

Memoirs of Samuel Smith, A Soldier of the Revolution, 1776-1786
(published in 1853)

Samuel Smith was born in Rhode Island in 1759. After being orphaned at the age of 13, he was taken in by a family friend, for whom he worked in exchange for clothing and lodging. At the age of 17, he was hired to take the place of a soldier for one month. He then enlisted for an additional three months, before joining the Continental Army.

“Sometime in November 1776, we were obliged to leave Red Bank on account of the cold, and we marched to Valley Forge, and again joined the main army – being at this time nearly destitute of clothing, except what we secured in the Hessian fight...

There were days while we were on our march to Valley Forge, for winter quarters, that we were entirely destitute of food, sometimes two days at a time. On our march we came to a valley, which abounded with black walnuts and butternuts, where we tarried two days. We then continued our march till we came to the Schuylkill River. There we laid down to rest on our arms, with nothing but the broad canopy of heaven to cover us. That night the snow fell about a half a foot deep. Some had blankets and slept upon the frozen ground and covered themselves with them, while others had none, and slept entirely unprotected from the weather...

On the next march we suffered extremely, our feet being wet and being compelled to travel on the wet, frozen ground, ice and snow. Those who had blankets cut off the corners and wound them around their feet. Others who had none, secured rags and the like, or anything of the kind which had been thrown from the houses on the road on which we marched, and blood from our feet might be traced on the ground. We finally reached Valley Forge, our winter head-quarters, the forepart of January, 1777. Here I built a hut, and soon after finishing it, was taken sick, and was blind for about ten days. We remained at Valley Forge till sometime in June...

Forty of the prisoners we took from their ships had a disorder with which our doctor was not acquainted. Its appearance was sudden. Some would fall down on the deck and froth like a mad dog; others would begin to draw their heads down till their hells and head would touch together. An American of

my acquaintance, who, to my certain knowledge, had been exposed repeatedly to the small pox for six years, caught it on board the British shipping and died.

From York Town we marched to Saratoga, a long and tedious march, where we made our headquarters until the spring.

In the winter, after the lakes had frozen up, we went to storm a fort on the frontier. Our army was conveyed in stages. In crossing the Niagara River on the ice, just above the Falls, one stage containing six men and the driver, slipped sideways in to the river and was carried over the Falls and lost.

We passed over across the Lake to a piece of swampy land, where the stages left us and returned home. We staid here two nights and a part of two days, when we learned by our spies, that the British had reinforced their fort with double the number of men they had before, and it becoming more than five degrees colder than when we started from Saratoga to cross the Lakes – a number of men having frozen to death, and a great part of the regiment being more or less frozen – but little regard was paid to the command of the officers, as every man did the best he could to protect himself from the cold.”