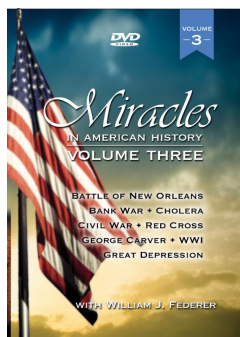
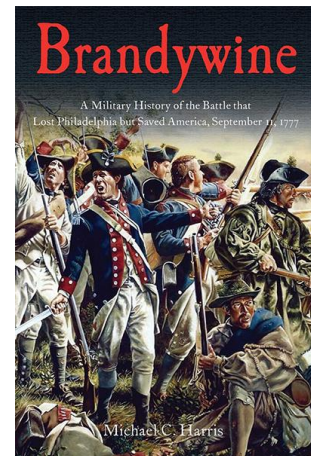


American Minute with Bill Federer
1777 Freezing Valley Forge & Starving Ships "If those few thousand men endured that long winter of suffering ... what right have we to be of little faith?"

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Washington lost the **Battle of Brandywine** on September 11, 1777, and was force to retreat toward **Philadelphia** ... [continue reading ...](#)

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Near the same time, **British General Burgoyne's** troops marched south from **Canada** toward **Albany, New York**, expecting **British**

reinforcements from **Brigadier-General Barry St. Leger's** troops marching east through the Mohawk River Valley, and **General William Howe's** troop



marching north from New York City up the Hudson River Valley.

Reinforcements never arrived.

St. Leger's troops were **halted** by a **torrential thunderstorm** following the **bloody Battle of Oriskany** near the American Fort Stanwix.

General Howe, instead of helping **Burgoyne**, decided to set sail from New York City to capture **Philadelphia** -- **America's largest city and busiest port.**

Howe's inexplicable action was considered to be, at least in part, motivated by **professional rivalry** between British Generals.

Howe's lack of support for Burgoyne's plan contributed to the **British defeat** at the **Battle of Saratoga**. **Nearly 6,000 British troops** **surrendered.**

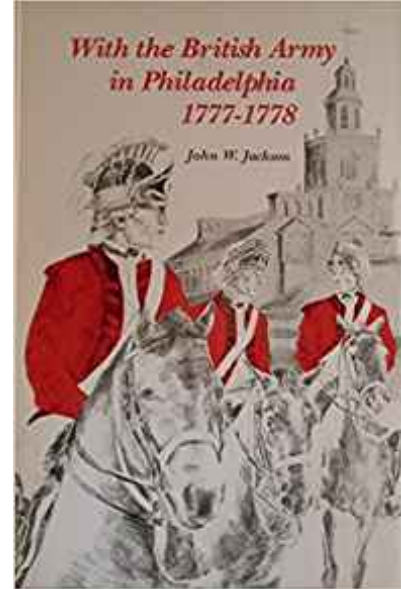


The American victory at Saratoga persuaded **France** to enter the war, transforming it from simply **Britain suppressing rebellious colonies** into a **full global conflict** between the world's two largest military powers.

Britain's military resources now had to be **stretched across the world.**

In his rogue plan, **British General William Howe** landed and marched his troops toward **Philadelphia**, which was effectively the **capitol of the United States.**

In **European warfare**, if a general captured an **enemy's capitol**, the war was considered over.



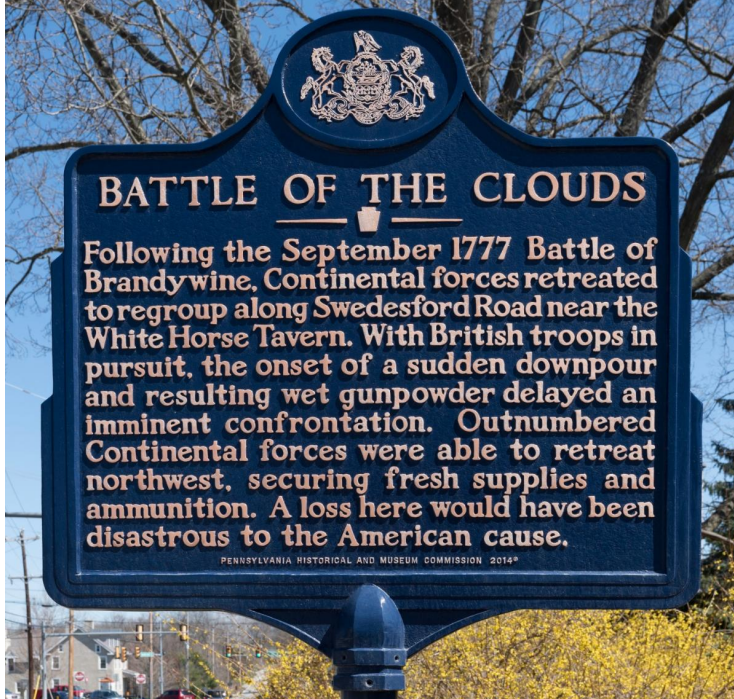
Rather than surrender, America's **Continental Congress** quickly **evacuated Philadelphia**.

They even took the down **the Liberty Bell** and carried it with them so the British could not melt it into musket balls.

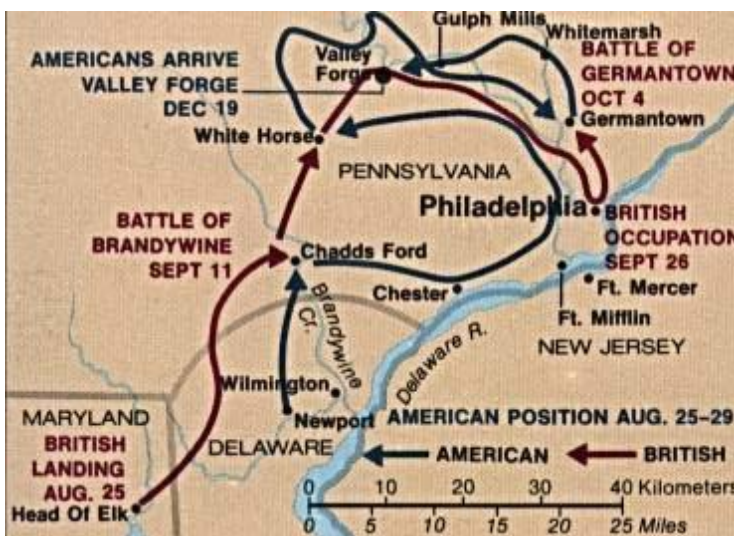
Congress had written an order, December 12, 1776, effectively leaving the entire cause of independence to rest upon Washington's shoulders :

"... until Congress shall otherwise order, **General Washington** shall be possessed of **full power** to order and **direct all things relative to** ... the operations of **the war.**"

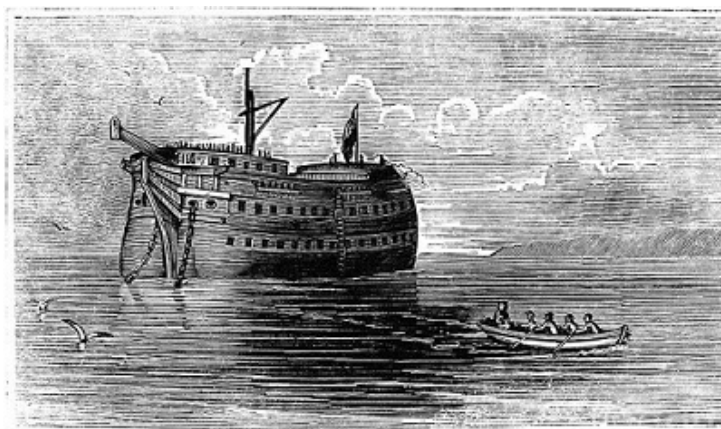
Washington attempted to fight the **British**, but at the **Battle of the Clouds**, torrential **rains** drenched the gunpowder of both sides, **rendering all firearms useless.**



Washington then led his 11,000 American soldiers on a forced retreat to a place 25 miles distant from Philadelphia -- **Valley Forge**, on December 19, 1777.



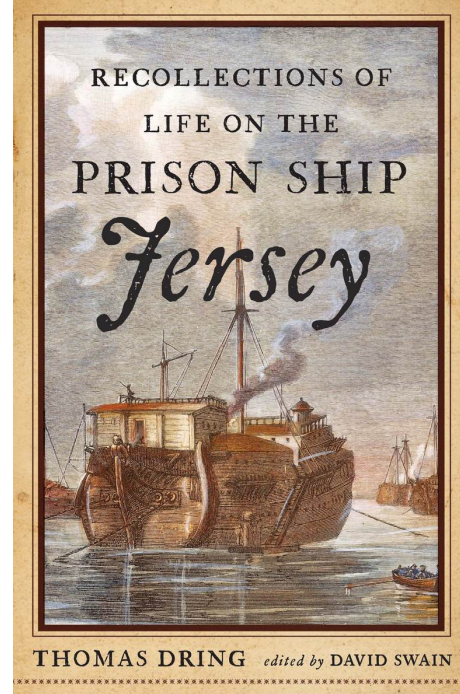
Meanwhile, another **11,000 Americans were dying on British starving ships** *Scorpion, Hope, Falmouth, Stromboli, Hunter, and Jersey.*



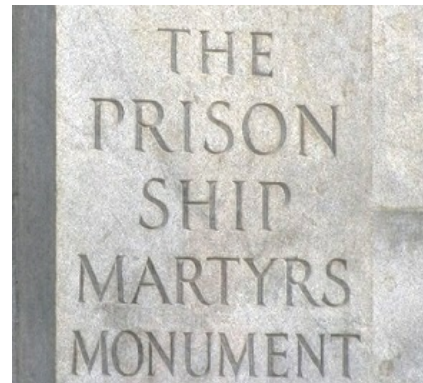
Yale President Ezra Stiles recounted May 8, 1783:

"O that my head were waters,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,"

that I might weep the
thousands of our brethren that
have **perished in prison ships-**
-



... in one of which, the *Jersey*,
then lying at New York, **perished
above eleven thousand the last
three years** -- while others have
been barbarously exiled to the
East Indies for life."



The Prison Ship Martyrs Monument stands in Fort
Greene Park, in the New York City borough of Brooklyn.

Soldiers at **Valley Forge** were from every State in the
new union, some as young as 12 and others as old as
60.

Though most were of European descent, some were
African American and American Indian.

Among them
were:

- **Marquis de Lafayette,**
- **Colonel "Mad Anthony"**

Wayne,

- future Chief Justice **John Marshall,**
- Lutheran pastor turned Major-General **John Peter Muhlenberg,** and
- George Washington's Jewish physician, **Dr. Philip Moses Russell.**



Lacking food and supplies, **soldiers died at the rate of twelve per day.**

Over **2,500 froze to death** in bitter cold, or perished from hunger, typhoid, jaundice, dysentery, and pneumonia.

In addition, hundreds of horses perished in the freezing weather.

A Committee from Congress reported on the soldiers:

"Feet and legs froze till they became black, and it was often necessary to amputate them."



Wives and children followed the army, **mending clothes, doing laundry, scavenging for food, and caring for the sick.**

An estimated **500 women died at Valley Forge.**

President Calvin Coolidge told the **Daughters of the American Revolution**, April 19, 1926:

"We have been told of the **unselfish devotion of the women** who gave their own warm garments to **fashion clothing** for the suffering Continental Army during that **bitter winter at Valley Forge.**

The burdens of the war were not all borne by the men."

A surgeon from Connecticut, **Dr. Albigeance Waldo**, wrote in his diary:

"December 25th — Christmas. We are still in tents, when ought to be in huts — the poor sick, suffer much in tents this cold weather.

But we now treat them differently from what they used to be at home, **under the inspection of old women and Doct. Bolus Linctus.** We give them mutton and grogg — and a captial medicine once in a while — to start the disease from its foundation at once.

... We avoid piddling pills, powders, Babus's Linctus's cordials (cough lozenges) — and all such insignificant matters whose powers are only rendered important by causing the patient to vomit up his money instead of his disease."

Two days before Christmas, George Washington wrote:

"We have this day no less than 2,873 men in camp UNFIT FOR DUTY because they are barefooted and otherwise naked ..."

Washington added:

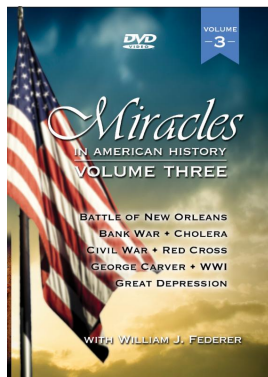
"... that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place ... this Army must inevitably ... starve, dissolve, or disperse, in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can."

The **Continental Congress** talked of replacing **General George Washington** with **General Horatio Gates** of Battle of Saratoga fame.

Called the "**Conway Cabal**," it was orchestrated by **Thomas Conway**, who Washington had passed over for promotion.

When an anonymous letter was sent to **Virginia Governor Patrick Henry**, attempting to enlist him in the plot, **Henry immediately sent the letter to George Washington** to warn him of the **insidious scheme**.

Maryland delegate **Charles Carroll**, the only Catholic to sign the Declaration, **was instrumental in persuading Congress to keep Washington as Commander-in-Chief**.



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Hessian Major Carl Leopold Baurmeister noted the **only thing that kept the American army from disintegrating** was their "**spirit of liberty**."

A farmer reportedly observed **General Washington** kneeling in prayer in the snow.

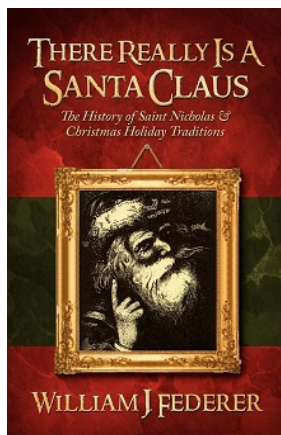


President Ronald Reagan stated in a Radio Address, December 24, 1983:

"The image of **George Washington kneeling in prayer** in the snow is one of the most famous in American history."

The Boy Scout Handbook, 5th edition (1948), in the section 'Duty to God':

"You worship God regularly with your family in your church or synagogue ... faithful to Almighty God's Commandments. Most great men in history have been men of deep religious faith. **Washington knelt in the snow to pray at Valley Forge.**"



[There Really is a Santa Claus- The History of Saint Nicholas and Christmas Holiday Traditions](#)

President Dwight Eisenhower broadcast from the White House for the American Legion's Back-to-God Program, February 7, 1954:

"We remember the picture of **the Father of our Country, on his knees at Valley Forge** seeking divine guidance in the cold gloom of a bitter winter.

Thus **Washington** gained strength to lead to independence a nation dedicated to the belief that each of us is divinely endowed with indestructible rights."

On April 21, 1778, **General Washington** wrote to Lt. Col. John Banister:

"No history ... can furnish an instance of an army's suffering such uncommon hardships as ours has done, and bearing them with the same patience and fortitude --

... To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lay on, without shoes, by which their marches might be traced by the blood from their feet, and almost as often without provisions ...

marching through frost and snow, and **at Christmas** taking up their winter quarters within a day's march of the enemy, without a house or hut to cover them

... and submitting to it without a murmur, is a mark of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be paralleled."



George Washington sent a desperate plea for help to **Virginia Governor Patrick Henry**:

"For several days past **we have experienced little less than a famine in the camp** and have had much cause to dread a **general mutiny and dispersion.**

From every appearance, there has been heretofore so **astonishing and deficiency in providing** that unless the most vigorous and effectual measures are at once everywhere adopted ... **we shall not be able to make another campaign."**

Outraged, **Henry** wrote to the Continental Congress:

"I am really shocked at the management of Congress."



Spurred to look into the situation, it was discovered that there was mismanagement by the **Continental Army's Quartermaster, General Thomas Mifflin**, who had been caught up in the **Conway Cabal**.

A controversy arose as to whether he exhibited **incompetence**, or, as some allege, **was waylaying supplies** bound for Valley Forge into **his own warehouses** to be **sold to the highest bidder**.

When **Mifflin** was confronted, **he resigned**.

Washington chose as the new **Quartermaster General, Nathaniel Greene**, and within days Valley Forge had clothing, food, and other supplies.

A Christmas carol that would have lifted the country's spirits at this time was "**God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen**," first published in 1760 on a broadsheet in London as a "New Christmas carol."

It was "the most common and generally popular of all carol tunes":

"God rest ye merry,
gentlemen,
Let nothing you
dismay.



**For Jesus Christ our Savior,
Was born on Christmas Day;**

To save us all from Satan's power,
When we were gone astray.

(Chorus)
O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy."

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Em C
 God rest ye mer - ry, gen - tle - men, let no - thing you dis -
 From God out Hea - v'nly Fa - ther a - bles - sed An - gel
 "Fear not then," said the An - gel, "Let no - thing you a -
 Now to the Lord sing pra - ises, all you with - in this

4 B7 Em
 may, Re - mem - ber, Christ our Sa - vior was
 came, And un - to cer - tain Shep - herds brought
 fright, This day is born a Sa - vior a
 place, And with true love and bro - ther - hood each

7 C B7 Am
 born on Christ - mas day. To save us all from
 ti - dings of the same: How that in Beth - le -
 bles - sed ho - ly sight, To free all those who
 o - ther now em - brace; This Ho - ly Child of

10 G B7 Em D7
 Sa - tan's pow'r when we were gone a - stray, O
 hem was born the Son of God by Name,
 trust in Him from Sa - tan's pow'r and might."
 Christ - mas shall fill our hearts with grace:

13 G B7 Em D7
 ti - dings of com - fort and joy, Com - fort and joy O

17 G B7 Em
 ti - dings of com - fort and joy.

Overcoming the freezing conditions, soldiers prepared to fight.

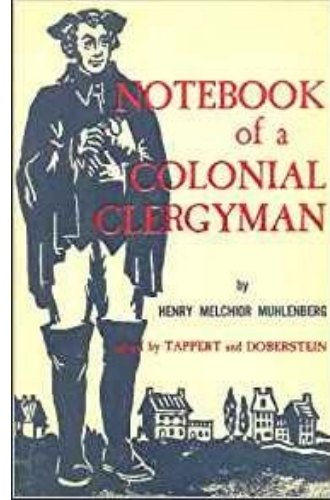
In February, 1778, there arrived in the camp **Prussian drill master Baron Friedrich von Steuben**, who had been a member of the elite General Staff of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia.

Baron von Steuben, who was sent with the recommendation of Ben Franklin, drilled the soldiers daily, transforming them from volunteers into a disciplined army.



Lutheran Pastor Henry Muhlenberg, whose sons Peter and Frederick served in the First U.S. Congress, wrote in *The Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman*:

"I heard a fine example today, namely that **His Excellency General Washington** rode around among his army yesterday and admonished each to fear God, to put away wickedness ... and to **practice Christian virtues ...**"



Muhlenberg continued:

"From all appearances **General Washington** does not belong to the so-called world of society, for he respects God's Word, believes in the atonement through Christ, and bears himself in humility and gentleness.

Therefore, the Lord God has also singularly, yea, marvelously preserved him from harm in the midst of countless perils, ambuscades, fatigues, etc., and has hitherto graciously held him in his hand as a chosen vessel."

Washington successfully kept the army intact through the devastating winter, and gave the order at **Valley Forge**, April 12, 1778:

"The Honorable Congress having thought proper to recommend to the United States of America to set apart Wednesday, the 22nd inst., to be observed as a day of **Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer**,

that at one time, and with one voice, the righteous dispensations of **Providence** may be acknowledged, and His goodness and mercy towards our arms supplicated and implored:

The General directs that the day shall be **most religiously observed** in the Army; that no work shall be

done thereon, and that the several **chaplains** do prepare discourses."

On May 2, 1778, **Washington** ordered:



"The Commander-in-Chief directs that **Divine service** be performed every Sunday ...

While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion.

To the distinguished **character of Patriot**, it should be **our highest Glory to laud the more distinguished Character of Christian.**"

President Dwight Eisenhower stated December 24, 1953, lighting the **National Christmas Tree**:

"**George Washington** long ago rejected exclusive dependence upon mere materialistic values. In the **bitter and critical winter at Valley Forge**, when the cause of liberty was so near defeat, his recourse was sincere and earnest prayer ...

As **religious faith** is the foundation of free government, so is **prayer** an indispensable part of that **faith.**"

On May 1, 1778, a messenger arrived at **Valley Forge** with a letter from **Benjamin Franklin** in Paris, announcing that the **French government** had signed **two treaties to help the Americans**: a Treaty of Amity and Commerce; and a Treaty of Alliance, pledging military aid.

Washington declared a day of celebration, beginning with religious services.

Speaking at **Valley Forge** during the crisis of the Great Depression, **President Herbert Hoover** admonished May 30, 1931:

"If, by the **grace of God**, we stand steadfast in our great traditions **through this time of stress**, we shall insure that we and our sons and daughters shall see these fruits increased many fold ...

If those few thousand men endured that long winter of privation and suffering ... held their countrymen to the faith, and by that holding held fast the freedom of America, what right have we to be of little faith?"

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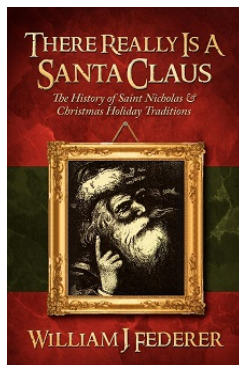
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