

Martin noted: "Had there falled deep snows (and it was the time of year to expect them) or even heavy and long rainstorms, the whole army must inevitably have perished....But a kind a holy Providence took more notice and better care of us than did the country in whose service we were wearing away our lives by piecemeal."

EFFORTS TO ASSIST THE AMERICAN ARMY

Joseph Plumb Martin expressed the bitterness of the common soldier over conditions at Valley Forge and the general neglect received by the American Army from the states and Congress. Yet there was little that could be done, because dissension in Congress, among officers in the army, and the rapid inflation of currency impeded the efforts of everyone to improve conditions.

Supplies were the greatest problem. Although the winter was not to prove severe, ill-clad men fed on rotten or musty food--when even that was available--could hardly be expected to maintain discipline and prepare for the forthcoming military campaign. Earlier in the year both the quartermaster general and the commissary general had resigned, and indecision on the part of Congress had prevented reorganization and efficient administration of these two departments so crucial for supplying the army. On December 22, General Washington wrote to Congress that he had done everything in his power "by remonstrating, by writing to, by ordering the Commissaries on this Head, from time to time; but without good effect, or obtaining more than a present scanty relief." The following day, Washington again addressed Congress, noting that his consternation concerning supplies had been heightened by the inability of his men to march against a large British foraging party advancing toward Derby (modern-day Darby), Pennsylvania, the previous day. When he summoned the single commissary in camp, he was met with "this Melancholy and alarming truth; that he had not a single hoof of any kind to Slaughter, and not more than 25 Barrels of Flour! From hence form an opinion of our Situation when I add, that, he could not tell when to expect any."

Washington urged that Congress immediately appoint commissaries qualified to undertake the essential business of supplying the army, predicting that his men could not survive the winter unless such action was immediately taken. For his own part, Washington ordered on December 20 that "all persons residing within Seventy miles of my Head Quarters to thresh one half of their grain by the first day of February and the other