

[< Return to January – September 1777 >](#)  
[< Return to Table of Contents >](#)  
[< Corrections to this Section? >](#)

[< Next—NC 1777-1785 >](#)



## SEPTEMBER 1777 — FEBRUARY 1778



**11 September 1777** – BATTLE OF BRANDYWINE: The next major engagement for the 3rd Virginia Regiment was at Brandywine, Pennsylvania. It was the only time General Washington of the Americans and General Howe of the British met head-to-head in a battle, and the largest land battle of the war thus far. It was also not a good result for the Americans. From the American Revolution website:

*In July, Lt. Gen. William Howe's army took 264 British transports south toward Philadelphia from their encampment in New Jersey. As they approached Philadelphia, Howe was informed of the American fortifications and a small naval force in and along the Delaware River, blocking his path. He changed course to the Chesapeake Bay, planning to land at Elk Ferry and march his troops some 30 miles northeast to Philadelphia.*

*After Gen. George Washington's victory at the Battle of Princeton, he had moved his army into quarters near Morristown, New Jersey. He had spent the summer encamped in Watchung Mountains. When he learned of Howe's movement southward, Washington marched his army south to Wilmington, Delaware, arriving on August 25. That same day, Howe landed his army at Elk Head.*

*On July 8, Howe began embarking his 16,500 men on board the British naval transports at Sandy Hook, New Jersey.*

*His intention was to sail via the Delaware Bay to the Delaware River, threatening Philadelphia and preventing Washington from reinforcing Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates's northern army against Lt. Gen. John Burgoyne. In the process, Howe might force a battle against Washington.*

*On July 23, the British fleet set sail and reached the Delaware Bay a week later. Howe received misleading intelligence of American obstructions in the Delaware River that seemed to make an approach from that direction impracticable. He decided to enter the Chesapeake Bay, landing at the northernmost point possible and approach Philadelphia by land. The Americans were meanwhile kept guessing about Howe's destination. The sighting of the British fleet in the northeast Chesapeake Bay on August 22 and the subsequent British landing at Turkey Point, 8 miles below Head of Elk, Maryland, on August 25 finally put an end to all speculation.*

*Marching from positions along the Neshaminy Creek in Pennsylvania, the American main army passed through Philadelphia to Darby, reaching Wilmington, Delaware just as the British began their landing. Although Howe's landing was unopposed, his soldiers were seasick and exhausted. The*

*local Tory inhabitants and deserters from the American dragoons helped to re-equip the British, but this took some time. A concentrated American attack, given the disorganized state of the militia and the distance of the main army, was clearly impossible, and Howe was left to rest and reorganize his army.*

*On September 3, the majority of Howe's army started marching toward Philadelphia, moving forward in 2 divisions, one commanded by Lt. Gen. Wilhelm Knyphausen and the other by Maj. Gen. Charles Cornwallis. The next 5 days saw the opposing armies positioning themselves along the White Clay Creek, west of Newport and Wilmington. Washington expected Howe to march toward him in Wilmington. Howe preferred to meet the American force elsewhere, thus preventing Washington from making use of the advantageous ground he occupied there. He made a feint north towards Pennsylvania, forcing Washington to change his defensive ground, moving to the Brandywine River at Chadds Ford.*

*On September 8, Washington ordered Maxwell to take up new positions on White Clay Creek, while the main army encamped behind Red Clay Creek, just west of Newport, Delaware. A small British force marched to demonstrate against the American front while the British main army marched around Washington's right.*

*On September 9, Washington had seen through Howe's plan and ordered a redeployment of the American main army to Chad's Ford on the Brandywine Creek. They camped on the east bank.*

*Washington positioned his army on the high ground east of the Brandywine Creek. He positioned brigades and regiments at the main fords, including Buffington's Ford, Chad's Ford, and Pyle's Ford. Washington was told by an advisor that Howe would try to outflank them by sending his main force northward while a decoy force attacked at Chadds Ford. Washington was aware of this possibility, but had been assured by local informants that Jefferis' Ford, the next ford above Buffington's, was difficult to cross, because it was very deep, more than half the height of a man, and that the road southward was poor. Washington expected the British to cross at Chadds Ford and put most of his army there.*

*Washington concentrated the American defenses at Chadds Ford, but also prepared to prevent possible British flanking movements to the south or north. Pyle's Ford, south of Chadds Ford, was covered by 2 brigades of Pennsylvania militia, commanded Brig. Gen. John Armstrong. Greene's 1st Division was assigned the primary defense of Chadds Ford. Greene's troops straddled the Nottingham Road leading east from the Brandywine Creek. To Greene's right was Brig. Gen. "Mad" Anthony Wayne's 4th Division. Col. Thomas Procter's Continental Artillery Regiment was placed to Wayne's right, on the heights at Chadds Ford.*

*Chadds Ford was at the point where the Nottingham Road crossed the Brandywine Creek on the route from Kennett Square to Philadelphia. It was the last natural line of defense before the Schuylkill River. The Brandywine Creek, a shallow but fast-flowing creek, was fordable at a comparatively small number of places that could be covered fairly easily. At Chadds Ford,*

*made up of 2 fords about 450 feet apart, the creek was 150 feet wide and commanded by heights on either side. The surrounding area had thick forests and low hills, surrounded by farms, meadows, and orchards.*

*On September 11, Washington had been receiving conflicting reports throughout the morning about the location of Howe's army. He considered crossing the river to launch an assault on Knyphausen but held off. He wouldn't receive a reliable report until early afternoon, but by that would time, it would be too late.*

*At 6:00 A.M., Howe sent half his army, about an 8,000-man force, straight to Washington at Chadds Ford to act as decoy. This force was led by Maj. Gen. Wilhelm von Knyphausen. The rest of Howe's army marched north, 17 miles total, to cross the Brandywine Creek above the fords that Washington guarded. Howe then marched south to launch a surprise attack on the American right flank.*

*Knyphausen's force had advanced only 3 miles before running into Maxwell's outposts near Welch's Tavern. Knyphausen's men drove in the American pickets west of the creek. By 10:30 A.M., the British had cleared the west bank of the Brandywine Creek and took up positions on the high ground overlooking Chadds Ford.*

*After Washington had received reports from several officers that Howe was making a flanking movement, Washington planned to make an attack on Knyphausen's force. He then received a report from Sullivan that said the earlier reports were incorrect. Thus, Washington decided not to go ahead with his planned attack on Knyphausen.*

*At 11:00 A.M., Howe crossed the west branch of the Brandywine Creek at Trimble's Ford. He then marched east, crossing the east branch at Jeffries' Ford about 3 hours later. At 2:30 P.M., Howe had seized and occupied Osborne's Hill, just behind the American right flank. He then gave his troops an hour to rest.*

*After Howe was spotted, Washington had no choice but to make a defensive stand. He ordered his reserve to take up positions near the Birmingham Friends Meeting House. The house was a small Quaker church on the east side of the road leading southeast from Jeffries' Ford and about 2 miles north of Chadds Ford. Directly across the road to the west was Birmingham Hill, a small hill that was well-suited for defense.*

*Sullivan had received another report of British movements. The situation demanded swift measures, and Washington responded by ordering Sullivan to abandon Brinton's Ford and join the force at the Birmingham Meeting House, where Sullivan would take overall command of the 3 divisions. While putting his division into motion, Sullivan encountered Col. Moses Hazen, who had reported the sighting of the British advance guard. Sullivan rushed to take up positions on Battle Hill.*

*At 4:00 P.M., Howe's troops formed into line for the assault on Battle Hill. The attack began before Sullivan's troops had a chance to take up proper positions. One of his brigades gave way almost immediately. Washington ordered Greene to march to Sullivan's aide. On the right, the*

*American artillery opened fire on the advancing British troops. The British were forced to halt and take cover a short distance from the base of the hill.*

*At this point, Howe and Cornwallis ordered a series of attacks on the left, right and center of the hill, gradually forcing the Americans off the hill. After 1 1/2 hours of fierce hand-to-hand fighting, the British pushed the Americans back and took possession of Battle Hill. After the loss of the hill, Washington's priority for the rest of the battle was the successful withdrawal of the remainder of the army.*

*At 5:00 P.M., upon hearing of the ensuing battle to the north, Knyphausen launched his own attack on the weakened American center at Chadds Ford. They rapidly drove the Americans back and captured most of Washington's artillery pieces. Washington had no choice now but to break off the fight and escape eastward with his remaining army.*

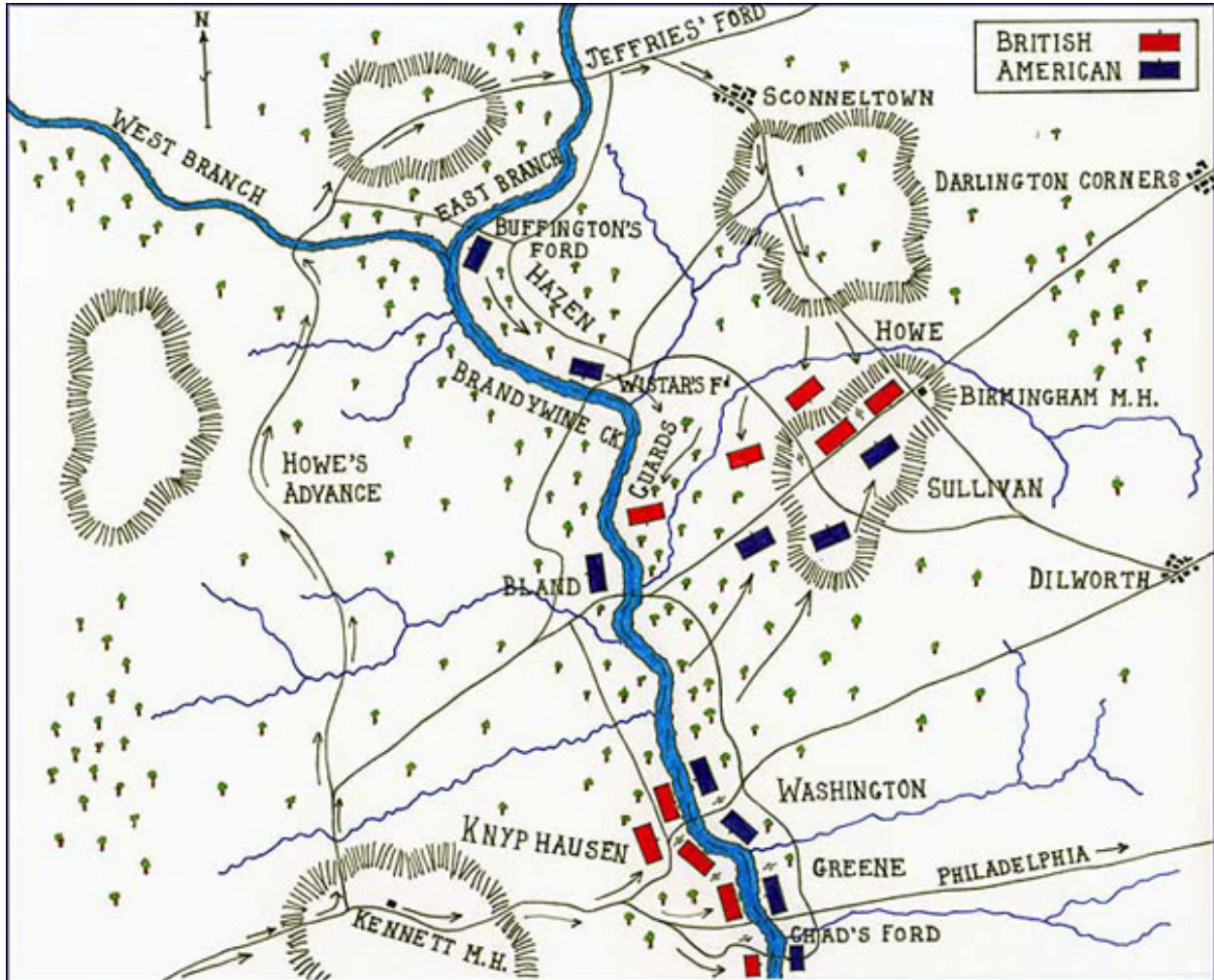


*Fighting continued until dusk, by which time ammunition was running low or was completely gone. Washington's army retreated to Chester, 12 miles east.*

*Washington attributed the defeat to bad intelligence reports rather than to a lack of fighting skill on their part. He also had made a serious error by leaving his right flank open. Even though Howe claimed a victory, he once again allowed the American army to escape.*

*On September 12, Washington issued orders for the troops to press on to Germantown. The exhausted British did not pursue the Americans through the night, but remained behind, camping on the battlefield, and treating the wounded and burying the dead.*

*The Battle of Brandywine was one of the largest land battles, as the only battle in which Washington and Howe fought head-to-head. The victory was a great morale booster for the American army. It is thought to be one of the first battles in which the Ferguson rifle was used and in which the Betsy Ross flag was flown.*



*(Source: Reprinted with permission from uswars.net)*

**4 October 1777** – BATTLE OF GERMANTOWN: The Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania, was the last engagement reported by **David Baker** in his pension application in 1832. From the American Revolution website:

*Gen. William Howe was camped outside of Philadelphia and Gen. George Washington's American forces were looking to drive Howe away from Philadelphia and re-capture it. Washington basically devised a plan to divided his army into 4 groups with each group taking a different path and to have a night march. Hopefully in the early morning his troops would hit Howe's army from 4 different roads all at the same time. This was a brilliant plan if it could be carried out successfully. It would surprise the British on both flanks and in the center and hopefully it would compel the British to retreat from the vicinity Philadelphia and leave it open for the rebel re-capture.*

*The British were camped from along School House Lane and Church Street. The British units from left to right were a division of Hessians under Lt. Gen. Baron William Knyphausen, 2 British support brigades, a division of British regulars under James Grant, a division of the Queens Rangers (Tory units raised in the colonies) and 2 battalions of British Guards. Located near the Chew House was the 14th regiment under Lt. Col. Thomas Musgrave. His job was to support the 2nd Light Infantry Battalion under Capt. Allen McLane if it came under attack. A half of a mile away was the Logans House, where General Howe's HQ was.*

*For Washington he was going to have the Pennsylvania militia under Gen. John Armstrong hit the British on the left while militia under Col. William Smallwood and David Formann hit the British on the right. In the center would be Washington's best troops, Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne and Sullivan's Division. Between these troops and the militia to the left would be 4 brigades all under Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Greene which was Washington's largest prong.*

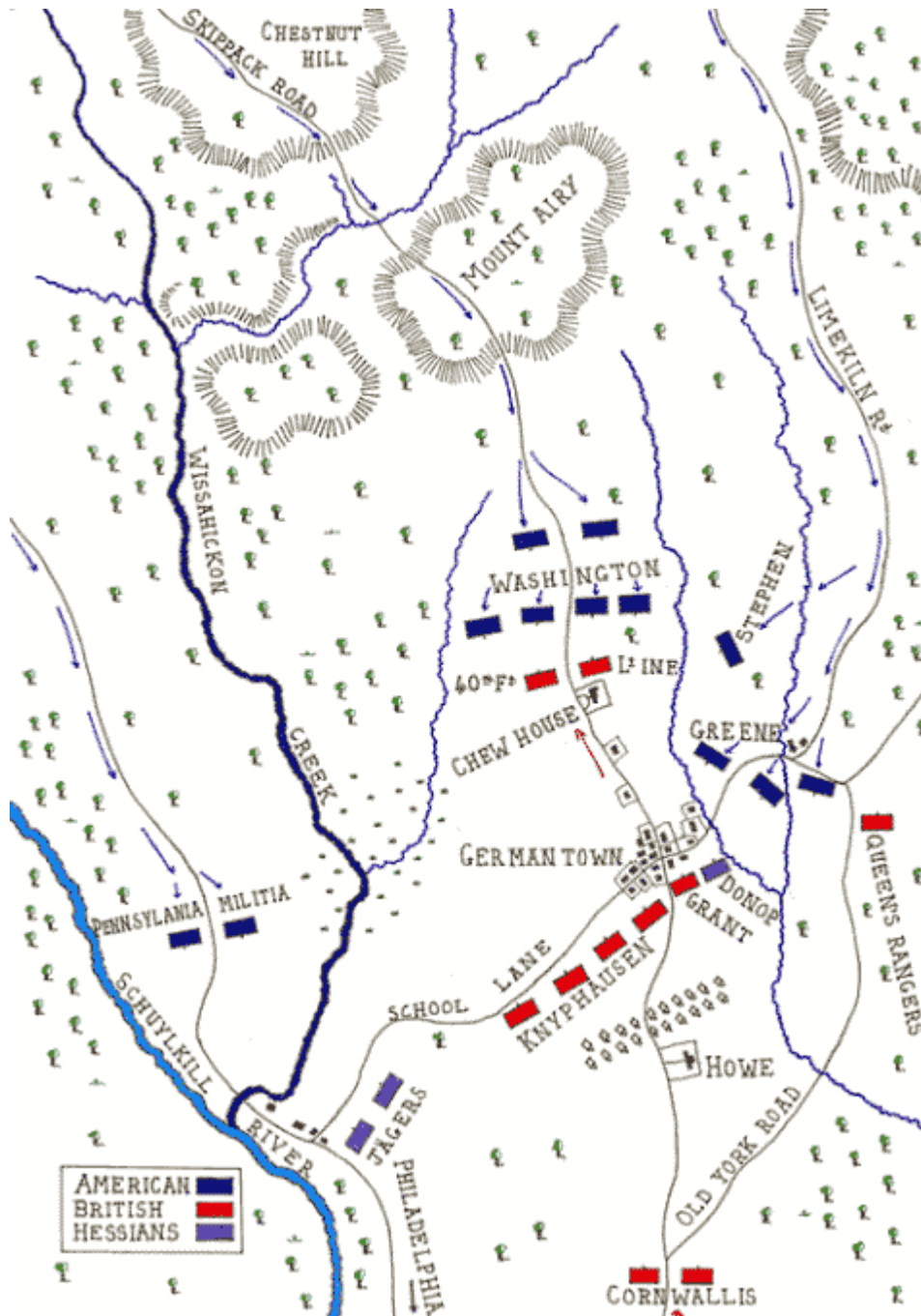
*The opening of the battle consisted of Sullivan's advance with Brig. Gen. Thomas Conway leading the way. He smashes the 2nd Light Infantry, while at the same time Wayne's troops deploy to the left. The 14th British regiment moves forward under the fog and temporally stabilizes the front while covering the retreat of the 2nd Light Infantry. While they retreat they burn the fields, covering the battle with smoke.*

*Some of the retreating British troops take cover in the Chew House. Henry Knox tries to bombard the house, but to little affect. Next, Maxwell orders his troops to take the house by storming it. Thirty minutes and 50 dead later, Washington calls the attack off and has the house cordoned off. The delay of 30 minutes cost Washington the surprise in his attack. While Sullivan's troops are engaged with the Hessians and Wayne's troops are engaged with the James Grant Division, Greene's men after an hours delay show up and drive toward Church Street.*

*Greene's troops attacked the Queens Rangers and the 2 British Battalions with 2 of his 4 brigades. One of his brigades under, Maj. Gen. Alexander Mcdougall's inexplicably never advanced. This blunder caused both Brig. Gen. Peter Muhlenberg and Brig Gen. George Weeden to be flanked by British troops. The Militia under John Armstrong to the left side of the battle fought elements of the Hessian troops throughout the entire battle. Also, 2 militia units under David Forman and William Smallwood never even showed up. This, in turn, caused Greene's troops to be without reinforcements. During all this fighting Greene's fourth and last brigade shows up under the now drunk Brig. Gen. Adam Stephen. This brigade after being separated from the rest of Greene's forces by a night march, wanders all across the battlefield towards the sound of the fight. His men then proceed to mistakenly fire into the back of Wayne's troops.*

*Adam Stephen's blunder of firing into the back of Wayne's troops convinced Wayne and his men that they were surrounded so they naturally decided to extract themselves from the fight in order to prevent his unit from being routed and captured. Sullivan seeing his right flank fall back decided to do the same and soon a general retreat followed. This didn't go as planned because at the same time the British after hearing an American call for ammunition decided now was the time to charge. The British charged the American lines and routed them. During the rout, the 9th Virginia in Greene's division found themselves to be surrounded by British troops, so they surrendered in mass.*

The Americans finally re-organized themselves at Pennypacker's Mill. The battle lasted almost 3 hours. During this time, the battle proved that Americans could stand up and fight against the British. Also, it provided a morale boost because of the near win. Plus, it got the French to think about helping the American cause. Of course, their help would prove to be immeasurable at the Battle of Yorktown.



(Source: Reprinted with permission from uswars.net)

Washington blamed the lost battle, literally all on the fog-of-war. Although the fog was a roadblock in Washington's plans several other factors contributed to the failure.

*The drunkenness of Stephen who, at the climax of the fight, fired into his own troops. The militia not showing up or providing very little support to the Continentals. The delays, especially the delay at the Chew House, which cost Washington the surprise and the hour delay for Greene which enabled the British to prepare for an attack. Also, the shortage of ammo was a crucial factor in the battle and, to some extent, Washington himself can be blamed because of the complexity of his plan involving a night march with untrained troops, especially the militia.*

*In his report to Congress, Washington blamed the fog and the Chew House "annoyance" for the collapse. Stephen was court-martialed, found guilty of drunkenness, and dismissed from the army. Greene's unfortunate tardiness was perhaps the biggest factor in blunting the attack. It may be that Washington's strategy was too sophisticated for field officers who lacked tactical experience; and, there were many new, raw soldiers among both the Continentals and the militia. What snatched victory from Washington's grasp were these imponderables. The Americans believed they had nearly succeeded at Germantown, and this lifted morale, despite losses.*

*Howe reported 537 killed and wounded and 14 captured. He recognized, after his narrow victory, that he could not string out his troops as he had done without courting attack. A few weeks later, he evacuated Germantown and reestablished his troops in a line of forts north of Philadelphia.*

*Ultimately Washington would move his troops into winter quarters at a place in Pennsylvania called Valley Forge.*



## THE WINTER AT VALLEY FORGE

**December 1777 – May 1778 – WINTER QUARTERS:** From until February 1778, the men of the 3rd Virginia Regiment were in winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Their experience there was brutal. As described by Joan Marshall-Dutcher, Historian (retired), Valley Forge National Historical Park:

*"A light snow fell as 12,000 weary men made their way up Gulph Road to the area selected only days before as winter quarters."*

*"Lewis Hurt, age 17, a private from Connecticut. Benjamin Blossom, age about 31 years, a soldier from Massachusetts. George Ewing, age 23, an Ensign of the Seventh Company in the Third New Jersey Regiment. Joseph Plumb Martin, age 15 when he enlisted in Connecticut's Third Company on July 6, 1776; age 16 when he arrived at Valley Forge. They came from Virginia, North Carolina, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New Jersey...They represented every state in the new union."*

*"Some were still boys -- as young as 12 -- others in their 50s and 60s. They were described as fair, pale, freckled, brown, swarthy and black. While the majority were white, the army included both Negroes and American Indians."*

*"Each man had few possessions and these he carried with him. His musket -- by far the most popular weapon -- a cartouche or cartridge box. If he had neither, the infantryman carried a powder horn, hunting bag and bullet pouch. His knapsack or*



*haversack held his extra clothing (if he was fortunate enough to have any), a blanket, a plate and spoon, perhaps a knife, fork and tumbler. Canteens were often shared with others and six to eight men shared cooking utensils."*

*"The first order of business was shelter. An active field officer was appointed for each brigade to superintend the business of hutting. Twelve men were to occupy each hut. The officers' hut, located to the rear, would house fewer men. Each brigade would also build a hospital, 15x25 feet. Many of the Brigadier Generals used local farmhouses as their quarters. Some, including Henry Knox, later moved into huts to be closer to their men."*



*"The huts provided greater comfort than the tents used by the men when on campaign. But after months of housing unwashed men and food waste, these cramped quarters fostered discomfort and disease. Albigeance Waldo complained, 'my Skin & eyes are almost spoil'd with continual smoke.' Putrid fever, the itch, diarrhea, dysentery and rheumatism were some of the other afflictions suffered by the Continental troops."*

*"Little is known about the women but there were women at Valley Forge. Junior officers' wives probably remained in the homes of their husbands and socialized among themselves. The enlisted men's wives lived and labored among the troops, some working as housekeepers for the officers; others as cooks. The most common positions were nurse and laundress. A washerwoman might work for wages or charge by the piece."*

*"The army was continually plagued with shortages of food, clothing and equipment. Soldiers relied both on their home states and on the Continental Congress for these necessities. Poor organization, a shortage of wagoners, lack of forage for the horses, the devaluation of the Continental currency spoilage, and capture by the British all contributed to prevent these critical supplies from arriving at camp."*

*"An estimated 34,577 pounds of meat and 168 barrels of flour per day were needed to feed the army. Shortages were particularly acute in December and February. Foraging expeditions were sent into the surrounding countryside to round up cattle and other supplies. In February three public markets opened. Farmers were encouraged to sell their produce. Fresh Pork, Fat Turkey, Goose, Rough skinned Potatoes, Turnips, Indian Meal, Sour-Crout, Leaf Tobacco, New Milk, Cyder, and Small Beer were included in the list of articles published in the Pennsylvania Packet and circulated in hand bills."*

*"Entertainment at Valley Forge took many forms. The officers liked to play cricket (known also as wicket) and on at least one occasion were joined by His Excellency, the Commander-in-Chief. Several plays were staged including Joseph Addison's 'Cato' which played to a packed audience. A common recreation was drinking, when spirits were available. And the soldiers liked to sing."*

*"Throughout the winter and early spring, men were frequently 'on command,' leaving camp on a variety of assignments. Units were formed to forage for food, some were granted furloughs, and individuals regularly returned to their home states to recruit new troops. In January Jeremiah Greenman reported, 'all ye spayr officers sent home to recrute a nother regiment & sum on furlow.'"*

*But those who marched out of Valley Forge in June of 1778, off to the Battle of Monmouth and eventual victory for the new Republic, would not include the men who enlisted at the home of Captain John Strother in February of 1776. Their two-year enlistments at an end, David Baker and his companions of the 3rd Virginia were discharged at Valley Forge in February 1778. For them, they believed, the war was over.*

**< Return to January – September 1777 >**

**< Next—NC 1777-1785 >**

**< Return to Table of Contents >**

**< Corrections to this Section? >**