

### The Love of His Men

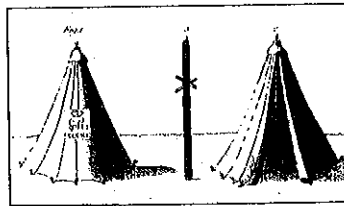
*From Baron von Steuben's instructions to his company officers:*

**A** captain... must pay the greatest attention to the health of his men, their discipline, arms, accoutrements, ammunition, clothes and necessaries. His first object should be to gain the love of his men by treating them with every possible kindness and humanity, inquiring into their complaints and when well founded, seeing them redressed. He should know every man of his company by name and character. He should often visit those who are sick, speak tenderly to them, see that the public provision, whether of medicine or diet, is duly administered, and procure them besides such comforts and medicines as are in his power.



Baron von Steuben

# 28 Valley Forge to Vincennes



**In bad weather, even muskets spent the night under cover, in little tents like these.**

Things weren't going well for George Washington. He lost two battles in Pennsylvania: one at Brandywine, the other at Germantown. Then Sir Billy Howe captured Philadelphia, and that meant that Congress—which was meeting in the State House (now called Independence Hall)—had to flee. The fall of 1777 turned to winter. Howe was warm and comfortable in Philadelphia, as he had been the winter before in New York. He was partying again. Loyalist families entertained him and his men. Eighteen miles away, Washington, Lafayette, Baron von Steuben, and the American soldiers were miserable.

Washington had brought his army to a place called Valley Forge. It had been named for a nearby iron foundry, although the foundry was now in ruins—the British had destroyed it. Valley Forge was a good site from a military point of view. The land was high, near enough to Philadelphia to keep watch on that city, but not so close that the British could cause trouble with surprise raids.

There was little there, except for farmland and the Schuylkill (SKOO-kill) River. There were no buildings for the army to use as barracks, and, in December when they arrived, the ground was covered with snow. The men had marched a long distance, and many were in rags. Within a few days the river turned ice hard. A cold wind began blowing. The soldiers pitched tents and built huts of sticks, logs, and mud plaster. Washington, who was precise and cared about appearances, insisted that they all be the same size.

Picture 2,000 dirt-floored, drafty wooden huts lined up in streets like a village, and you have an idea of Valley Forge. If you look at the

## Lord—Lord—Lord

*Dr. Albigence Waldo of Connecticut, a surgeon serving at Valley Forge, wrote about the Continental army's misery in his diary:*

ground, you may see blood. Some of the soldiers had no shoes, and their toes froze and left bloody tracks. Now add hunger to the scene, and you begin to get an idea of that terrible winter. But that was not the worst of it. Disease swept the camp. About 2,000 men died.

That is the way it was at Valley Forge. There wasn't enough clothing. There wasn't enough to eat. It was fiercely cold. The officers feared a mutiny, and there were desertions. But not many. Most of those who slipped over to the British in Philadelphia were newcomers to the colonies.

There were no battles fought at Valley Forge. None at all. But something astounding happened there. A spirit evolved. It was amazing; the men who made it through that winter were better for it. They became a team: strong, confident, and proud of themselves, their country, and their leaders.

Dec 12th We are ordered to march over the river—it snows—I'm sick—eat nothing—no whiskey—no baggage—Lord—Lord—Lord. The army were till sunrise crossing the river—some at the wagon bridge and some at the raft bridge below. Cold and uncomfortable....  
Dec 14th Poor food—hard lodging—cold weather—fatigue—

nasty clothes—nasty cookery—vomit half my time—smoked out of my senses—the Devil's in it—I can't endure it—why are we sent here to starve and freeze....Here comes a bowl of beef soup—full of burnt leaves and dirt, sickish enough to make a Hector spew—away with it Boys—I'll live like the chameleon on air.

Washington tries to cheer his troops at Valley Forge. Benjamin Rush was shocked at the conditions: "The troops dirty, undisciplined, and ragged...bad bread; no order; universal disgust."



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### Liberty Lover

**I**t was lucky for the rebellious American colonies that Thaddeus Kosciuszko had a broken heart. You see, when he tried to elope with the girl he loved, her father wouldn't allow it. Kosciuszko hoped to forget the girl by coming to America to fight for freedom. He arrived just in time to join the American army in the battles of Fort Ticonderoga and Saratoga; then he headed south to do battle in the Carolinas.



Thaddeus Kosciuszko

**K**osciuszko was more than a warrior. He was a fine thinker who cared about liberty. He became a friend of Thomas Jefferson. After the Revolutionary War, the grateful nation gave him U.S. citizenship and 500 acres of land in Ohio. But he wasn't ready to settle down. He returned to Europe to fight for freedom in Poland and France and Russia. Kosciuszko also freed all the serfs (who were almost like slaves) on his Polish estate (and that left him poor and in debt). In his will he asked that his American land be sold and the money used to buy freedom for slaves.

George Washington had a lot to do with that. At first Washington lived in a tent, among his men, and put up with hardships as they did. Later, he made his headquarters in a nearby four-room stone house, but the soldiers remained awed by his example. A young Frenchman who was there wrote of General Washington,

*I could not keep my eyes from that imposing countenance... Its predominant expression was calm dignity, through which you could trace the strong feelings of the patriot, and discern the father, as well as the commander of his soldiers.*

Martha Washington could often be seen with a basket in her arms, bringing food and socks and cheer to those who needed it. Von Steuben made a difference that cold winter, too. He began training 100 men at a time and soon had the whole army drilled. The Americans were astonished. British officers did not conduct drills; they left that to sergeants. This man did the drilling himself. He seemed to thrive on hard work, and nothing upset him. He was always good-humored, even when he was shouting and swearing.

Before long the Americans could march and maneuver, load and fire, use bayonets, and respond to complicated orders. But that wasn't enough for von Steuben. He expected them to be neat and shaved. Even rags, he told them, could be clean. He made all the officers set their watches by the same clock. He was determined that this army was going to be precise and proud of itself. Soon it was just that.

Washington appointed Nathanael Greene as quartermaster general. The quartermaster is in charge of supplies. Greene protested that he didn't want the job, but General Washington knew what he was doing. Greene brought enormous energy and determination to everything he did. He tramped around the countryside, found big caches of food and supplies, and hauled them to Valley Forge. By spring there was plenty of food, and clothing, too.

In June the British left Philadelphia and headed for New York. They'd had a pleasant winter, but they hadn't accomplished a thing. The men who had gotten through the winter at Valley Forge were now a strong fighting force. They knew they could endure almost anything. They were ready to follow George Washington wherever he led.

While all that was going on at Valley Forge, the Indians, who were being paid by the British for American scalps, were creating havoc on the frontier. (The Americans paid for British scalps.) But no matter which side they chose, the Native Americans would be losers. Their land was being taken from them. The European way of life and the Native American way of life seemed incompatible.

## Death of a Brave Spy

**C**aptain Nathan Hale was a 21-year-old school-teacher just out of Yale College when he accepted a dangerous mission: to go behind British lines and spy on troop movements. The British caught him and, without even a trial, hanged him. His last words were, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Hale was paraphrasing a popular English essayist, Joseph Addison, who wrote, "What a pity is it that we can die but once to serve our country." Hale's bravery made him a hero. In this engraving an artist imagines the scene, with British Major Cunningham preparing for the execution with a noose and a coffin.

Most of the settlers didn't understand what was happening. When they heard of Indian raids and scalplings, they were horrified. They believed what they had been told—that Indians were savages. They knew the English were signing treaties that gave Native Americans protection and rights; that was another reason they wanted the British out.

So most colonists thought of Indian fighters as great heroes. Those Indian fighters, men like George Rogers Clark, believed they were doing the right thing. Mostly they just wanted to push the Native Americans west, to free new lands for the settlers.

Clark was a frontiersman and a Patriot, as well as an Indian fighter. Born in Virginia, near Jefferson's home, Clark knew Indians well and could talk to them in a way they understood: he had learned to use their form of oratory. They called him *Mitchi Malsá*, which means Big Knife.

Clark was smart; he was also brave and daring. He had hardly any schooling, but he read all the books he could find. Some people called him the "Washington of the West." Like George Washington he was tall, very strong, and a surveyor—but that was where the resemblance ended. He had none of the dignity of the Virginia planter. Clark's personality swung from fierce temper to calm persuasion, but rarely rested anywhere.

He was 25 years old in 1778, when he persuaded Virginia's governor, Patrick Henry, to let him gather a force to take the Ohio Valley from the British and their Indian allies. Then he proceeded to win some astounding battles.

Here is some of what he did: with just 175 men and a few barges, Clark captured three strategically located British forts: Cahokia, Kaskaskia, and Vincennes. Then he talked the French inhabitants of the region into coming over to the American cause.

It was the battle of Vincennes that made him famous. When Clark fought at Fort



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George Rogers Clark took Kaskaskia with 175 men. It surrendered in 15 minutes.

Vincennes, he had only 150 men, most of whom were sick with chills and fever.

"A desperate situation," he said, "needs a desperate resolution." Clark sent a note to the British commander demanding the surrender of the fort. The British leader refused.

Clark attacked. He decided to confuse his enemy. He kept his men yelling like maniacs and demons as they fired through gun holes into the fenced fort. To those inside, it seemed as if a huge army was attacking. The fort depended on cannons for protection, but cannons are useless against moving targets. Clark never stopped moving. The British surrendered.

Later, England moved back into much of that region. But, for a while, it seemed as if a young backwoodsman had captured the Ohio territory. The Americans were frustrating the British. Men like George Rogers Clark just wouldn't fight the way they were expected to fight—and they never seemed to give up.

### The Battle of the Kegs

What were the Americans to do about the British ships in the river near Philadelphia? David Bushnell was sure to figure out something, thought Colonel Joseph Blandin, who was in charge of the American forces in Philadelphia. Bushnell had already invented a device that, maybe, he could do something about those British ships. The colonel was right. Bushnell came up with a simple plan: fill wooden barrels (called kegs) with gunpowder, then tie the barrels out in the river, he expected the kegs to bump into the British ships and wham!—that would trigger an explosion.

Nothing happened. It looked as if the kegs would just harmlessly beat the British ships. And they would have. If it hadn't been for some curious British sailors. They hauled a few of the kegs onto a barge where they did explode. Actually, they didn't do much harm, but they certainly caused a commotion. The alarm and con-



David Bushnell's submarine Turtle. It failed to sink the British ship Eagle in 1776—but the British were so surprised that they fled anyway.

ternation of the British was extremely great—the Military of every kind in order was seen in an instant, running in every degree of confusion and in every direction," said a report of the day. The Americans found it all funny, especially after Francis Hopkinson (a signer of the Declaration of Independence) told the tale in a tongue-in-cheek poem. With mock seriousness, he described the heroic British fight against some wooden kegs. Here's the last stanza of his poem:

*Such feats did they perform that day  
Against those Wicked kegs, sir,  
That years to come, if they get home,  
They'll make their boasts and brags, sir.*

The British, it seems, weren't poetry lovers. Soon afterward they burned Hopkinson's house.