

From the diary of Albigeance Waldo, a surgeon at Valley Forge:

December 11

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 nauseating 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 Waggon 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 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 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

Mankind are never truly thankful 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.

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 Schuylkill, made some Ravages, kill'd two of our Horsemen, taken some prisoners. We have done the like by them....

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.

Vocabulary:

constitution – structure, composition

contented – satisfied

discontented – not satisfied

dishevell'd – messy

extolling – praising highly

felicities – happiness

fire cake – thin bread made of flour and water

forage – food, vegetables

hector – bully, devil

hitherto – until now, before

humour – state of mind, mood

impoverished – poor

meager - thin

melancholic – sadness

pox – mark, disease

prodigious – terrible, extreme

providence – fate, luck, destiny, fortune

provisions – food supply

