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From the Diary of Albigeance Waldo, Surgeon at Valley Forge, 1777.

*** Quote ***



December 6

The Enemy forming a Line from towards our right to the extremity of our left upon an opposite long height to ours in a Wood. Our men were under Arms all Day and this Night also, as our Wise General was determined not to be attack'd Napping....

December 8

All at our Several Posts. Provisions and Whiskey very scarce. Were Soldiers to have plenty of Food and Rum, I believe they would Storm Tophet...

December 11

At four o'clock the Whole Army were Order'd to March to Swedes Ford on the River Schuylkill, about 9 miles N.W. of Chestnut Hill, and 6 from White Marsh our present Encampment. At sun an hour high the whole were mov'd from the Lines and on their march with baggage. This Night encamped in a Semi circle nigh the Ford. The enemy had march'd up the West side of Schuylkill - Potter's Brigade if Pennsylvania Militia were already there, and had several skirmishes with them with some loss on this side and considerable on the Enemies....

I am prodigious Sick and cannot get anything comfortable - what in the name of Providence am I to do with a fit of Sickness in this place where nothing appears pleasing to the Sicken'd Eye and nausiating Stomach. But I doubt not Providence will find out a way for my relief. But I cannot eat Beef if I starve, for my stomach positively refuses to entertain such Company, and how can I help

that?

December 12

A Bridge of Waggons made across the Schuylkill last Night consisting of 36 waggons, with a bridge of Rails between them each. Some skirmishing over the River. Militia and dragoons brought into Camp several Prisoners. Sun Set - We were order'd to march over the River - It snows - I'm Sick - eat nothing - No Whiskey - No Forage - Lord - Lord - Lord. The Army were 'till Sun Rise crossing the River - some at the Waggon Bridge and some at the Raft Bridge below. Cold and uncomfortable.



December 13

The Army march'd three miles from the West side of the River and encamp'd near a place call'd the Gulph and not an improper name neither, for this Gulph seems well adapted by its situation to keep us from the pleasures and enjoyments of this World, or being conversant with anybody in it. It is an excellent place to raise the Ideas of a Philosopher beyond the glutted thoughts and Reflexions of an Epicurian. His Reflexions will be as different from the Common Reflexions of Mankind as if he were unconnected with the world, and only conversant with immaterial beings. It cannot be that our Superiors are about to hold consultations with Spirits infinitely beneath their Order, by bringing us into these utmost regions of the Terraqueous Sphere. No it is, upon consideration for many good purposes since we are to Winter here-

1. There is plenty of Wood and Water
2. There are but few families for the soldiery to Steal from - tho' far be it from a Soldier to Steal
- 3.
4. There are warm sides of Hill to erect huts on
5. They will be heavenly Minded like Jonah when in the Belly of a Great Fish
6. They will not become home Sick as is sometimes the Case when Men live in the Open World - since the reflections which will naturally arise from their present habitation, will lead them into the more noble thoughts of employing their leisure hours in filling their knapsacks with such materials as may be necessary on the Journey to another Home.

December 14

Prisoners and Deserters are continually coming in. The Army which has been surprisingly healthy hitherto, now begins to grow sickly

from the continued fatigues they have suffered this Campaign. Yet they still show a spirit of Alacrity and Contentment not to be expected from so young Troops. I am Sick - discontented - and out of humour. Poor food - hard lodging - Cold Weather - fatigue - Nasty Cloaths - nasty Cookery - Vomit half my time - smoak'd out my senses - the Devil's in't - I can't Endure it - Why are we sent here to starve and Freeze - What sweet Felicities have I left at home; A charming Wife - pretty Children - Good Beds - good food - good Cookery - all agreeable - all harmonious. Here all Confusion - smoke and Cold - hunger and filthiness - A pox on my bad luck. There comes a bowl of beef soup - full of burnt leaves and dirt, sickish enough to make a Hector spue - away with it Boys - I'll live like the Chameleon upon Air. Poh! Poh! crys Patience within me - you talk like a fool. Your being sick Covers you mind with a Melancholic Gloom, which makes every thing about you appear gloomy. See the poor Soldier, when in health - with what cheerfulness he meets his foes and encounters every hardship - if barefoot, he labours thro' the Mud and Cold with a Song in his mouth extolling War and Washington - if his food be bad, he eats it notwithstanding with seeming content - blesses God for a good Stomach and Whistles it into digestion. But harkee Patience, a moment - There comes a Soldier, his bare feet are seen thro' his worn out Shoes, his legs nearly naked from the tatter'd remains of an only pair of stockings, his Breeches not sufficient to cover his nakedness, his Shirt hanging in Strings, his hair dishevell'd, his face meagre; his whole appearance pictures a person forsaken and discouraged. He comes, and crys with an air of wretchedness and despair, I am Sick, my feet lame, my legs are sore, my body cover'd with this tormenting Itch - my Cloaths are worn out, my Constitution is broken, my former Activity is exhausted by fatigue, hunger and Cold, I fail fast I shall soon be no more! and all the reward I shall get will be - "Poor Will is dead." People who live at home in Luxury and Ease, quietly possessing their habitations, Enjoying their Wives and families in peace, have but a very faint Idea of the unpleasing sensations, and continual Anxiety the Man endures who is in Camp, and is the husband and parent of an agreeable family. These same People are willing we should suffer every thing for their Benefit and advantage, and yet are the first to Condemn us for not doing more!!

December 15

Quiet. Eat Pessimens, found myself better for their Lenient Operation. Went to a house, poor and small, but good food within - eat too much from being so long Abstemious, thro' want of palatables. Mankind are never truly thankfull for the Benefits of life, until they have experienc'd the want of them. The Man who has seen misery knows best how to enjoy good. He who is always at ease and has enough of the Blessings of common life is an Impotent Judge of the feelings of the unfortunate....

December 16

Cold Rainy Day, Baggage ordered over the Gulph of our Division, which were to march at Ten, but the baggage was order'd back and for the first time since we have been here the Tents were pitch'd, to keep the men more comfortable. Good morning Brother Soldier (says one to another) how are you? All wet I thank'e, hope you are so (says the other). The Enemy have been at Chestnut Hill Opposite to us near our last encampment the other side Schuykill, made some Ravages, kill'd two of our Horsemen, taken some prisoners. We have done the like by them....

December 18

Universal Thanksgiving - a Roasted pig at Night. God be thanked for my health which I have pretty well recovered. How much better

should I feel, were I assured my family were in health. But the same good Being who graciously preserves me, is able to preserve them and bring me to the ardently wish'd for enjoyment of them again

December 21

[Valley Forge.] Preparations are made for huts. Provisions Scarce. Mr. Ellis went homeward - sent a Letter to my Wife. Heartily wish myself at home, my Skin and eyes are almost spoil'd with continual smoke. A general cry thro' the Camp this Evening among the Soldiers, "No Meat! No Meat!" - the Distant vales Echo'd back the melancholy sound - "No Meat! No Meat!" Immitating the noise of Crows and Owls, also, made a part of confused Musick.

What have you for your dinner boys? "Nothing but Fire Cake and Water, Sir." At night, "Gentlemen the Supper is ready." What is your Supper Lads? "Fire Cake and Water, Sir." Very poor beef has been drawn in our Camp the greater part of this season. A Butcher bringing a Quarter of this kind of Beef into Camp one day who had white Buttons on the knees of his breeches, a Soldier cries out - "There, there Tom is some more of your fat Beef, by my soul I can see the Butcher's breeches buttons through it."

December 22

Lay excessive Cold and uncomfortable last Night - my eyes started out from their Orbits like a Rabbit's eyes, occasion'd by a great Cold and Smoke.

Our Division are under Marching Orders this morning. I am ashamed to say it, but I am tempted to steal Fowls if I could find them, or even a whole Hog, for I feel as if I could eat one. But the Impoverish'd Country about us, affords but little matter to employ a Thief, or keep a Clever Fellow in good humour. But why do I talk of hunger and hard usage, when so many in the World have not even fire Cake and Water to eat....

It is not in the power of Philosophy...to convince a man he may be happy and Contented if he will, with a Hungry Belly. Give me Food, Cloaths, Wife and Children, kind Heaven! and I'll be as contented as my Nature will permit me to be.

This Evening a Party with two field pieces were order'd out. At 12 of the Clock at Night, Providence sent us a little Mutton, with which we immediately had some Broth made, and a fine Stomach for same. Ye who Eat Pumkin Pie and Roast Turkies, and yet Curse fortune for using you ill, Curse her no more, least she reduce you Allowance of her favours to a bit of Fire Cake, and a draught of Cold Water, and in Cold Weather too.

*** [Quote](#) ***

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