

# *Witness* TO REVOLUTION | The Unlikely Travels of Washington's Tent

## AUDIO TOUR »

### Object Highlight: Verplanck's Point Watercolor 210

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We don't know why Pierre Charles L'Enfant painted this panoramic watercolor and another similar one of West Point in 1782. Perhaps he was bored as the summer wound down and the chance of any more fighting diminished for the year. Perhaps he hoped someday to convert his sketches into prints for publication. Or perhaps he was simply impressed by the elaborate encampment which one viewer described as "truly a subject worthy of the pencil of the first artist."

What we do know, thanks to our ability to compare this image with other surviving maps, letters, and diaries, is that it is one of the best visual depictions of a Continental Army encampment during the Revolutionary War. This is as close as we'll ever get to having a Google Street View of Washington's army on campaign. It shows his own tent, two Guardsmen standing nearby, and a mile-long line of the common soldiers' tents (each six-by-six feet, wedge-shaped, and housing a "mess" of 5-6 men). At Verplanck's Point, Washington had his men create bowers from sticks and branches, shading their tents from the autumn sun and creating elaborate entryways to regimental encampments. These details are tiny, but they help us better picture Washington's army during the Revolutionary War.

Near the center of the image, for example, is a small depiction of what was once a large archway crowned by an anchor, a symbol of Rhode Island: the entrance to the Rhode Island Regiment's camp. In 1782, that Regiment included two companies of soldiers of African and Native American descent.

At Verplanck's Point, the Continental Army impressed visiting French officers, who remained committed to supporting the United States. In less than a year, the Revolutionary War ended with the Treaty of Paris. But the journey of Washington's tent was far from over.