

From the Diary of Albigeance Waldo,

Surgeon at Valley Forge, 1777

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. [...] 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. There are warm sides of Hill to erect huts on They will be heavenly Minded like Jonah when in the Belly of a Great Fish
4. 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.

good location

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 - smok'd out my senses - the Devil's in't - I can't Endure - 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!!

sick

miss home easier to endure

when healthy

jealous of a home

civilians criticize too easily

¹ Source: <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/D/1776-1800/war/waldo.htm>

David Jones

Primary Source Analysis

The document is a set of two entries from the diary of Dr. Albigence Waldo, surgeon at Valley Forge in 1777. Other than the name, the author is unknown. As a diary, its likely purpose is to help him cope with his difficult situation by giving him a place to vent his feelings and work out his thoughts.

In 1777, the British were defeated at the Battle of Saratoga. As a result, the foreign powers such as France and Spain began helping the American rebel colonists. That autumn and winter, British troops rested in Philadelphia and American troops lodged some distance away in Valley Forge. That experience was brutally difficult. There was very little food in very harsh conditions. Men mutinied, froze extremities, suffered homesickness. Thanks to the help from Europeans like Marquis de Lafayette and Friedrich von Steuben, American colonists came out of the experience a better trained Continental Army.

Being a diary it can only be imagined that the intended audience is himself.

Topic Frame

Dr. Waldo contrasts the area they chose to camp with less desirable spots. It has good covers and few farms for soldiers to steal from. A second contrast is between how soldiers who are healthy will put up with difficulty better than soldiers who are sick. He explains that civilians criticize the army without appreciating how hard a soldier's life is. He is himself sick, homesick, and miserable. He is jealous of people in their own homes.

Dr.

If Dr. Waldo is indeed a surgeon, then his work could be more reliable than a less-educated person because education may have trained him to communicate clearly. The fact that it is a diary could support the document - who lies to their diary?

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