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**New Book Claims that Most Brutal Winter of the American Revolution  
was *the* Pivotal Moment of the War for Independence**

# ***VALLEY FORGE***

**By Bob Drury and Tom Clavin**

Authors of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The Heart of Everything That Is*

“Here is a beautiful book about a dire passage in our country’s history, a time of supreme reckoning that revealed some of the first stirrings of our national character. Through muscular prose grounded in meticulous research, Drury and Clavin capture all the tribulations of that storied winter encampment, and show us how Washington, in his finest hour, managed to pull his bedraggled army—and the revolution itself—from the brink of disaster.”

—Hampton Sides, bestselling author of *In the Kingdom of Ice* and *On Desperate Ground*

“A central episode in the history of the American Revolution comes under thoughtful examination. The story of Valley Forge is a trope in America’s sense of itself, a morality play in which beleaguered, stalwart soldiers outlast the ferocious elements in order to wrest freedom from imperial oppression. The reality, ably told here, is far more complex—and far more interesting....A fluent, readable story that corrects mythmaking errors and provides a more nuanced narrative in their place.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“This gripping, panoramic account of the Continental Army’s 1777–1778 winter encampment at Valley Forge charts, in lively language, the decisions that allowed the American Revolution to survive....As the authors sketch out the dizzying array of obstacles Washington faced, the reader gains an appreciation for the genuinely heroic role he played in the founding of the United States of America..”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

It was 240 years ago, during the winter of 1778, when George Washington was first referred to as the “Father of Our Country.” According to a new book, that bleak winter was also the turning point for both Washington’s military and political career *and* the American War for Independence.

In *VALLEY FORGE* (October 2, 2018/\$30.00 hardcover), the #1 *New York Times* bestselling authors Bob Drury and Tom Clavin turn conventional thinking on its head. Long viewed as a disaster, the authors make the case that

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the Continental Army's arduous encampment at Valley Forge was not only the key component that shaped and strengthened a fighting force that went on to defeat the most powerful empire in the world, but also showcased Washington's masterful skills as both a tactician and politician.

Combining a "vivid" and "lively" non-fiction writing style (*Wall Street Journal*) that "reads like a novel" (*Slate*) with stories that are "exquisitely told" and "remarkably detailed" (*USA Today*), Drury and Clavin's books often focus on unknown or under-reported military events that shed new light on American history. **VALLEY FORGE** is but another example of that thinking – and writing – outside of the box.

"That the Continental Army still existed in June of 1778 was a miracle of survival," they maintain. "And none of it could have happened without the character, integrity, and empathy demonstrated by George Washington."

Under the Continental Army's brilliant commander in chief, the 12,000-odd American troops – including a contingent of black soldiers, the last to fight alongside their white counterparts until the Korean War – not only survived Valley Forge against tremendous odds (and predictions), but emerged a more professional fighting force. "By all rights, that winter alone should have destroyed Washington's army; certainly, the British commanders assumed it would," the authors note. "As it was, the command sustained some 2,000 deaths during that winter encampment, by far the single largest loss of life on either side during the war. Yet, instead, what didn't kill the Continental Army made it stronger."

In setting the scene for that brutal winter, Drury and Clavin recount how after losing a series of battles and being driven from New York the previous summer, Washington and his inner circle of advisors had been uncharacteristically flummoxed by British General Sir William Howe, who led the 30,000-strong British expeditionary force in North America. Throughout the spring and summer of 1777, Howe had orchestrated a series of feints that forced Washington into exaggerated countermeasures. Each expedition was for naught, as Howe always pulled his troops back to New York before the Americans arrived. This was all a part of the British commander's scheme: he was in no hurry to crush the rebels just yet. His superiors in Britain, particularly his friend King George III, hoped that the massive show of British force would bring the colonies to their senses and, subsequently, to the bargaining table.

When the British Gen. Howe finally did decide to fight, he took the then-American capital of Philadelphia with ease in autumn 1777, only days after the Continental Congress fled the city. This left most of the congressional representatives either ineffectual, absent from the political body's temporary home in the rustic town of York, Pennsylvania, or doubting Washington's leadership. This was a natural result of Washington's Pennsylvania campaign of that year. Coming off his surprise victories in Trenton and Princeton in late 1776, a string of military engagements fought from Brandywine to Paoli to Germantown had resulted in a mixture of defeats and strategic retreats for the Americans. "The Brandywine fiasco in particular breathed new life into the vampirical criticism that had hounded Washington since his appointment as commander in chief—that he was a one-note general unable to adjust his field tactics on the fly and had surrounded himself with a staff of sycophants and toadies," write Drury and Clavin. By the time the Continental Army sought winter refuge, a dark pall hung over both the troops and Washington's reputation.

It was these circumstances that combined to foster the conspiratorial political efforts led by his bitter rival Gen. Horatio Gates to topple Washington from his post. Thus it occurred that during the six months Washington spent at Valley Forge, he was not only fighting the British as well as battling to retain his position as commander in chief. Moreover, the nearly unendurable conditions at the encampment – a dearth of clothing and shoes; weeks on end where the troops' only protein was derived from the weevils and maggots in their rotting "firecakes;" and the spread of a plethora of diseases – constituted a veritable third front. At no other time during the American Revolution did Washington come so close to being deposed.

Yet it was precisely these multiple hardships that allowed Washington – with the assistance of his fiercely loyal inner circle – to display his brilliance as a political actor, beating back efforts to usurp him and thwarting the blind ambitions of his American rivals in Congress and the military while deftly outmaneuvering his British counterparts. "In a brazen act of political jujitsu," Drury and Clavin write, "Washington decided to turn the criticisms of his leadership skills to his advantage" and sent a stark rebuke to congress, warning the delegates that

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unless an adequate supply line of food, clothing, and arms was immediately established under competent management, he foresaw no other options for his army other than “starve, dissolve, or disperse.” The politicians caved to his demands.

“The commander in chief’s singular tenacity was the trait that had set him above his peers on the battlefield,” explain the authors. “Now this same persistence was on display in the political arena.”

In recounting these desperate hours, *VALLEY FORGE* brings together an illustrious cast of characters highlighted by Washington’s closest aides Alexander Hamilton, the Marquis de Lafayette, and John Laurens – astonishingly, each barely out of their teens. Also playing key roles in the narrative are Martha Washington and the American Generals “Mad Anthony” Wayne, Nathanael Greene, and Benedict Arnold; the Falstaffian Baron Friedrich von Steuben and the imperious Count Casimir Pulaski; the Founding Fathers Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and John Hancock – the latter two deeply suspicious of what they viewed as Gen. Washington’s autocratic motives; and last but not least a common soldiery from whose desperate ranks emerged the future President James Monroe, the future Chief Justice of the United States John Marshall, the storied water carrier Molly Pitcher, and the dashing cavalry officer “Light Horse” Harry Lee, destined to father the son who nearly a century later would surrender his sword to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse.

With its laser focus on the military machinations and political intrigue hanging over the humble military cantonment in the Valley of the Forges as well as the significant events and battles that immediately preceded and succeeded it – not least the climactic and war-altering Battle of Monmouth Court House – *VALLEY FORGE* provides a perspective on Washington and the Revolutionary War too often if not completely overlooked.

“It was in fact the turning point in the War for American Independence,” Drury and Clavin conclude. “Though armed conflict would rage for another five years, the winter of 1777-1778 marked the end of the war’s classic period. From there on the struggle would move to the southern states, and Washington would not personally participate in another engagement until the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781.”

#### About the authors

**Bob Drury** is the author/coauthor of thirteen books. He has written for numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *Men’s Journal*, and *GQ*. He is currently a contributing editor and foreign correspondent for *Men’s Health*. He lives in Manasquan, New Jersey.

**Tom Clavin** is the author or coauthor of eighteen books. For fifteen years he wrote for *The New York Times* and has contributed to such magazines as *Golf*, *Men’s Journal*, *Parade*, *Reader’s Digest*, and *Smithsonian*. He lives in Sag Harbor, New York.

#### About the book

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**More advance praise for Bob Drury and Tom Clavin's VALLEY FORGE:**

“Valley Forge was the existential moment in the war for independence, when the direction of American history hung in the balance. Drury and Clavin have now given us the fullest and most readable account of that dramatic story, against which all subsequent efforts must be measured. As we negotiate our own existential moment, this is a story to savor.”

—**Joseph J. Ellis, Pulitzer Prize– and National Book Award–winning author of *Founding Brothers* and *American Dialogue: The Founders and Us***

“In these pages, Bob Drury and Tom Clavin, masters of narrative nonfiction, whisk us into a pivotal moment in American history. General George Washington leaves behind his dusty schoolbook caricature and leaps into full, vivid life as both a world-changing titan and a complex man of uncommon will and grace. Forget your starched notions of Valley Forge and plunge into this, the true story of grit, courage, and innovation that was a fulcrum moment in the founding of our great nation.”

—**Lynn Vincent and Sara Vladic, *New York Times* bestselling authors of *Indianapolis***

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