



1779-80

The weather was cold enough to cut a man in two.

—Pvt. Joseph Plumb Martin, 8th Connecticut Regiment

For two agonizing winters, Morristown sheltered the main body of the Continental Army under Gen. George Washington. In early 1777 the general rebuilt and reorganized the young army. Two years later, the harshest winter in decades, some 10,000 soldiers endured relentless cold and snow, meager supplies, and constant hunger. Led by Washington and mustering their own determination, they emerged as a cohesive force.

Since the Revolutionary War, each generation has found its own way of telling Morristown's story and honoring those who lived it. These chapters unfold in many ways at Morristown National Historical Park. Exhibits display artifacts lovingly preserved by soldiers' families. Restored homes remind us that war affected civilians. Original encampment sites are places to contemplate those trying winters or take a walk in the woods.

Morristown, protected behind the Watchung Mountains from British forces 30 miles east in New York City, was a strategic choice for the Continental Army's 1777 winter encampment. Soldiers sought shelter wherever they could—in public buildings, private homes, stables, barns, sheds, and tents.

Gen. George Washington hoped to spend the winter rebuilding and retraining his war-weary army, but it dwindled further because of desertions and expired enlistments. Then smallpox struck. Washington's decision to inoculate soldiers and civilians alike saved countless lives. Reinforcements finally arrived in spring 1777, and the army moved out in June.

During the winter of 1779-80, at least 20 snowstorms cut supply lines for food, clothes, and shoes. "The weather was cold enough to cut a man in two," wrote Pvt. Joseph Plumb Martin. Despite the conditions, the business of maintaining the 10,000-man army con-



Above: An imagined scene shows many of the Ford Mansion's occupants outside as Martha Washington arrives in late 1779 to join her husband at his winter quarters. From left: George (1776) and Martha (1772) Washington portraits by Charles Willson Peale;

Washington's dress sword from first inauguration; makeshift frying pan fashioned from a shovel; Brown Bess musket; Joseph Plumb Martin's first-hand account of his experience as a Revolutionary War soldier; Isaac Whitehead's canteen.

ALL PHOTOS NPS UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED. FORD MANSION AND ENCAMPMENT PAINTINGS—NPS/KEITH ROCCO; GEORGE AND MARTHA WASHINGTON PORTRAITS—B. COURTESY OF MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION; BROWN BESS MUSKET—THE GEORGE C. NEUMAN COLLECTION, VALLEY FORGE NHP.

tinued. Thousands of acres of trees were felled for over 1,000 log huts, built in precise rows on the hillsides. Huts housed 12 enlisted men; field officers had larger quarters. Units from each state generally encamped as a group.

Routine work included hauling and chopping wood, cooking, digging latrines, troop inspections, and guard duty. Many soldiers were accompanied by wives and children. Two women gave birth in camp.

Theodosia Ford, widow of Jacob Ford Jr., a colonel in the local militia, allowed Washington to use her large home as his headquarters. Ford and her four children squeezed into two rooms while Washington and his senior staff took over most of the house.

On New Year's Eve 1779, Martha Washington arrived to spend the winter with her husband. Like other officers' wives, she traveled to her husband's winter quarters every year.

Hastily built additions (since removed) provided an office for the aides and a kitchen for the headquarters. Servants and slaves tended to domestic duties. Military guards stood watch over a constant stream of visitors. Washington wrestled with the problems of the army and the precarious coalition of states that was not yet a nation. The Continental Congress could not fund the army, and ruinous inflation made the purchase of badly needed food and clothing almost impossible.

The general sought help from neighboring New Jersey counties and other states. The response from New Jersey was immediate and generous; it "saved the army from dissolution, or starving," wrote Washington.

In May 1780 the Marquis de Lafayette arrived at the Ford Mansion with welcome news of aid from France. The next month the camp dispersed, as the last of the troops were ordered into battle yet again.

Continental Army Winter Camps	
Units directly under George Washington	
1775-76	Cambridge, Massachusetts
Early 1777	Morristown, New Jersey
1777-78	Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
1778-79	Redding, Connecticut, and Middlebrook, New Jersey
1779-80	Morristown (Jockey Hollow)
1780-81 and 1781-82	Hudson Highlands of New York, and Morristown area
1782-83	New Windsor, New York



Above: An imagined scene depicting typical daily activities at the Pennsylvania Line encampment, 1779-80.