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Fife and Drum in the Transformation of the Soundscape of the Continental Army at Valley Forge

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FIFE AND DRUM IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUNDSCAPE OF THE CONTINENTAL ARMY AT VALLEY FORGE

By

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Chapter 1:

Music has always been tied to the military. While many associate music with military ceremonies, such as parades and military funerals, the tactical role music played on the battlefields of war is often forgotten. Music was used to communicate commands down the battlefield amidst the chaos of war. Fifes and drums have a long-standing history of being the “instruments of choice” to not only communicate commands, but also as a tool for maintaining discipline. During the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge, fife and drums served as integral components of military tactics that required retraining in order to successfully win the American Revolutionary War.

Music has been heavily integrated with military tactics through the use of field music. Music’s use in the military could be divided into two categories: field music and bands of musicians.¹ Field bands were used on the battlefield for military tactics, whereas the bands of musicians were used for esprit de corps and morale boosting events. On the battlefield, the instrumentation was primarily fifes, drums, and trumpets or bugles. Many of the musicians serving on the field were young boys with only basic training.² These young musicians were typically commanded by a fife or drum major, or eventually a music master.

Fife and drums were a fundamental component to military tactics for all armies during the eighteenth century, including the American Revolutionary War. While musicians had many roles at camp, their primary role was to relay information across the battlefield. Musicians had to stay near the commander of the unit to hear the commands being given. The fife and drum were selected for this role because of the dynamics that could be projected out across the battlefield,

² Camus, "Military Music."
when the human voice failed. As Fairfax Downy states in his book titled Fife, Drum, & Bugle, the musicians “held the army together, maintained a schedule and discipline in the camp and on parade, and coordinated movements in the battle where they could be readily distinguished from the multitude of shouts and other noises.” The music needed to be easily distinguished over the clamor of voices, the foe’s musicians, the noise of guns, and the intermittent chaos that arises within battle.

The adoption of the fife was after the Swiss armies made the utilization of this instrument famous. A fife is a cylindrical traverse flute that has a narrower bore (main body aside from where air is blown into the instrument) that accounts for the shrill sound. The fife is similar to the renaissance flute, but has a much narrower bore. The practice of using the fife spread across Europe and eventually to the English, where there are mentions of the use of fife and drum dating back to 1540. This soon dwindled after the supply of fifes could not keep up with the demand for them, choosing in the late seventeenth century the hautboy (an ancestor to the modern-day oboe) to replace the use of fife. Eventually, the English re-adopted the use of the fife sometime between 1745 and 1746 as the instrument of the infantry. The fife was a sound choice for infantry, as it could be easily distinguished over the chaos of battle due to the high

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5 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 4.
10 Montagu et Al, “Military Music.”
pitch, similar to that of a piccolo. Human ears naturally have a higher sensitivity to these higher frequencies, which is why they can be heard over the battlefield’s pandemonium.

Many of the soldiers were regular people without musical training, which meant these tunes needed to be easily heard and understandable. Many common tunes can be found in fife tune books, such as “Soldiers’ Joy” and “Irish Washerwoman”. Musicians in the British colonies were trained using the British military traditions based upon imported fife books, which were aimed at commercial sales. These fife manuals used three types of tunes: English Duty Melodies, Scotts Duty Melodies, and Miscellaneous Popular Tunes, but the musicians of the continental army used a variety of tunes.

The drum served as both the cadence on the march and the military signal, while the fife would overlap the drum beatings with common melodies. On the battlefield, the drum essentially served as the “walkie talkie” to communicate orders from a commander down the battlefield; meanwhile, the fife’s melodies helped serve as a morale boost to troops. While in camp, the fife and drum relayed the order for the day of what was to be done. This could be anything from waking up to packing up the camp.

In contrast to the field music, the bands of musicians served within the encampments. These musicians were typically of higher quality, as they were not always young boy soldiers; instead, they were either professional musicians, or civilians with lots of musical experience. These bands served the ceremonial music, such as parades. They were not officially recognized until later in the eighteenth century. Due to the increased experience of the musicians serving in

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12 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 83.
13 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 4.
14 Camus, “Military Music.”
15 Camus, “Military Music.”
these bands, there was often more variety. Many of the musicians could perform on multiple instruments.\^16

Amongst the band musicians, the musicians needed a superior to look to for guidance. This role soon became that of a drum major. A drum major was to supervise and train the musicians.\^17 This position followed the practices of the British army’s British Manual of 1764 as the basis for their regulations until the army entered Valley Forge in the cold winter from 1777-1778. While musician uniforms were more differently colored to show the distinction between positions, the drum major uniform was even more elaborate to clearly depict this position of leadership.\^18

The fife major served similarly to that of the drum major. Between the drum major and fife major, the drum major was the more senior position in the chain of command.\^19 This fife major was always an experienced musician and thus was not expected to march before the fifes and drums; instead, the fife major marched amongst the ranks of the musicians. The fife major was responsible for selecting what music was to played alongside the beatings of the drum. The fife major uniform did not contain anything to distinguish this position of leadership.\^20

These instruments were synonymous with military tactics during the American Revolutionary War. Their use of echoing commands, whether across the battlefield, or in camp, was essential to maintaining order and discipline. The lack of discipline prior to Valley Forge

\^16 Montagu et Al, “Military Music.”
\^18 The Military Band in the United States Army Prior to 1834”, 90.
\^19 The Military Band in the United States Army Prior to 1834”, 92.
\^20 The Military Band in the United States Army Prior to 1834”, 93.
was not only throughout the army, but also within the field musicians and band musicians.

Without discipline, the hope of building a new nation would not survive.
Chapter 2:

In the fall of 1777, General Washington launched the Philadelphia campaign against the British. After refusing to engage in an open battle that Washington knew would wipe out the remnants of his rebel army, General William Howe decided he would need to use other means to win the war. While General John Burgoyne was in Canada, General Howe wanted to capture the main capitol of the rebels, the great city of Philadelphia. In an attempt to block General Howe, Washington moved his troops to the shores of Brandywine Creek, where Washington knew Howe would need to cross in order to overtake Philadelphia.\(^{21}\) Even with Washington’s valiant effort to block, General Howe was able to outmaneuver and move the British troops into Philadelphia. Washington’s plan had a major loophole: General Howe knew the Jeffries Ford was left undefended.\(^{22}\) Howe surprised the Continental army and, following the battle, the Americans suffered heavy casualties, losing approximately 1,100 men.\(^{23}\) Private Elisha Stevens, describing the event, remarks:

The Battle was at Brandy wine it began in the morning and Held til tonight
without much Seasation of arms Cannons Roaring muskets Cracking Drums
Beating Bumps Flying all Round. Men a dying woundeds Horred Grones which
would Greave the Heardist of hearts to See Such a Dollful Sight as this to See our
Fellow Creators Slain in such a manner as this.\(^{24}\)

In his remark on the “Cracking Drums”, Private Stevens was illustrating the need for the musicians to be heard over the disarray of noises that emerge from the battlefield.

\(^{22}\) Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 247.
\(^{23}\) Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 250.
\(^{24}\) Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783 (Chapel Hill, NC: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1979), 255.
Luckily, by the time the British army arrived in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress had already fled the city for fear of falling into the British’s hands. Following this loss at Brandywine, Washington chose to surprise a small encampment of British soldiers at Germantown, by attacking from all four sides.\textsuperscript{25} This plan required absolute synchronization and coordination, but his complex plan, while great on paper, could not be executed properly.

The Maryland and New Jersey militias never arrived at Germantown to execute Washington’s complex plan; thus, when the Pennsylvania militia arrived, they were quickly pinned down.\textsuperscript{26} While the front of the column made it to both Brandywine and Germantown, by the time the rear column arrived, the battle was already over.\textsuperscript{27} Unlike the British armies, the colonists’ army was not marching in close order drill. Instead, they were marching in “column of files” that they had learned from their Native American warfare, which took up to four times the amount of space, which took double the time.\textsuperscript{28} In close order drill, the rear can catch up to the front in a mere 30 minutes, but until close order drill was instructed, it could take up to 2 hours for the rear to catch up to the front.\textsuperscript{29} As Palmer illustrates, “until the tail arrived, no effective preparation for action could occur.”\textsuperscript{30} While the army could hold their own when fighting with guerrilla warfare tactics, amidst an open field they were “practically useless before the trained veterans of Europe.”\textsuperscript{31}

Following the tremendous loss at the Battle of Brandywine, Germantown, and losing control of Philadelphia, the morale of the troops hit a new low; now, the colonists were not only

\textsuperscript{25} Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 254.  
\textsuperscript{26} Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 254.  
\textsuperscript{27} John McAuley Palmer, General Von Steuben (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1937), 156.  
\textsuperscript{28} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 155  
\textsuperscript{29} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 156.  
\textsuperscript{30} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 156.  
\textsuperscript{31} Joseph Beaty Doyle, Frederick William von Steuben and the American Revolution; Aide to Washington and Inspector General of the Army (Steubenville, OH: The H. C. Cook Co, 1913), 82.
without crucial supplies, but also ready to give up the war they had worked for. Knowing that things needed to change, General Washington moved troops to a small town called Valley Forge, a mere 20 miles northwest from Philadelphia.\footnote{Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 218}

The decision of when and where to set a training encampment was originally posed to the Council of War on October 29, 1777, by General Washington, following the decision not to attack the British in Philadelphia.\footnote{Benjamin H. Newcomb, “Washington’s Generals and the Decision to Quarter at Valley Forge,” The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography. vol. 117, issue 4 (Oct 1993): 311.}

Washington and his generals were all in agreement that if a winter encampment were to happen, the army would not emerge until spring with their new training. Whitemarsh originally emerged as a potential spot for the winter encampment. This spot lacked wood for cabins and other crucial supplies and would not allow enough time to react if the British planned a surprise attack, as they would be combined with the pre-existing troops there.\footnote{Newcomb, “Washington’s Generals and the Decision to Quarter at Valley Forge,” 313.}

Washington originally would have preferred to scatter the army amongst smaller encampments from Reading to Lancaster, but in this situation, the encampments would have had to compete for food and supplies.\footnote{Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 274.}

Major General Nathanael Greene wished for the army to encamp at Wilmington, so that the army could harass the British troops in nearby Philadelphia; however, with much consideration, this location was too close to the city for their retraining to go unnoticed.\footnote{Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 274.}

Valley Forge was offered as a potential site by Lord Stirling (William Alexander) and Brigadier General James Irvine. Both focused on the plentiful amounts of wood that could be used to build, while also remaining as a strategic location for the army begin their retraining.\footnote{Newcomb, “Washington’s Generals and the Decision to Quarter at Valley Forge,” 318.}
Military drill and discipline were atrocious prior to Valley Forge. Each commanding officer had their own form of drill, either Prussian or French, but never consistent. A letter from 1777 published in the New Jersey Gazette stated that “It was almost impossible to advance or retire in the presence of an enemy without dis ordering the line and falling into confusion,” depicting how even military basics were disorderly and chaotic.\(^{38}\) Many soldiers claimed to have drill skills and commonly scoffed at the British armies, but were too proud to admit their lack of proficiency.

Policy and the practice of punishment was also atrocious prior to Valley Forge. There were some guidelines for how an officer should discipline, but these guidelines lacked understanding.\(^{39}\) Before the use of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (which emerged in 1950), officers had to draw upon a broad range of influences on how to practice the art of discipline, including from the British tradition of army codes.\(^{40}\) Punishment was to be used to reinforce hierarchy and authority of a commanding officer, while also maintaining the discipline without any desertion or rebellion against officers.\(^{41}\) This was meant to be a tool to enforce standards, but not be used in excess like the British or Prussian armies, as the Continental army served as volunteers. Punishments needed to be enough to enforce discipline, but also maintain numbers with the short-term enlistments.

Punishments were divided into two categories: capital and corporal. Corporal included slashings or beatings by a superior officer, primarily used on the enlisted.\(^{42}\) In comparison,

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\(^{38}\) Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American, 218.

\(^{39}\) Caroline Cox, A Proper Sense Of Honor: Service And Sacrifice In George Washington's Army (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 75.

\(^{40}\) Cox, A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army, 75.

\(^{41}\) Cox, A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army, 76.

\(^{42}\) Cox, Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army, 74.
capital punishment was death, instead of beatings, either by firing squad or hanging which could apply to officers and enlisted. When officers needed to be punished, they typically got reprimanded by their superior officer and dismissed from the military if the case was severe enough, or “drummed out of camp” unless the offense was more serious, such as treason.43

Upon the arrival of troops at Valley Forge, December 19, 1777, the cold winter was just beginning to set in. Equipped with tattered uniforms and broken muskets, on average 8-10 men deserted daily, while others considered mutiny.44 In a letter to William Buchanan, the head Commissary officer, General George Washington noted the mood of the army.

The spirit of desertion among the Soldiery, never before rose to such a threatening height, as at the present time. The murmurs on account of Provisions are become universal, and what may ensue, if a better prospect does not speedily open, I dread to conjecture.45

It was honorable to fulfill the term of enlistment and return home; desertion was dishonorable and could mean corporal punishment.

The Continental Congress was running out of funds and began debating General Washington’s effectiveness as a commander. While Washington had numerous allies, a rumor had spread that the Board of War intended to replace Washington with General Horatio Gates, following Gate’s victory at Saratoga, and Washington’s losses at Brandywine and Germantown. General Thomas Conway, an Irish native who volunteered with the French in 1777 to assist the Continental Army, was openly opposed to Washington’s leadership. In a letter from General

43 Cox, Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army, 74.
44 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 196.
Conway to General Gates, Conway exclaims, “Heaven has been determined to save your Country; or a weak Genl and bad Counsellors would have ruined it.”46 Prior to his appointment as General, Washington was adamantly against Conway’s promotion, as this position would appoint him as the first Inspector General of the Continental Army, which Washington felt he did not deserve.47 Conway had served alongside Gates at the Battle of Saratoga, but while it was his plan for inspector general that was approved by congress, Washington still did not believe in his abilities to inspect. Many disgruntled members of congress and within the army that did not believe in Washington’s leadership are said to have sided with Conway and gave them their full support.48 This overarching dispute became known as the “Conway Cabal”. Historians do not know the full state of the disgruntle or how much was due to supersensitivity of the officers, but it can be certain that it influenced the situation at Valley Forge.

Through the political games between Washington and the Conway Cabal, the soldiers at Valley Forge continued to suffer in the cold winter without food and supplies. Albigence Waldo expressed this in his diary.

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.49

With morale low, food resources depleted, and facing the bone-chilling cold, it was not a surprise so many men deserted, for “only a fool for reasons of immediate material interest,” would

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continue to stay through these ghastly conditions. In a personal memoir, Joseph Plumb Martin also remembered the low morale.

We then had but little, and often nothing to eat for days together, but now we had nothing and saw no likelihood of any better determent of our condition. Had there fallen deep snows or even heavy and long rain-storms, the whole army must inevitably have perished. Or had the enemy, strong and well provided as he then was, thought fit to pursue us, our poor emaciated carcasses must have ‘strewed the plain.’ But a kind and holy Providence took more than notice and better care of us than did our country.

The brutal sufferings of the Continental Army can only be described as one of the bleakest moments of the American Revolutionary War, when all hope seemed lost.

On top of the supply challenges, enlisted men faced even greater challenges than the officers. Officers had slightly better conditions than their enlisted soldiers. NCOs and privates stayed in a one room cabin with 10-12 men stacked to the ceiling in bunkbeds, when cabins were available. In the beginning, many of these cabins had not been built, forcing all enlisted to stay in tents, but as cabins became available, higher enlisted ranks were able to sleep inside. Many of the field grade officers were privileged to stay in log cabins at camp; the general officers stayed with “private residences well away from the center of camp.” Officers were privileged to stay in cabins with 1-2 rooms and only 3-4 per cabin. These cabins were somewhat drafty and were

50 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 195.
53 Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 276.
54 Van Doren, Mutiny in January, 31.
primarily only used after the long work day was done, or the officer was too ill to work. In a stark contrast, the enlisted men stayed in cramped tents, facing the bitter cold.

Additionally, while all soldiers at Valley Forge were lacking uniforms, the enlisted uniforms were in much worse condition than the officer uniforms. Many of the enlisted soldiers were lucky to even use a blanket as a part of their uniform to ward off the bitter cold. In a letter to John Banister, Washington wrote that it was too frequent “To see men without Cloathes to cover their nakedness—without Blankets to lay on—without Shoes, by which their Marches might be traced by the Blood from their feet.” Between the officers and the enlisted soldiers, the officers were more vocal about their hardships due to their wealthy upbringing. These gaps greatly contributed to the lack of discipline at Valley Forge. When officers do not stay with their enlisted or are not directly involved in training, how can the common soldiers be expected to respect and listen to their superiors?

Many of the challenges faced at Valley Forge are common knowledge today, but at the time, the struggles of Valley Forge were kept quiet. To maintain public confidence in General Washington and the Continental Congress, while keeping the army’s struggles a secret, the stories of Valley Forge remained in the dark. In an article that was later published in the New Jersey Gazette, Chevalier de Pontgibaud, a French officer visiting the encampment, described his reactions to the state of the camp:

Soon I came in sight of the camp. My imagination had pictured an army with uniforms, the glitter of arms, standards, etc., in short, military pomp of all sorts;

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55 Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 276.
56 Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 276
Instead of the imposing spectacle I expected, I saw, grouped together or standing alone, a few militiamen, poorly clad, and for the most part without shoes - many of them badly armed… I did not then know that this was not unusual, and I laughed, for it made me think of the recruiting sergeants on the Quai de la Ferraille at Paris, who say to the yokels, “You will want for nothing when you are in the regiment, but if bread should run short you must not mind eating cakes.” Here the soldiers had tea and sugar.\(^58\)

Chevalier de Pontgibaud is discussing how he lacked an understanding of the state the army was in and was surprised to find them lacking food and supplies. There was a widespread assumption of the public that the army was able to maintain themselves, so General Washington would try to convey the sense of urgency about pay and supplies to both the public and Continental Congress. The army was also suffering due to the shortcomings of the supply chain. Even Congress had to be convinced of the true plight of the soldiers at Valley Forge. In a letter to Congress on December 23, 1777, Washington states:

I can assure those Gentlemen that it is a much easier and less distressing thing to draw remonstrances in a comfortable room by a good fire side than to occupy a cold bleak hill and sleep under frost and Snow without Cloaths or Blankets; however, although they seem to have little feeling for the naked, and distressed Soldier, I feel superabundantly for them, and from my Soul pity those miseries, which it is neither in my power to relieve or prevent.\(^59\)
Congress was aware of the catastrophes of the Commissary Department, but by December, had never corrected these failures.\textsuperscript{60}

While the supply line was headed by a Commissary and Quartermaster Department, it was primarily run by civilians. The Commissary was divided into two branches: purchasing and issuing. The issuing side of the commissary was paid a regular salary; meanwhile, the purchasing commissary was percentage based, in hope of encouraging incentives. Contrary to the incentives this system might provide, it encouraged corruption. In an entry from March 10\textsuperscript{th} in General George Weeden’s orderly book, an officer by the name of Lieutenant Tilton was tried for embezzlement and found not guilty.\textsuperscript{61} There are several other entries depicting fraudulent acts within the officers involving supplies. While many imagine the countryside as barren of all food, crop production prior to the winter at Valley Forge was plentiful. Farmers began to sell to the British, as the Continental Congress currency was banned by England and the supporting loyalists, thus many farmers would only negotiate for British pounds. As James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender depict, “Civilians in vicinity would not even sell them straw to help prevent sick and freezing comrades from freezing to death.”\textsuperscript{62} Additionally, many of the sellers would overcharge goods, which Congress already could not afford, and thus had to cancel many of the needed supply orders for Valley Forge. As Drury and Clavin remark in their book, Valley Forge, “even if the contents of every farmer’s wagon and cart hauling goods into Philadelphia could have been magically diverted to Valley Forge, it would have made but the merest dent in

\textsuperscript{61} George Weeden, Valley Forge Orderly Book (NY: Dodd, Mead, 1902), 252.
his [Washington’s] supply shortage.” Approximately 3,000 soldiers were declared unfit for duty because of their lack of clothing or weapons.

William Buchanan was appointed as the Continental Army’s Commissary officer on August 5th, 1777. Being new to the important position in a time of great need did not serve him well. While attempting to operate under a new supply system, they were failing to match the demands of the army. In a Letter to the President of Congress on December 23rd, Washington voices:

I have been tender heretofore of giving any opinion, or lodging complaints, as the change in that department took place contrary to my judgment, and the consequences thereof were predicted; yet, finding that the inactivity of the army, whether for want of provisions, clothes, or other essentials, is charged to my account, not only by the common vulgar but by those in power, it is time to speak plain in exculpation of myself. With truth, then, I can declare, that no man in my opinion ever had his measures more impeded than I have, by every department of the army.

Angered by the lack of urgency and the carelessness of supply, Washington knew the soldiers could not continue on without these crucial supplies and was discouraged by the, “widespread indifference of patriot civilians towards an army so desperately in need of help.”

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64 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 123.
In the daytime, soldiers were kept busy attempting to build log huts to ward off the bitter cold. Many were untrained and used what was available for roofing material, such as saplings, straw, muddy “earth covered with splints,” or canvas tents that were banned from being used as roofing material. The uniformity of the various cabins (dimensions, looks, and exterior features) was overshadowed by the desperation for these huts to be finished and was often overlooked; some cabins had fireplaces or windows, while others lacked these features. When the cabins had fireplaces, it did not always do as much good, as the green, moss covered firewood, would smoke up the entirety of the room. The average dimensions of the huts were 16 feet deep by 12 feet high and 6 feet high, many featured packed dirt floors, just below the frost line. General Marquis de Lafayette described the huts as, “little shanties that are scarcely gayer than dungeon cells.” Approximately 900 huts were under construction upon entering Valley Forge to be “mostly finished” by mid-February.

Within these poor living conditions, sanitation was also atrocious. Many of the soldiers at Valley Forge were not well acquainted with housekeeping, as this was deemed as “women’s work.” Very few soldiers brought their wives to the encampment contrary to European army traditions. Frostbite as a common ailment in the camp, as Lafayette conveys the soldiers had “feet and legs turned black with frostbite and often had to be amputated.” Malnourishment and fighting the bitter cold only contributed to the growing sickness that surrounded the encampment. In his diary entries, Albigence Waldo recounts his patient screaming, “I am Sick.

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69 Van Doren, Mutiny In January, 30.
70 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 166.
71 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, Valley Forge, 117.
73 Cox, Proper Sense of Honor, 140.
74 Ferling, Almost a Miracle, 277.
my feet lame, my legs are sore, my body covered with this tormenting Itch… exhausted by fatigue, hunger & Cold, I fail fast [and] I shall soon be no more!”

This tormenting itch the patient was referring to was smallpox, also known as “dimpled death”. Smallpox became one of the most common ailments to spread through the encampment. Anyone that entered the camp was briefly inspected for any signs of the illness, but only in vain, for this pestilence was spread through the air. Being in a solitary spot did not help the health conditions amidst the camp, as the soldiers at Valley Forge sat in their own filth and waste.

These appalling conditions also extended to the hospitals used to treat the sick and wounded. One of the physicians at Valley Forge, Benjamin Rush, declares, “Hospitals are the sinks of human life in the army. They robbed the United States of more citizens than the sword.” Many of these hospitals were overwhelmed with the amounts of soldiers coming in with ailments, with physicians filling rooms fit for 12 with 20 men; by mid-January, Washington ordered for the “flying hospitals” to be built in addition. In a letter from General Washington to William Livingston, Washington exasperately states, “It is but too melancholy a truth, that our Hospital Stores, are exceedingly scanty & deficient in every instance, and I fear there is no prospect of their being better shortly,” illustrating their trying times of great need. Either within the “flying hospitals” or regular hospitals, soldiers with minor ailments were mixed with soldiers suffering from smallpox, further spreading the pestilence, and allowing other illnesses such as

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76 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 167.
77 Cox, Proper Sense of Honor, 141
78 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 167.
79 Cox, Proper Sense of Honor, 143
80 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge 167.
81 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 168.
typhoid and dysentery to spread. Furthermore, blankets and straw from the dead were often reused and issued to new incoming patients, while surgical tools were never washed after surgery.\textsuperscript{83} Bob Drury and Tom Clavin express, “There was but little army doctors could do to successfully treat the majority of pestilences swirling in and around Valley Forge that winter.”\textsuperscript{84}

As the ground was frozen, burial of the dead became nearly impossible.\textsuperscript{85} In the grim winter of 1778, as many as 500 horses died due to the harsh conditions.\textsuperscript{86} The putrid stench of the dead horses, rotting in their shallow graves could fill the encampment. As unsanitary as it may seem, in the time of desperation, once a horse was deceased, the meat was used for food. As Bob Drury and Tom Clavin comment, “it [the horse] was quickly butchered for its meat while the carcass was left to rot where it lay.”\textsuperscript{87}

Once any supply of fresh meat entered the camp, large amounts of salt were used to preserve the remains. Sometimes, in the case of the horse flesh, the meat had to be “soaked repeatedly in order to be remotely edible.”\textsuperscript{88} Additionally, as the muscle from the animals decayed faster than the fat, many of the meats would contain the taste of salty lard.\textsuperscript{89} A yeast-less flour-water bread became the common concoction of the encampment known as “firecake.”\textsuperscript{90} Sometimes soldiers went 5-6 days without bread or meat, but sometimes soldiers went as many was 2-3 days without any food.\textsuperscript{91} With the little food that was around, men chanted, “No Meat! No Meat,” almost appearing to be, “Immitating the noise of Crows and Owls, also, made a part

\textsuperscript{83} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 168.
\textsuperscript{84} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 168.
\textsuperscript{85} Martin, James Kirby and Lender, Mark Edward, A Respectable Army, 101.
\textsuperscript{86} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 166.
\textsuperscript{87} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 166.
\textsuperscript{88} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 166.
\textsuperscript{89} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 166.
\textsuperscript{90} Ferling, Almost A Miracle, 277.
\textsuperscript{91} Van Doren, Mutiny in January, 18.
of confused Musick." Any ounce of meat, regardless of where it came from, was hungrily devoured.

Even amidst the misery that plagued Valley Forge, moments of joy could still be found in the encampment. Albigence Waldo describes in a diary entry:

The party that went out last evening has not returned to-day. This evening an excellent player on the violin in that soft kind of music which is so finely adapted to stir up the tender passions, while he was playing in the next tent to mine these kind soft airs it immediately called up in remembrance all the endearing expressions -- the tender sentiments -- the sympathetic friendship that has given so much satisfaction and sensible pleasure to me from the first time I gained the heart and affections of the tenderest of the fair.

When musicians were off duty, they served as the heart of the morale within the encampment.

February 22, 1778, amidst the cold winter, the continental army took a moment in the dreariness to celebrate their Commander-in-Chief’s birthday. General Thomas Proctor was insistent that Washington’s birthday be publicly recognized. The band of musicians of Proctor’s 4th Continental Artillery marched across the frozen snow to perform for their leader. It is unknown what tunes they performed, whether it was something like “Yankee Doodle” or something such as “Soldier’s Joy” has not been

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92 Rankin, The American Revolution, 168.
93 Rankin, The American Revolution, 168.
documented. Upon this performance, the Commander-in-Chief enjoyed the small
ceremony and gifted the band a small amount of money for their performance.96 This
became the first public recognition of Washington’s birthday, that is celebrated across the
United States as President’s Day!

While the winter months at Valley Forge were cruel and bitter, those that
remained had an immense love for their country and were proud to show off their
patriotism.97 These men became the test of the young nation’s survival, when hope
seemed almost lost following the brutal defeats at Brandywine and Germantown.
Washington’s army needed to learn some discipline before they could return to the war
ready to defeat the British.

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96 Downy, “Birthday at Valley Forge,”44.
97 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 222.
Chapter 3:
The Continental Army was in desperate need of discipline, but eventually received it from the most unlikely source. Baron Friedrich Wilhelm August Heinrich Ferdinand von Steuben was born in Magdeburg, Germany on September 17, 1730 as a descendent of a noble family with military lineage. At a mere 17 years old, Steuben left home to lead a military life, enlisting in the infantry and serving in the Seven Year’s War (1756-1763), where he was eventually wounded. He was eventually promoted to First Lieutenant, where he served as a quartermaster for headquarters. Upon his promotion to Captain, Steuben served as the aide-de-camp for King Frederick the Great. While serving under King Frederick, Steuben attended classes in both the art of warfare and the science of warfare directly from the King of Prussia, for which he was selected as one of the six officers chosen to attend the King’s personal military tactics class. Following his resignation from the Prussian army, Steuben accepted a position as the Grand Marshall of the court of the Prince of Hohenzollern-Hechingn, where he served for ten years. As the court was deeply in debt, Steuben left the court and found himself jobless and penniless.

Steuben went to Paris for work in the summer of 1777 to meet up with a colleague from the Seven Years War, the Count de St. Germain, the Secretary of War for King Louis XVI of France. Count de Saint Germain served in the Seven Years War alongside Steuben, working for the King of Denmark. In discussion with St. Germain, he strongly insisted that Steuben

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was needed in the colonists’ fight against Great Britain and insisted it was the “pathway to honor and great riches.”

St. Germain understood that Prussian military education was better than the French military education and strove in his career to reform the French system by integrating Prussian discipline and efficiency into the French system. Additionally, Prussia’s army operated differently than any other army in Europe. Instead of having the noncommissioned officers be in charge of drill instruction and taking care of the welfare of the troops, the Prussian army gave their officers this duty. St. Germain knew that while General Washington was a skilled leader, he did not have the experiences only war could give him. Thus, Baron von Steuben followed his advice and met with Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, who worked for King Louis XVI and helped create the Roderigue Hortalez and Company. This was a shipping company founded between Spain and France in 1775 to provide munitions, clothing, and other supplies to the colonists against their ancient enemy Great Britain, prior to France officially joining the war in 1778.

Baron Von Steuben was only ever a Captain, a general staff officer, under Frederick the Great, a low rank, but was known for his professionalism from his duties. With St. Germain’s insight into the full background of Steuben’s military career, he was able to meet with Benjamin Franklin with not only the support of St. Germain, but with that of Beaumarchais, representing the French government.

Prior to the meeting with Benjamin Franklin, Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette and Johann de Kalb were both appointed to Major General, which disappointed many American officers. Following these appointments, France was instructed by the American Congress to

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105 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 248.
make no more promises concerning work, rank, or pay. It would then be Congress and General Washington who would make the decisions based upon France’s endorsements.\textsuperscript{106} While the American adventure appealed to Steuben, Congress would not pay for the travel expenses, which disappointed Steuben. He returned to Germany to seek a commission but could not find any job openings.

Upon searching for jobs without any luck, the penniless Baron von Steuben returned to Paris for a second time. This time he wished to serve as a volunteer, distinguished foreigner, in the Continental Army, without requesting any pay or compensation. While originally told he would fund his own expenses, Roderigue Hortalez and Company funded his travel expenses over to the colonies. His high credentials and recommendations were hopefully going to earn him a position in the colonies, or France would compensate him for his troubles.\textsuperscript{107}

Baron Von Steuben understood that he needed to win the hearts of not only the American leaders, but also the American people and knew that his rank as Captain would not suffice for this. In one of Benjamin Franklin’s letters to General Washington, he states:

\begin{quote}
This Gentleman who will have the honor of waiting upon you with this letter is Baron Steuben, Lieut. Genl. in the King of Prussia’s service, whom he attended in all his campaigns, being his Aid de Camp, quartermaster Genl.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

Thus, Steuben traded in his rank of Captain to Lieutenant General and proceeded to purchase new uniforms reflecting his new promotion.\textsuperscript{109}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{106} Paul Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge (New York, NY: Harper, 2010), 64. \\
\textsuperscript{107} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 95. \\
\textsuperscript{108} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 96. \\
\textsuperscript{109} Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 245. 
\end{flushright}
Von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge on February 23, 1778, “escorned in a grandiose sleigh adorned with 24 jingle bells and pulled by a team of well-muscled, coal dark Percheron horses stepping in sync.”

He also brought along his personal staff of Louis de Pontiere as his aide-de camp, Pierre Etienne Duponceau as his military secretary, and Jean-Baptiste Lazare Theveneau de Francy, representing Beaumarchis’s business ventures with the rebellious colonies, and Beaumarchais’s nephew, Augustin Francois Des Epiniers. Additionally, Steuben brought a servant and his dog, Azor, an Italian greyhound. Almost immediately upon arrival, he began his work of inspecting the soldiers. He began touring and interviewing various officers and enlisted men throughout the camp.

Through the initial inspections, it became very apparent that something was unique about the Continental army; despite the harsh winter conditions, the lack of food, and lack of clothing, the spirit of the Continentals still remained strong. If this happened anywhere else in the world, the armies would have given up, and the war would be over. Describing these hardships, Royster writes:

The fact that the Continentals were still in the army at Valley Forge, poorly disciplined yet withstanding great hardships without quitting, showed that the army could neither fully indulge the soldiers’ love of freedom nor smash it for the purposes of discipline.

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10 Drury and Clavin, Valley Forge, 45.
11 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 49.
12 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 49.
14 Palmer, General Von Steuben, 97.
Steuben intended to use this love and patriotism for their country to his advantage. He encouraged their love of country while also working to promote “professional loyalty and pride of achievements.”

In his initial inspection, Steuben found a number of problems within the encampment, including the parade ground, attention to dress, cleanliness, equipment, health, camp sanitation, orderliness of the march, grievances, lack of mutual respect, and lack of hierarchical obedience. Many of these issues could be summed into one of two categories: lack of discipline and lack of officership. The continental officers believed in honor as the compass for the gentlemen’s way.

Thus, Steuben got to work on reforming the troops. Following his initial inspections, on March 19th, he began with his first lesson of “Position of the Soldier.” After a late evening preparing for the hard work that had yet to begin, Steuben arose before the sun was up at 0300. He wanted his appearance to be fit and proper of a noble, to enhance his teachings. In the dim morning, Steuben went out to find the men waiting to greet him on the Grand Parade. Steuben hand selected soldiers that were long time veterans to serve as his model for the rest of the encampment of how to perform the drill movements. Steuben promptly memorized the few phrases he could of English to instruct the soldiers how to cadence, march to the rears (turning around while marching), halt, perform facing movements (stationary turn 90 degrees) and about face.

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116 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 223.
117 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 222.
119 Palmer, General Von Steuben, 144.
120 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 95.
121 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 96.
(from stationary turning 180 degrees to the right). Steuben not only demonstrated these movements to his model company, but also went around checking the accuracy of everyone performing the movements. The soldiers practiced these movements for an hour, before switching to wheeling movements in the afternoon.

As Steuben began to instruct, it became very apparent he was incredibly handicapped by his lack of English. While training his model company, Steuben could not translate what he was trying to convey and began to curse. He tried again, in vain, with German, meanwhile the soldiers could only giggle. Upon even attempting sign language, Duponceau attempted to step in, but without a military background, he could not be much help in describing the movements to be performed. “Godamn” became not only Steuben’s first word in English, but also a word that was frequently used during the initial drillings. Finally, a young officer by the name of Captain Benjamin Walker of the New York Regiment stepped up from the crowd of onlookers offering to translate. Word of the training incident quickly spread through the encampment, as an “endless source of merriment.”

As the weeks continued, Steuben continued to work with his model company. Each week he would push out a new chapter for the drill company to work on, while he began working on writing the next chapter. Duponceau would work on translating the French drill instructions into basic, rudimentary English, while Lt. Colonel John Laurens

122 Palmer, General Von Steuben, 144.
123 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 100.
125 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 103.
126 Fering, Almost a Miracle, 287.
127 Palmer, General Von Steuben, 140.
and Lt. Colonel Alexander Hamilton would edit it to add military terminology.\textsuperscript{128}

Without typewriters or any printing press, the brigade inspectors would hand copy every chapter to learn from.\textsuperscript{129} Steuben would commit his drill commands to memory and recite them in English, but often breaking temper when things did not go as planned. Palmer writes:

> When a movement went wrong, the Baron would delight the soldiers by swearing in French and then in German. When his artillery of foreign oaths was exhausted, he would call on one of his assistants to curse in English for him.\textsuperscript{130}

This would only make the soldiers grin at him and, “execute the maneuver more skillfully.”\textsuperscript{131} The teachings quickly began to draw the attention of the rest of the encampment. Enjoying the attention from onlookers, he sometimes played up his theatrics, but never making a true fool of himself.\textsuperscript{132}

Steuben believed in the power of example for his drill company. He set out to rebuild the officership standards in the Continental soldiers. While officers were expected to live the honorable lives of gentlemen, many officers fell short of these high standards. The Baron recounts this in his initial inspections:

> There was another evil still more subversive of all their companies and regiments as corps confided to them by the United States for care of the men as well as the preservation of order and discipline. The greater part of the captains had no roll of

\textsuperscript{128} Fleming, 	extit{Washington’s Secret War}, 217.

\textsuperscript{129} Fleming, 	extit{Washington’s Secret War}, 217.

\textsuperscript{130} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 148.

\textsuperscript{131} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 218

\textsuperscript{132} Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 103.
their companies and had no idea how many men they had under their orders.

When I asked a colonel the strength of his regiment, the usual reply was
‘something between two and three hundred men.’ The colonels, and often the
captains, granted leave of absences as they thought proper and not only that, but
permissions to retire from the service.133

Many officers spent their nights in the village, instead of crammed into the small tents
shared by the enlisted soldiers134. Steuben wanted to bring out the personal honor of the
soldiers and encourage them to think of themselves as honorable men135.

In Steuben’s new system, officers were required to not only come watch the
model drill company, but also instruct the enlisted. In Steuben’s instructions for training
soldiers, he demands that officers must,

> Explain with mildness what the soldiers are to do; they are not to use them ill
> neither by abusive words or otherwise, but to point out their Faults patiently.
> There will be no other punishment for the soldier who neglects his duty or is
> inattentive, than make him exercise a whole hour after the others are done.136

Steuben wanted his officers to not only know who they were leading, but also their
“character, whereabouts, and wellbeing or grievances.”137 This would enforce discipline
not only in the enlisted men but force the officers to get away from using rank for social
status. These young officers demanded respect they believed they were entitled to as,

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133 Joseph Beaty Doyle, Frederick William von Steuben and the American Revolution; Aide to Washington and
Inspector General of the Army (Steubenville, OH: The H. C. Cook Co, 1913), 85.
134 Cox, A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army, 49.
135 Cox, A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army, 63.
136 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 232.
137 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 226.
“propertied citizens who now held high military rank.” These officers simply believed that their duty was to only consist of “mounting guard and putting themselves at the head of their companies or regiments when the army went into action,” rather than serving as gentlemanly leaders of the Continental Army. Many of the officers were used to living the high life and expected that to continue into the war experience; however, they failed to lead lives with discipline and honor, which leaked into the enlisted men they were attempting to lead.

Steuben also quickly found that many of the enlisted did not respect the rank of the officers above them. Many of the men were not simply satisfied by just blindly following the commands they had been given. Soon, many of the men wanted to know the reasoning behind any movement they performed. Steuben comments on this following the war in a letter to a Prussian comrade:

The genius of this nation is not in the least to be compared with that of the Prussian, Austrians, or French. You say to your soldier ‘Do this and he doeth it’; but I am obliged to say [to the American soldier]: ‘This is the reason why you ought to do that,’ and then he does it.

Soldiers wanted to fully understand the movements and were eager to learn whatever they could from the Prussian drillmaster’s teachings.

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138 Martin, A Respectable Army, 106.
139 Fleming, Washington’s Secret War, 213.
140 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 104.
141 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 104.
On March 28th, Washington made Baron von Steuben the official inspector general of Valley Forge. In his “General Orders”, Washington exclaims:

Baron Steuben a Lieutenant General in Foreign Service and a Gentleman of great military Experience having obligingly undertaken to exercise the office of Inspector General in this Army, The Commander in Chief ’till the pleasure of Congress shall be known desires he may be respected and obeyed as such and hopes and expects that all officers of whatsoever rank in it will afford him every Aid in their Power in the execution of his office.  

Washington also declared that on the following Monday at precisely 0730, the drums will beat the troop and the grand parade will commence at 0800.

In the series of weeks that followed, Steuben continued to work on retraining the Continental Army. His planned sequence was: Parade Ground, Attention to Dress, Cleanliness, Equipment, Health, Camp Sanitation, Orderliness of the March, Grievances, Mutual Respect, and Hierarchical Obedience. Steuben wanted to not only address the drill needs within the encampment, but also create a spiritual or psychological change in their attitudes.

As the weeks continued on into April, Steuben soon spread his reform throughout the entire encampment to every brigade. By 0900 every morning the brigades would fall in and the inspectors would begin their inspections. Following understanding the basic

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144 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 222.
145 Fleming, Washington’s Secret War, 230.
movements, such as columns and moving from column position to line, by mid-April, the army began working on gaining precision in their arms tactics and marching at close interval.\textsuperscript{146} To improve the manual of arms, Steuben taught the soldiers the importance of bayonet fighting. Prior to Steuben’s instruction, the army had never been taught how to use this weapon for fighting at close proximity; thus these weapons were typically used as “spits for broiling their beefsteaks.”\textsuperscript{147} These weapons were not even always carried, until the Battle of Monmouth, following Steuben’s instruction.\textsuperscript{148}

While this fixed one problem, the army needed to understand the consequences of marching in their “Indian Files” and needed to work on close interval, or as Steuben called them, “solid collums.”\textsuperscript{149} In order to bring precision amongst the army, on April 10, 1778, Washington prohibited marching by files and mandated that all detachments march in double rank and close interval. In the General Orders for the day, Washington proclaims:

As marching men by files has an unmilitary appearance and a tendency to make them march in an unsoldierlike manner—All parties commanded by commissioned officers are to be march’d by divisions and every officer commanding a Guard or detachment will be very attentive to see that his men march properly and when relieved to march his guard &c. back to the Brigade to which they belong, if from several Brigades he will march them to the Grand Parade before he dismisses them.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{146} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 154.
\textsuperscript{147} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 152.
\textsuperscript{148} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 152.
\textsuperscript{149} Palmer, General Von Steuben, 157.
This method was selected so that soldiers regularly practiced this close order drill, as not to repeat the mistakes made at Brandywine and Germantown.

The profanities from the lack of English continued on through the remainder of the days at Valley Forge. In many cases, once Steuben was tired of swearing in foreign languages, he would call upon one of his aids to curse, Walker being one of the most frequently called upon. Steuben would exclaim, “Tiens, mon ami, mon bon ami! Godamn de gaucheries of dese badants. Je ne puis plus. You curse them, Walker,” which translates to, “Here, my friend, my good friend. Godamn the awkwardness of bad guys (their bad performance). I can no longer. You curse them, Walker.” 151

Alongside the many changes made to drill, Steuben changed the hearts and minds of the officers surrounding him. Steuben was a firm believer in setting a proper example for his men and was typically one of the first to rise and the last to bed. 152 In his off time, he would dine with the officers around him, but would request that they show up in tattered clothing, like their enlisted troops wore. 153 These teachings by example of affection for the plight of the soldiers began to change the perceptions of the officers of how to be a proper gentlemen and lead a life of honor.

In May, word reached Washington’s ears that an alliance with France had been reached. On May 5th, the orders for the day read:

It having pleased the Almighty ruler of the Universe propitiously to defend the Cause of the United American-States and finally by raising us up a powerful

152 Lockhart, Drillmaster at Valley Forge, 112.
153 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783, 332.
Friend among the Princes of the Earth to establish our liberty and Independence upon lasting foundations, it becomes us to set apart a day for gratefully acknowledging the divine Goodness & celebrating the important Event which we owe to his benign Interposition.\(^\text{154}\)

The morning began with inspections at promptly 1000, but by 1130, a feu de joie was to occur.\(^\text{155}\) A feu de joie is a celebratory firing of the rifles in succession to create a continuous sound. At the end of the firing:

Upon a signal given, the whole Army will Huzza! “Long Live the King of France”—The Artillery then begins again and fires thirteen rounds, this will be succeeded by a second general discharge of the Musquetry in a running fire—Huzza!—“And long live the friendly European Powers”—Then the last discharge of thirteen Pieces of Artillery will be given, followed by a General running fire and Huzza! [“]To the American States.”\(^\text{156}\)

Following this celebration, a grand parade was to follow. At the end of the celebration, each man was granted a “gill of rum,” a rarity amongst the encampment.\(^\text{157}\)

The army stayed at Valley Forge until June 19\(^\text{th}\), where they reemerged with a better understanding of military drill and military discipline. While anyone, even General Conway, could have served as inspector general, Steuben’s background and expertise

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\(^{156}\) Washington, Writings of George Washington Vol. 10: Mar., 1778-May, 1778, 354-355

made him a phenomenal leader for this role. The army that emerged in the bleak winter months was reborn when they left in the summer.
Chapter 4:
This sense of honor and leading by example did not only fall upon the officers in the encampment, but also upon the leading musicians. Every regiment was given one fifer and one drummer per 12 companies. Additionally, there was a Fife Major, a Drum Major, and a Music Master who were all responsible for providing leadership to the inexperienced musicians. The Music Master oversaw both the Fife Major and Drum Major, while the Fife Major and Drum Major each oversaw their respective instruments.

While many of the concepts used by the military musicians were used prior to Valley Forge, nothing was standardized. Some musicians, such as Henry Blake, wrote some of their music in fife manuals in order to maintain some semblance of standardization. For many, this was not the case. The deficiencies within the musicians had significant consequences. The lack of discipline and standardization amongst musicians meant that commanders were not able to convey orders to the troops. The lack of standardization meant that when the drum was beat to signal a movement to the troops, there were times when this communication was misunderstood.

There were several key commands that were used throughout the American Revolutionary War for daily functions: March, Retreat, Troop, Reveille, and Tattoo. All of these commands regulated a soldier’s day. These commands could communicate to a soldier “the passage of time and what was to be expected of him” while also being prepared to “instantly obey them.” This meant that the rhythms needed to be easily distinguishable so that even a

soldier with no musical background could easily distinguish the command he needed to obey. While many of these commands were used prior to Valley Forge, when commanders used drill tactics from various countries, these commands were often muddled together.

When Steuben entered Valley Forge in February, 1778, he recognized the importance of musicians with military tactics. While Steuben focused on reconditioning the drill standards of the Continental Army, he also knew he needed to have steady drummers in order for the movements to be successfully called. Recognizing the significance of music, Steuben dedicated an entire chapter of his drill manual, Regulations for The Order and Discipline of The Troops of the United States, which he titled “Of the Different Beats of the Drum”. This chapter examined the commands for which the drums would beat, while the fife enhanced the command with an overlapping melody. In this chapter, Steuben works to set one standard for how the musicians were to interact with the commands, but never included any musical notation on how to perform these drum beats. Steuben rewrote a new standard for many of the familiar movements, including March, Retreat, Troop, Reveille, and Tattoo.
Example 4.1: “The March”, potential variations of drum beats.\textsuperscript{162}

The March was used to move all of the troops from one place to another.\textsuperscript{163} There was never standardization of specific drum beats, nor for how long the drums were to play, and while example 4.1 is based on later sources, it indicates some of the potential variations that may have been utilized by musicians to convey this signal. This was especially due to every nation having their own patterns, but with the soldiers’ skills increasing, the marches increased in complexity; thus, these commands needed to be unequivocally clear and easy to understand.\textsuperscript{164} While the typical marching cadence, or common step, was around 60 beats per minute, quickstep was beat at 120 beats per minute, to allow a more rapid pace of marching, in order to cover more

\begin{itemize}
  \item Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 88.
  \item Steuben, Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin, Baron von, Regulations for The Order and Discipline of The Troops of the United States, (Philadelphia, PA: Styner and Cist, 1779), 89.
  \item Camus, Military Music in the American Revolutionary War, 89.
\end{itemize}
distance. In contrast, the Retreat was used to march to the rear, but was also “beat at sunset for calling roll, warning the men for duty, and reading the orders of the following day” (Example 4.2). Retreat while in an encampment, meant the end of a work day. Soldiers in the Continental Army typically worked from sunrise to sunset and would have especially long days in the summer months.

Example 4.2: A potential melody and drum call that may have signaled Retreat.

Troop was used to bring the encampment together for roll call, following either Reveille or the General (Example 4.3). Reveille, deriving from the French word, “Se Reveiller”, meaning to wake one’s self up, meant that the soldiers were to rise from their beds and eat (see Example 4.4, No.1). This command was sometimes replaced with the General, which was

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165 Camus, Military Music in the American Revolutionary War, 87.  
166 Steuben, Regulations for The Order and Discipline of The Troops of The United States, 90.  
167 Camus, Military Music in the American Revolutionary War, 93.  
168 Camus, Military Music in the American Revolutionary War, 92.  
169 Steuben, Regulations for The Order and Discipline of The Troops of The United States, 90.
used when, “the whole are to march, and is the signal to strike the tents, and prepare for the march” (see Example 4.4, No.2). Today, Reveille still remains one of the oldest military traditions still being upheld. A version of this signal is still used daily at American military bases around the globe.

Example 4.3: Troop

Tattoo, derives from “tap-too”, which translates from Dutch to, “turn off the taps” (see Example 4.4, No.5). Tattoo was used for soldiers “to repair to their tents, where they must remain till reveille beating next morning.” There were also many commands simply used for drill, such as file marching, facing movements, calling the soldiers, to attention, or even halting.

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170 Steuben Regulations for The Order and Discipline of The Troops of The United States, 89.
171 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 92.
172 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 94.
173 Steuben, Regulations for The Order and Discipline of The Troops of The United States ,89.
Example 4.4: Potential Melodies utilized over drum signals.\textsuperscript{174}

In these regulations for marching, one of the biggest accomplishments was tightening the control of the march. The straggling “Indian File” columns that contributed to the losses at Brandywine and Germantown were also tied to the musical tactics.\textsuperscript{175} The slowed movements that caused delayed reactions, were also tied to drum.\textsuperscript{176} In order to be an effective tool for providing a steady marching cadence, the drum needed to have a clear and consistent beat. These drum beatings needed to be, as Washington describes, “with such moderation, that the men may

\textsuperscript{174} Joshua Cushings, \textit{Fifer’s Companion}. (Salem, MA: Joshua Cushing, for Cushing & Appleton, 1805), 6.

\textsuperscript{175} Charles Royster, \textit{A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783} (Chapel Hills, NC: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1979), 239.

\textsuperscript{176} Royster, \textit{A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character}, 239.
step to it with ease; and without dancing along, or totally disregarding the music, as too often has been the case.”

In order to perfect these movements, musicians needed to incorporate the military discipline into their training, as well. Musicians worked with Steuben during specific hours in order to gain a better understanding of their importance to the army. Practicing outside these hours warranted punishment, particularly for the drummers because their beats could be mistaken for a command. Unfortunately, there are not very many writings from the American Revolution depicting exactly what happened because music was accepted as a fundamental part of daily routine that was, “unworthy of comment.” While there is little documentation for the bands of music, Raoul Camus, in his book Military Music of the American Revolution, discusses that there were three bands in total in the Continental Army at the time: Crane’s 3d Artillery regiment, Proctor’s 4th Artillery regiment, and Webb’s infantry. Proctor’s band can be shown to have been at Valley Forge through Washington’s own expenses, where in the month of February, 1778, he noted an expense that was paid to the “Procr band.”

These bands of musicians served to enhance military ceremonies. In a diary by Private Elijah Fisher, on April 5th, he remarks:

Gen. Washington with all his attendance went to the Lines to Meet Gen. Lee and to Accompany him to Head Quarters where they arrived at two of the Clock in the

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178 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 79.
179 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 79.
180 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 79.
181 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 80.
182 Camus, Military Music of the American Revolution, 80.
afternoon where they was receved with a kind salute of arms Drums fifes and Band of Musick. 

This band of musicians most likely were honoring one of the continued traditions of performing “Ruffles and Flourishes” for General Lee’s arrival. In contrast to General Lee’s arrival being a joyous occasion, there were quite a few instances of court martial, in which the musicians played while the guilty party is marched out of camp. In General George Weedon’s Valley Forge Orderly Book, on March 14, 1778, he describes Lieutenant Enslin’s court martial for his absence of three months without leave. In this orderly book, he illustrates:

The Comm. in chief approves the Sentence & with abhorrence & Detestation of such infamous Crimes, orders Lt Enslin to be drumm’d out of Camp tomorrow M$ by the Drums and Fifes in the Army never to return. The Drums and Fifes to attend on the grand Parade at Guard Mounting for that Purpose.

In this case, the musicians served to show Lt. Enslin’s actions were worthy of such a punishment, and for others to not repeat this mistake. A similar incident occurred on March 22nd, when another soldier was court martialed.

When the army left Valley Forge in June 19, 1778, exactly six months following their arrival, both Washington and Steuben recognized the need for a music inspector who could focus on continuing his lessons and furthering the discipline amongst the musicians. 

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184 George Weeden, Valley Forge Orderly Book (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1902), 258.
186 Howe, Early American Military Music, 89.
appointed Lieutenant John Hiwell from the 3d Continental Artillery Regiment under Col John Crane on August 19, 1778, to fill this role of Inspector and Superintendent of Music in the Army. Hiwell’s life prior to his military service remains much of a mystery, but during the American Revolution he served as a regimental fife major under Gen. Henry Knox, before he was moved to serve under John Crane in December 1776. Within this role, he took the lessons Steuben instilled in the musicians a step further, by standardizing the musicians’ training within the army. Upon meeting the French fifers in Newport in 1781, Hiwell even incorporated French music traditions into his own fife playing and the army. Hiwell was able to complete the standardization that Steuben sought to create at the winter encampment of Valley Forge.

Following the end of the American Revolutionary War, many of the musicians (field and bands of musicians) left the army; however, the traditions of the army followed these musicians. Today, many organizations work to preserve this important piece of America’s history. The 3rd U.S. Infantry, commonly known as “Old Guard”, exists as a reminder of the traditions that were used in the American Revolutionary war to maintain discipline. In an interview for A Living History, Sergeant Major William White, a former fife section leader and current drum major, states, “This is really the best, the most tangible reminder we have of the values and traditions the United States was founded on, and the reason we still need to be prepared to defend it today.”

While many have forgotten these musical traditions, they were used not only in the War of 1812, but still live on today in the United States military. It was not until the American Civil

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187 Howe, Early American Military Music, 89.
War that the use of fife and drum disappeared from the infantry. When the methods of war
tactics changed, the need for musical instruments to relay signals on the fields of battle were no
longer required. These ceremonies still live on in our military every single day when the call of
Reveille is sounded on base. As Fairfax Downey remarks, “The flag is slowly lowered from the
peak of its staff, to soar up again at morning Reveille. Soldiers and citizens present stand at
attention. And throughout the United States people hear the music in their hearts.” 190 The
hardships faced at Valley Forge must never be forgotten, for their resilience helped to unite the
colonies when the army of resistance was on the brink of disbanding. What has been more easily
forgotten are the sounds of the fifes and drums that accompanied Steuben’s daily drill exercises
and that resounded in the Continental Army up until the British surrendered at Yorktown,
Virginia.

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190 Downey, Fife, Drum, & Bugle, (Fort Collins, CO: The Old Army Press, 1971.) 156.
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The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Moira E. Conley defended on 11 March 2020.

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