possession of the city. *

Captain Montessor

*The grenadiers were physically and psychologically intimidating individuals that the British army sent on special missions. They wore tall bear skin hats bearing the Latin motto "Nec Aspera Terrent," which translates as: "Difficulties be Damned."



Grenadier Hat

Citizen Response

Some Philadelphians were happy to see the British come, as evidenced by the comments of seventeen-year-old loyalist Robert Morton

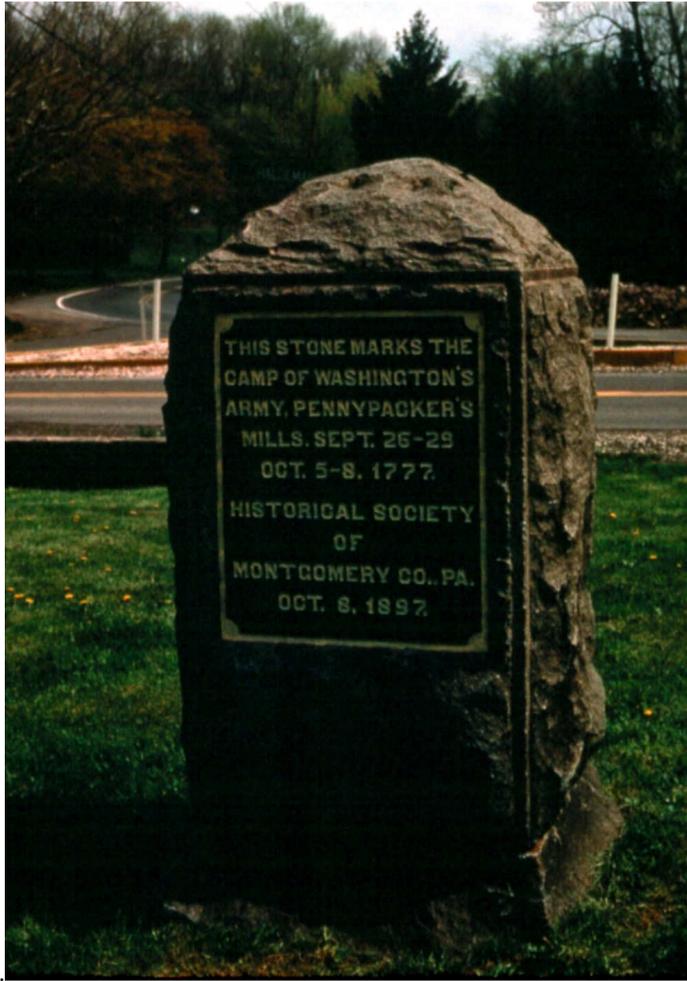
To the great relief of the inhabitants who have too long suffered under the yoke of arbitrary Power; and who testified their approbation of the arrival of the troops by the loudest acclamations of joy.

Others simply wondered what was to befall them during the British occupation.

A ten-year-old boy known only as "J.C." remembered

Their tranquil look and dignified appearance have left an impression on my mind, that the British grenadiers were inimitable ... I went up to the front rank of the grenadiers when they had entered Second Street, when several of them addressed me thus, -- 'How do you do, young one -- how are you, my boy' -- in a brotherly tone, that seems to still vibrate on my ear; then reached out their hands, and severally caught mine, and shook it, not with the exalting shake of conquerors, as I thought, but with a sympathizing one for the vanquished.

Meanwhile, far from the scenes unfolding in the city, Washington's forces began to stir. George Washington had begun offensive maneuvers aimed at reclaiming Philadelphia. At 9 a.m. on September 26, the American army left Pottsgrove and marched **ten miles** to Pennypaker Mills (Schwenksville). The army's route took them east on Swamp Pike to Limerick. They then proceeded northeast on Limerick Road to Pennypaker. The Americans lay here at **Camp Perkiomen from September 26 - 29**. While there, George Washington located his headquarters in a mill on the property.



Camp Perkiomen Marker

At 10 a.m. on September 29, the army moved even closer to the British in Philadelphia. They advanced **five miles** along Skippack Pike (Route 73) to Skippack. The army rested at **Camp Skippack from September 29 – October 2.**

At this time George Washington noted that

Our army has now had the rest and refreshment it stood in need of, and our soldiers are in very good spirits.

George Washington 1 October 1777

On October 2, Washington ordered another advance. This time the Continental Army marched **four miles** southeast down Skippack Pike to Methacton Hill, a location that fully commanded the surrounding countryside. The army remained here at **Camp Methacton from October 2 - 3.** Washington planned his next attack from Camp Methacton headquarters, which he placed in the Peter Wentz house.



Peter Wentz House

British Forces at Germantown Vulnerable to Attack

In early October, the British had not fully fortified and secured Philadelphia, so they had yet to concentrate their forces in the city. The 8,000 troops still present in Germantown presented General Washington with an opportunity to strike a serious blow.

Battle of Germantown: the Second Key Battle of the Campaign

Washington's rather complex plan of battle for Germantown specified that four army sections approach from different directions and converge on the British simultaneously. The strategy required nearly perfect execution and conditions. However, poor communication between army divisions, foggy weather, and the impediment caused by a British regiment's stubborn defense of Cliveden, a stone mansion turned fortress, all prevented the Americans from capitalizing on their designs.

Routes Taken by the Troops to Battle

The army's center with General Washington in command of General Wayne's and General Sullivan's forces approached on Skippack, Bethlehem, and Germantown Pikes. The right flank attack under General Nathanael Greene, which consisted of General Greene's and General Stephen's troops, went in on Church Road as far as Limekiln Pike. The Pennsylvania militia planned to come in on both outside flanks.

Even though the American attack faltered after a promising beginning, the operation impressed friend and foe.

she heard the [British] officers say at dinner, twas the severest blow they had yet met with, twas plan'd with Judgement, executed with Spirit and they cant tell why we left it unless for want of Ammunition.

Account of Miss Lucy Leonard, who had just come from Philadelphia, recorded in letter from Colonel Walter Stewart to General Gates, Camp 26 miles from Philadelphia, 12 October 1777

And thus happend the memorable Event of the battle of German Town in which was great numbers killed on both sides... I had previously underwent many fatigues but never any that so much overdone me as this. had it not been for fear of being taken I shou'd have remaind on the road all night for when considering my march when on Picquet I had in 24 hours marchd 45 miles and in that time fought 4 hours during which we advanced so furiously thro' buckwheat fields that it was an

almost unspeakable fatigue. At 5 after 5 oClock the attack commenced from right to left, we drove the Enemy for near 3 miles with the utmost precipitation.

Lieutenant McMichael 4 October 1777

The strong performance of the American troops on the battlefield further increased the men's confidence.

It [the experience of battle of Germantown] has served to convince our people, that when they make an attack, they can confuse and Rout even the Flower of the British Army, with the greatest ease, and they are not that invincible Body of Men which many suppose them to be. *

George Washington to Major General Israel Putnam 9 October 1777

*The "flower" that George Washington spoke of was the British light infantry that the continentals had pushed for three miles at Germantown. These men were very fit marksmen equipped with lighter equipment. When the British officers wanted troops who could move quickly to seize an objective, they selected the light infantry.

The exhausted American troops retreated back out on Skippack Pike to a point beyond the Perkiomen Creek to Pawling's Mill, covering a total distance of about **forty miles** for the entire day. They again occupied the **Perkiomen Camp, this time from October 4 - 8**. On the retreat, the army had deposited their wounded in every available building along the roads leading to Reading including various homes and churches along Skippack and Germantown Pikes



Soldier Grave Monument at Saint James Church, Evansburg

New Hanover Lutheran Church and Falkner's Swamp Reformed Church, which had served as hospitals and burying places after the Battle of Brandywine, again served this purpose. Those who could stand travel moved further up to Reading, where the army transferred them to houses in this region.



Soldier Grave Monument at New Hanover Lutheran Church

Even as the soldiers recovered from the Battle of Germantown, it was imperative for the life of their cause that Washington remains aggressive and advance towards Philadelphia. At 8 a.m. on October 8, the American soldiers pushed east on Skippack Pike, turned left on Forty-Foot Road in Skippack, and then marched to Sumneytown Pike where they encamped on Frederick Wampole's property (Towamincen Township), a distance of **sixteen miles**.



Wampole Marker

During the **Towamincen Encampment, which lasted from October 8 - 16**, General Nash died of wounds that he received at the Battle of Germantown. On October 9, the officers buried him with full military honors in the Mennonite Meeting Cemetery, which lies at the intersection of Forty-Foot Road and Sumneytown Pike.



General Nash Memorial

Washington kept his headquarters at Frederick Wampoles's house during this time. The house no longer stands, but it was located in Kulpsville, north of Sumneytown Pike. An addendum attached to a letter composed for General Washington at Wampole's by Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton gives an indication of the long hours often kept by Washington's dedicated staff.

The above letter was written by His excellency's orders; but as he went to bed before it was finished it will be handed you without his signature.

George Washington to Colonel Christopher Greene, Headquarters (Frederick Wampole House), **11 O'Clock at night**, 15 October 1777

On October 16, the army returned to Camp Methacton. For the march the troops split into two sections. The first retraced its march down Forty-Foot Road to Skippack Pike and turned east to Worcester. The other group moved east down Sumneytown Pike to the intersection of the pike with North Wales Road then marched south on North Wales to Methacton. The army covered **five miles** that day. The American forces remained here at **Camp Methacton from October 16-21**.



Peter Wentz House

Washington wrote a letter while stationed at the Wentz house at Camp Methacton that indicates how incredibly hectic this campaign season was for him.

When my last to you was dated I know not, for truly I can say, that my whole time is so much engross'd that I have scarce a moment (but sleeping ones) for relaxation, or to indulge myself in writing to a friend.

George Washington to John Augustine Washington (General Washington's brother), Headquarters 18 October 1777

On October 20, the army moved closer to Philadelphia and the British, this time covering **five miles** down Skippack Pike to Whitpain. Here they established **Camp Morris**, which they occupied from **October 21-November 2**.

The "Whisky Scrape"

Some of the most trying experiences of the Continental Army infantryman did not occur at famous battles, but rather during the course of normal duty. We seldom commemorate such service. Luckily, Private Joseph Plumb Martin of Connecticut recorded one such incident in his memoirs. Because this adventure ended with a humorous encounter with spirituous liquors, Martin dubbed the experience the "Whisky Scrape." On this occasion, Martin and his comrades were sent from Camp Morris to check a British exploration force that had come out from Philadelphia. During this forced march, the men plunged several times through the frigid waters of the Schuylkill River and tramped about thirty-five miles in less than forty-eight hours. The expedition left Camp Morris on the evening of October 21. They moved down Butler Pike, turned left onto Germantown Pike, proceeded to Barren Hill, and then crossed Schuylkill River at Rees ap Edward's Ford, (Miquon). Once across the river, the troops marched over Young's Ford Road (Gladwyne). In the early morning hours of the twenty-second, they returned without having sighted the British. On the evening of

October 22, Martin and his companions set out on another fruitless search for the enemy. This time they marched as far as Upper Darby, returned, and crossed the river a final time at dusk on the twenty-third. The “Whiskey Scrape” occurred when they returned to the north bank of the Schuylkill River at Matson’s Ford (Fayette Street Bridge, Conshohocken).

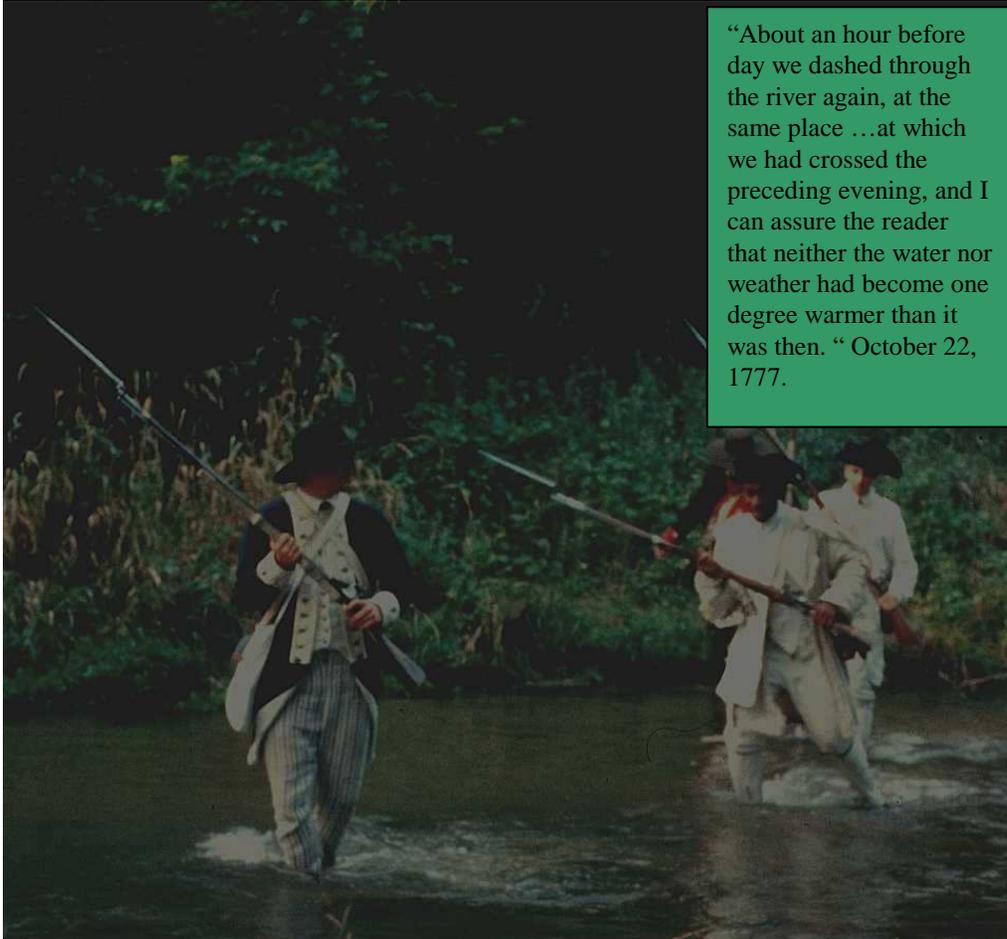
Schuylkill River Looking Downstream from Matson’s Ford



**October 21, 1777
“Our brigade was
ordered off ... We
marched from**

camp just before night as light troops, light in everything, especially in eatables. We marched to a place called Barren Hill, From here about ten o'clock in the evening, we forded the Schuylkill where the river, including a bare gravelly island, or flat, "which we crossed, was about forty rods wide, ... the water about to the waist. It was quite a cool night, in the month of October; the water which splashed on to our clothes froze as we passed the river. Many of the young and small soldiers fell while in the water and were completely drenched.

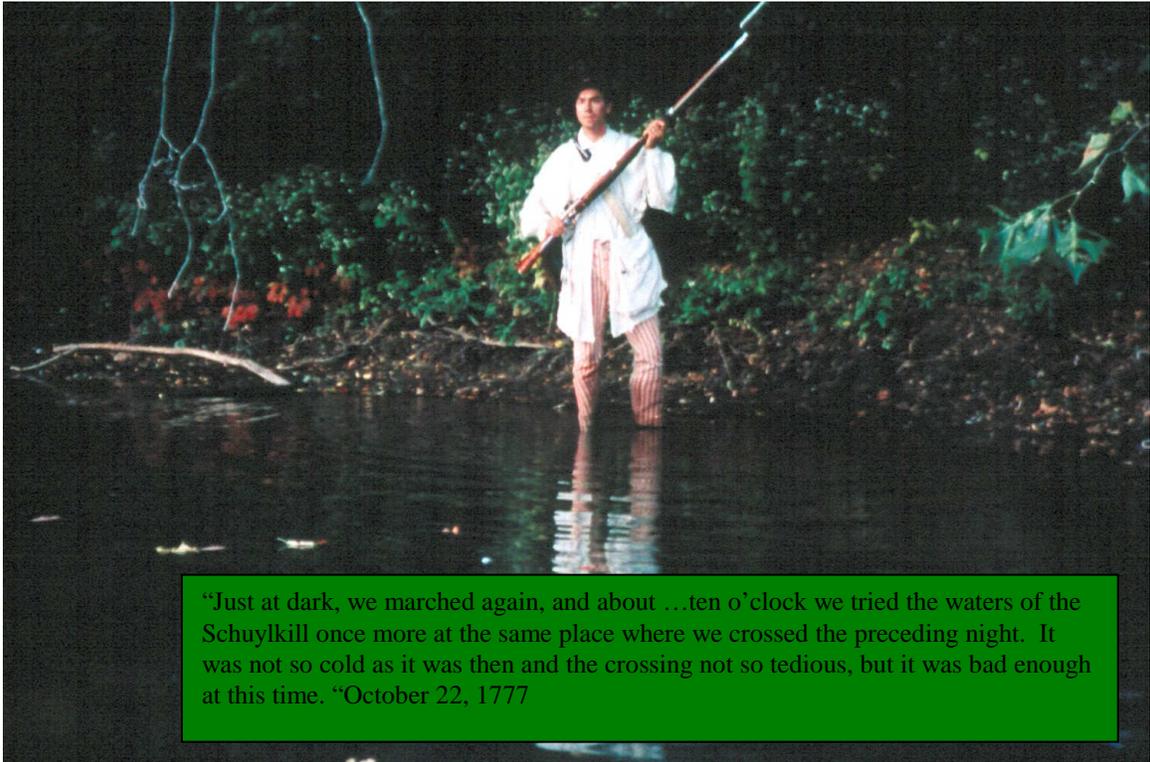
We, however, got over and marched two or three miles on a dreary road (Young's Ford Road, which still runs through somewhat forbidding terrain). [The officers ordered the men to halt here.] We lay there freezing, about two hours, and then were orderd to fall in and march back again. "



"About an hour before day we dashed through the river again, at the same place ...at which we had crossed the preceding evening, and I can assure the reader that neither the water nor weather had become one degree warmer than it was then. " October 22, 1777.

Soldiers Fording in the Dark

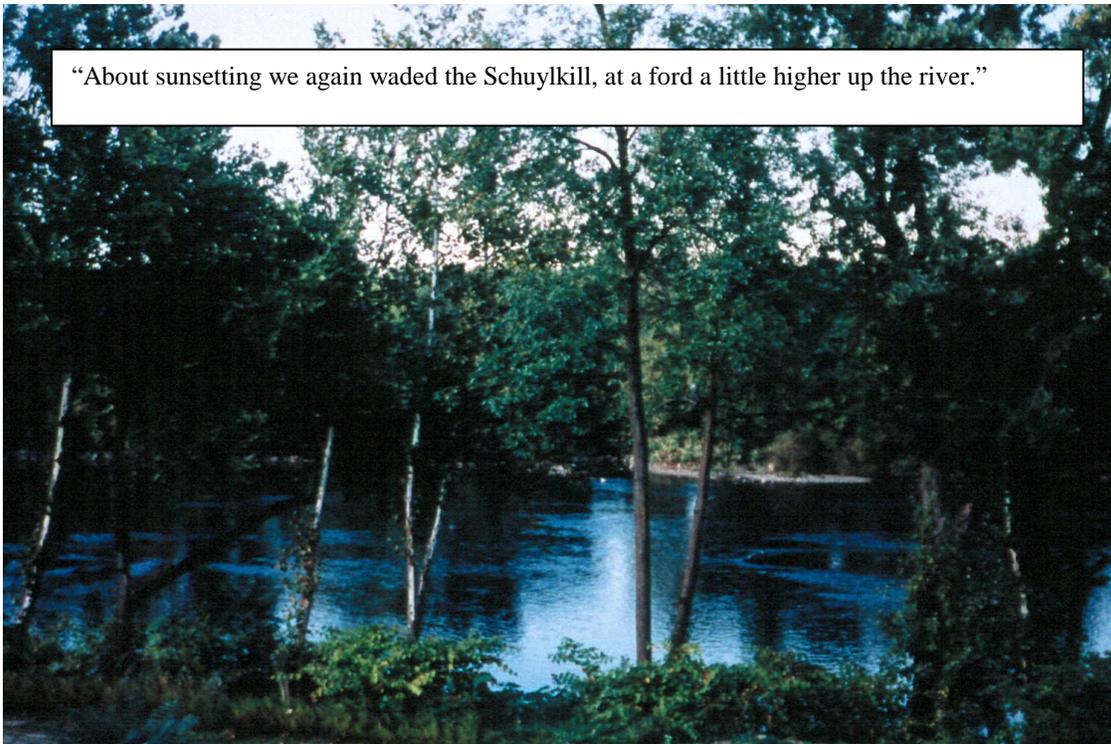
They set out again from camp on the evening of the twenty-second.



“Just at dark, we marched again, and about ...ten o’clock we tried the waters of the Schuylkill once more at the same place where we crossed the preceding night. It was not so cold as it was then and the crossing not so tedious, but it was bad enough at this time. “October 22, 1777

Martin Crossing the Island Again

During the day on the twenty-third, Martin foraged for some walnuts and turnips on the south side of the river, and rested before he headed back.



“About sunseting we again waded the Schuylkill, at a ford a little higher up the river.”

Matson's Ford

Once Martin and the other wet, tired, and hungry solders reached the north bank of the river, they marched some distance to meet the commissary wagons. They only sustenance that the commissary could offer the men was whisky. In the dark and confusion that ensued, many men drank much more than the gill (4 oz.) share allotted them, and as **“our stomachs being empty, the whisky took rank hold and the poor brain**

faired accordingly.” As the troops marched on, a comical pile up of man and musket occurred when they attempted to cross a rail fence. Martin mused that if the British had happened upon them at that time, **“there would have been an action worth recording.”** After the “Whisky Scrape,” Private Martin found a spot to rest and **“roasted some of [the] turnips, ate them, rolled myself up in my innocence, lay down on the leaves and forgot my misery till morning.”**

Advance to Defensive Position at Whitemarsh

The Continental Army shifted from Camp Morris to a well-placed defensive location on November 2. The army marched in two columns to their next camp at Whitemarsh (Fort Washington). One group followed Skippack Pike, and the other stuck to Morris Road and then turned down present day (Pennsylvania Avenue) to the camp, having covered a distance of **five miles**. The army spent over a month at **Camp Whitemarsh, from November 2-December 11**. Washington’s position on the heights above Sandy Run (Fort Washington State Park) was an extremely strong one. During the span of days from December 5 through 8, the British probed Washington’s defenses, found them too formidable, withdrew, and returned to Philadelphia.

Private Martin’s Wigwam

During the campaign, field conditions often forced the continental soldiers to build temporary shelters or wigwams to protect themselves from the elements. At times, the fast traveling troops ranged far from the army’s plodding baggage trains, which carried the men’s canvas tents. In severe weather, wigwams provided better insulation than cloth tents.



Wigwam before the Storm

Private Joseph Plumb Martin described how he and his comrades built wigwam type structures at Whitemarsh: **we were obliged to put us up huts by laying up poles and covering them with leaves, a capital shelter from winter storms.**



Wigwam after the Storm

Wigwams and tents did not offer quite enough shelter for the campaign-weary men, and so on December 11, the army left Whitmarsh in search of a more long-term winter camp. They moved six miles down Bethlehem Road, turned west on Skippack Pike, then moved south on Butler Pike towards the river. They would attempt to cross the Schuylkill on a bridge constructed of wagons at Matson's Ford. The march covered **nine miles** total.

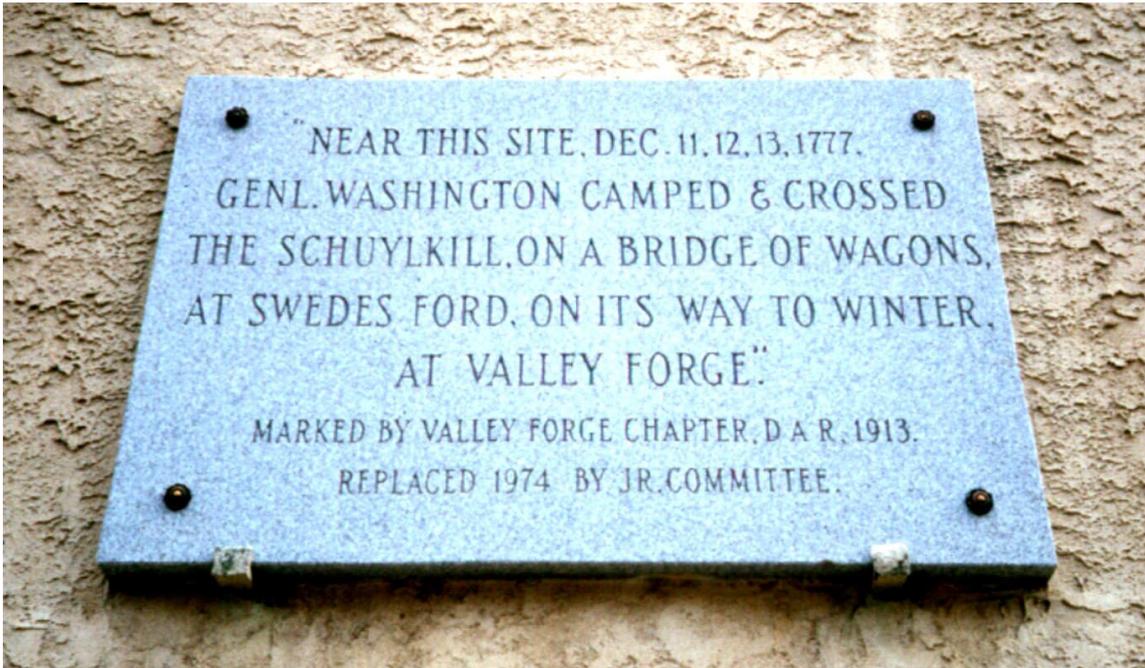
Pennsylvania Militia Delays General Cornwallis

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Militia had encountered a British foraging expedition under General Cornwallis about six miles south and east of Matson's Ford near present day (Bryn Mawr). After contesting each hill as the British advanced, the militia eventually gave way.

As the British over ran the militia, Colonel John Lacey of the Pennsylvania militia was nearly undone by his own men. As the British cavalry caught up with Lacey, he heard "**the Bullets wish by,**" and asked his troops to about face and fire. The men shot at the approaching British "**– by firing off their sholders without stoping or turning about -- conceiving myself in more danger by this mode of firing from my own men than the Enemy called upon them to seace firing or they would shoot me.**"

Memoirs of Brigadier General John Lacey of Pennsylvania

While Lacey was recovering from the shock of the pusillanimous behavior of his men, part of the Continental Army had begun to cross over to the south side of the Schuylkill on their improvised wagon bridge. The advance force of the Americans encountered Corwallis' force that had just brushed aside the Pennsylvania militia. Forced to retreat, the Americans tore up the bridge and marched **four miles** west along the north bank of the river on Ridge Pike to Swede's Ford (Norristown).



Camp Norristown Marker

The army camped overnight at **Camp Norristown from December 11-12** in a semicircle on the hills above Swedesford.

On December 12, at 6 p.m., the army crossed over the river on two makeshift bridges at Swedesford.

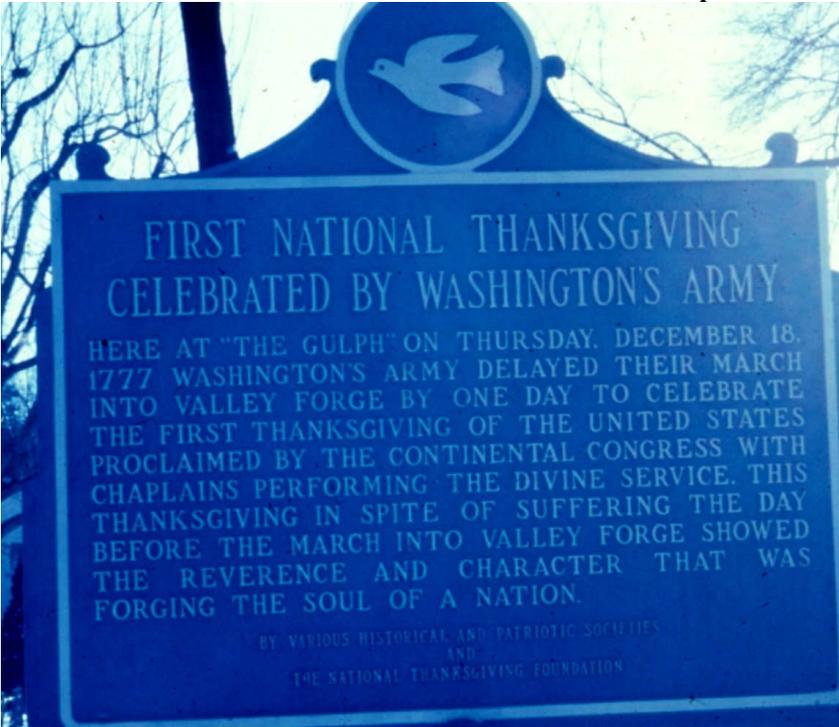


Swedesford

After making their thirteenth and last crossing of the river on this campaign, the army proceeded **5 miles** over Swedeland Road to Gulph Mills and remained here at **Camp Gulph Mills from December 13-19**.



Gulph Mills



Gulph Mills Marker

A Continental Thanksgiving

The Continental Congress proclaimed a day of “public Thanksgiving” on December 18, 1777, to commemorate the progress made up to that point in the fight to establish independence. General Washington’s continental soldiers celebrated their day of thanksgiving while stationed at Camp Gulph Mills. Some of Washington’s soldiers recorded the menu of their “feast” in their diaries:

“We had but a poor Thanksgiven, Nothing but Fresh beef and Flour to Eate Without aney Salt & but very Scant of that.”

Sergeant Ebenezer Wild, first Massachusetts regiment



Soldier Cooking

“We had nothing to eat for two or three days previous, except what the trees of the fields and forests afforded us. but we must now have what Congress said, a sumptuous Thanksgiving to close the year of high living we had now nearly seen brought to a close. And what do you think it was ? ...it gave each and every man half a gill of rice and a tablespoonful of vinegar!”*

Joseph Plumb Martin, eighth Connecticut regiment

*One half-gill equals two ounces. The commissary often issued vinegar to the soldiers for use as a purifier and scurvy preventative. The men mixed the vinegar with canteen water rather than drink it full strength.

March to Valley Forge

On December 19 the army marched **7 miles** west on Gulph Road to the site selected for their winter camp -- Valley Forge.



Mile Marker 15 on Gulph Road

Friday ye 19th

The Sun Shone out this morning being the first time I had seen it for Seven days, which seem'd to put new Life into everything -- We took the Remains of two Days Allowance of Beef, ... and two fowls we had left, of these we made a broth upon which we Breakfasted with a half a loaf of Bread we Begg'd and bought, of which we shoud have had made a tolerable Breakfast, if there had been Enough!! By ten Oclock we [had] to march to a place Call'd Valley Forge being about five or six miles -- about Eleven ock we Sit out, but did not arrive there 'till after Sun Sit. During this march we had nothing to Eat or nor to drink.

Lieutenant Samuel Armstrong, eighth Massachusetts regiment



Soldiers at the Gulph Road Entrance to Valley Forge National Historical Park

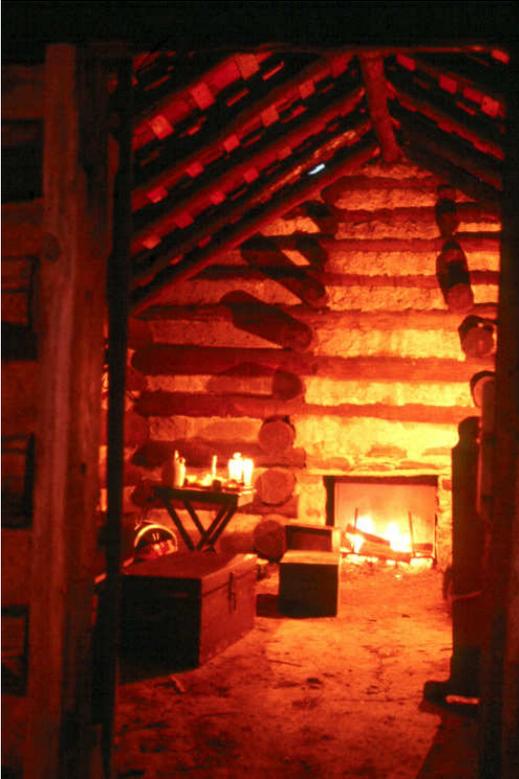
When the army reached Valley Forge the rigors of the campaign ended, but new challenges lay ahead. While not as well known for its suffering as the encampment at Valley Forge is, the Campaign to Valley Forge challenged the continental soldiers with many hardships along the way. As the diaries of the soldiers have revealed, the men stood the physical tests with fortitude, and often with a strong sense of humor as well. The approximate total distance covered by the Continental Army during the main maneuvers, not including many side excursions such as the Whisky Scrape, was over **200 miles**. Those hardened core of veterans who endured this campaign built upon the military prowess acquired in the operations of 1777 during the coming winter and spring at Valley Forge under the tutelage of Baron von Steuben. The army's dedication and new found "relish for the trade of soldiering" that Steuben inspired in the men also enabled the army, despite continuing hardships and spiraling citizen apathy, to stick single-mindedly to their task until they secured independence in 1783.

On that snowy evening of December 19, 1777, however, the exhausted men, while cautiously optimistic, resigned themselves to the task at hand.



in Snow

Huts



Hut Illuminated

We are going to work with all our Might and Diligence to [house] the Army in huts at this Place. The General seems resolved to keep us together if possible. Our Men, ... are almost worn out with the constant Marches and Fatigues of the Campaign, but the army is well disposed and will try to make the best of it. I wish I could tell you I was coming home to see you, instead I am gong to build me a House in the Woods...
General Jedediah Huntington to Relatives
20 December 1777