

of 1777 from lamenting to Governor William Livingston of New Jersey about "Our sick naked, our well naked, [and] our unfortunate men in captivity naked!" A naked, unfed army was a source of despair to all but the most sanguine patriots. Valley Forge had little to offer in terms of renewing the strength of the existing army or recruiting new men to its ranks. Yet, the year 1777 had witnessed remarkable achievements in American quest for liberty. The surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga was to prove critical in the European courts where emissaries of the United States were soliciting aid, but even more remarkable was that despite repeated defeats on the field of battle the Continental Army remained intact. And Valley Forge, despite its deficiencies in terms of human needs, at least provided the Americans with a strategic location, where, in the words of the Marquis de Lafayette, the "Army will attempt to clothe itself, because it is practically naked, to improve itself, because it is in great need of training, and to rebuild itself, because it is very deficient in numbers."

The winter at Valley Forge would not meet Lafayette's expectations. The American army had suffered nearly 1,400 killed during the 1777 campaign, and an additional 2,250 wounded and over 2,000 captured. This staggering loss of men willing to fight for the cause of American liberty would be compounded by the demise of nearly a fourth of the men Washington consigned to the dark and damp huts at Valley Forge. To the Americans the War for Independence had become a battle for survival--not from the British redcoats, comfortably ensconced in Philadelphia, but from the incompetence and indifference of Congress and the citizens of the states that they had pledged their lives to defend.