The Hessian Barracks

at
Winchester, Virginia and Frederick, Maryland

(From the Yorktown Prisoner of War Perspective)

Marie Rasnick Fetzer
©2009
Dedicated to
Private Johann Jacob Rierschneck
Mousquetier
Leibkompanie, Ansbach Regiment, Ansbach-Bayreuth Troops
Surrendered at the Battle of Yorktown
October 19, 1781
and Held in Prisoner of War Camps in
Winchester, Va. and Frederick, Md.
until his Escape sometime before the Summer of 1783.
Remained in America as the SW Virginia Pioneer
JACOB RASNAKE
Father of the
Rasnake – Rasnick – Rasnic
Family
of SW Virginia.
The Barracks at Winchester, Virginia and nearby Frederick, Maryland, and the surrounding countryside, became a detention center for thousands of British and German Revolutionary prisoners of war from 1776 to 1783. Among those interred included the large contingent of German Auxiliary soldiers taken captive after the Battle of Yorktown in the fall of 1781.

Because the majority of these soldiers came from Hesse-Kassel, they are collectively referred to as Hessian, however many came from other Germanic principalities and various city states. The Hessians are often described as mercenaries because their rulers rented out their service to the British monarch, but these men were not true soldiers of fortune. Their role in the Revolutionary War can be more accurately understood by referring to them as they referred to themselves – as the “Hilfstruppen”, or helping troops.

After the defeat at Yorktown, General Cornwallis had tried to negotiate the parole of his men. However, General Washington emphatically rejected his plea and ordered the troops be surrendered, divided into two groups, and marched to prison camps in the north. Article V of the Articles of Capitulation stipulated they be sent to Virginia, Maryland or Pennsylvania; among these places, Winchester, Virginia and Frederick, Maryland were deemed perfectly suited for the containment of the newly captured prisoners of war. Their remote location in the mostly agricultural, largely German speaking "back country" was on the fringe of the frontier, where, according to German prisoner Lieutenant Johann Ernst Prechtel’s diary, “Indians and other wild people” could be found as close as fifty miles away.

The strategy of locating the captives near German speaking communities was meant to create their greater involvement in those communities and to covertly encourage desertions; the more desertions, the fewer prisoners to manage. The more men that could be hired out into the community, the less rations needed to be supplied.

American Propaganda and Prisoner Management Strategies

From the very beginning, the deck had been heavily stacked against the Hessians through the Americans’ concentrated tactics of using propaganda and “prisoner management” strategically devised to encourage them to defect.

Immediately upon receiving accurate intelligence that the British were hiring Hessian soldiers for service in America, the Continental Congress appointed a three-man committee to “devise a plan for encouraging the Hessians and other foreigners...to quit that iniquitous service”. The result was a resolution, believed to have been drafted by Thomas Jefferson, offering fifty acres of land, freedom to practice their religion, and civil liberties to German deserters. Copies were translated into German and distributed among the Hessian soldiers.

Benjamin Franklin, who joined the committee to implement the operation, arranged for the leaflets to be disguised as tobacco packets to make sure they would fall into the hands of the ordinary Hessian soldiers. Franklin was also involved in fabricating a letter which appeared to have been sent by a German prince to the commander of his troops in America, inflating German casualty figures and encouraging officers to humanely allow their wounded to die, rather than to save men who might become cripples unfit for service, thus entitling the prince to a greater amount of “blood money” which was paid for each of his men who were wounded or killed.4

Another favorite tactic of Washington was that of sending a Philadelphia baker by the name of Christopher Ludwick to infiltrate the enemy camps. Posing as a deserter, he would make contact with the Hessians and encourage them to defect, and is in fact credited with the defection of many from the German ranks throughout the war.

Two other successful practices that the Congress utilized were that of exposing the German prisoners to the prosperous lifestyles of their emigrant cousins, and of purposely marching them in times of inclement weather.5

March into Captivity

The defeat at Yorktown had effectively ended the war. The resulting surrender had been so humiliating for General Cornwallis that he had refused to meet his victors personally. So between three and four o’clock on the afternoon of October 19, 1781, it was Brigadier General Charles O’Hara who led the British and German troops in a procession of surrender in front of their enemies. The troops marched along Williamsburg Street, carrying their knapsacks and equipment, among great pomp and circumstance, to a level place where the Hussars of the French were drawn up in a circle, and there they laid down their weapons and

---

5 P. Kirby Gull, M. DIV., MSW, A Captor’s Conundrum: The Management of German Prisoners After Yorktown, A Maryland Perspective, p. 34.
armor, surrendering to the French and American troops under the command of
General George Washington.6

By order of General Washington, the prisoners were to be divided into two
groups that would begin the march north together, but would ultimately end up at
two different prison camps. The first group, who would be sent to Winchester,
Virginia, totaled 3,029. Included among the British ranks were 948 German
prisoners of the two Battalions of Ansbach.

The second group of prisoners totaled 2,924 and included 425 German
prisoners of the Regiment Hereditary Prince and 271 German prisoners of the
Regiment Du Bose of the Hessian Battalions. This group, according to
Washington, would be sent to Fort Frederick, Maryland, (which is not the same as
the similarly named Frederick Town, or Frederick, Maryland as it’s called today).

---

Prior to their departure, four hundred sixty-seven of the sick and wounded British and Germans who could be moved waited in Yorktown. About thirteen hundred that were unable to march were left behind to be cared for in the hospitals of Gloucester, across the bay from Yorktown. They were to be reunited with their original regiments later.7

According to the diary kept by the Bayreuther prisoner, Private Johann Conrad Döhla 8, the German troops spent the day after the surrender recovering from their “many exertions and sleepless nights that occurred during the siege”. He wrote of seeing the undoubtedly impressive sight of the Americans raising a large flag “on the water battery at Yorktown” that had thirteen stripes, which represented the thirteen provinces of the United North American Free States.

---

At three o’clock in the afternoon of October 21st, the able-bodied prisoners broke camp and began their march into captivity, escorted under a guard commanded by Brigadier General Robert Lawson, whose brigade of Virginia militia had also fought at Yorktown.9

The prisoners marched along for days in steady rain and snow, lacking adequate food and water, and sleeping out under the open sky at night. They did, however, report that they enjoyed much freedom along the way.

Their march took them through Williamsburg and Fredericksburg, where the two groups separated; the one bound for Winchester and the other for Fort Frederick.

On November 1st, the Winchester group was made to cross the Rappahannock River barefoot, where the waters came up to their thighs. They proceeded on, coming into sight of the Blue Ridge on November 3rd. On the 4th they were made to wade barefoot again for nearly a quarter of an hour across the ice cold waters of the Shenandoah River, where the current was so swift that they had to be careful that it did not carry them away. This crossing in cold water caused all sorts of sickness.

Finally, after marching two hundred and forty grueling miles in sixteen days, the first group arrived at their destination of Winchester, Virginia, on November 5th, 1781.10

Winchester, Virginia

The exact location where the Hessian Barracks at Winchester once stood is unknown. Unlike other prison camps, no formal barracks ever existed in Winchester, only an uncompleted main structure and a number of temporary huts.

Winchester’s first prisoners started arriving in 1776 and included a few Scottish Highlanders and Tory leaders. In September of 1777 a group of twenty Pennsylvania Quakers arrived from Philadelphia, where they’d been arrested as prisoners of war.

The first German prisoners to arrive were some of the Hessians captured at Trenton, New Jersey, in 1776. They moved to Winchester in the fall of 1777, where they were parceled out to the local people to live and work in the countryside.

As more prisoners continued to arrive, by October, the Continental Congress resolved that a log barracks and stockade should be built to house them. At the end of the year Congress authorized $20,000 for Colonel John Smith to build the

9 Lion G. Miles, p. 41.
10 Johann Conrad Döhla, p. 188-189.
Barracks, feed and clothe the prisoners, and pay the guards. In January, 1778, Colonel David Kennedy entered into a contract with William Hobday, who agreed to construct a two story barracks, six hundred and forty feet long and eighteen feet wide, for £13,000 in Virginia currency. He promised to have it completed by the last day of December, but because many of the prisoners were being dispersed to other locations or had gone out into the community, there was no pressing need for a large prison camp. So when contractual disputes arose between Colonel Kennedy and Hobday, coupled with the devaluation of currency, the work was only partially completed and construction on the Winchester Barracks came to a halt in the fall of 1778.

Two years later, by the fall of 1780, there was still no adequate facility for maintaining prisoners and Winchester became unable to cope with the housing and feeding of the increasing numbers passing through the camp. In an effort to ease the situation, sometime near the end of that year, cabins were ordered to be built, and 525 acres of land were rented four miles outside of Winchester near a town called Round Hill.

The Wiederholdt Map – Earliest Known Map of Winchester
_Drawn in 1777 by Lt. Andreas Wiederholdt of the Hesse-Kassel Regiment von Knyphausen._
_Special Collections of University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia._
General Location of the Winchester Hessian Barracks

Somewhere west of Albin and north of Round Hill, lays the site of the camps where the Hessians and British prisoners of war were kept. Though many have speculated on the precise location, no firm proof has ever been uncovered.

The Winchester Hessian Barracks, Lion G. Miles.
By March of 1781, thirty of the cabins had been completed, and there were orders to build ten more. Their dimensions were fourteen feet square, which was more or less the standard size for a soldier’s log hut during the Revolution, and would have been adequate to house ten to twelve men per hut.

In April, at least sixty more huts needed to be built, but getting the money from the State was always a problem. It was during this time that the Germans really began improving the existing structures and building new huts at what is known as the Winchester Hessian Barracks, or as the Germans themselves called it, the New Frederick Barracks.

When British forces surrounded Virginia on all sides and Tory activity increased within the Winchester vicinity itself, the security of the area was threatened and it became necessary to move most of the prisoners to the safety of the interior; this left the camp basically empty all summer and fall.

In November, the Barracks was in a shambles. Still incomplete and with only enough huts to house about eight hundred men, Winchester was woefully insufficient to accept the two thousand prisoners marching in from Yorktown.

Upon arrival on November 5th, about a thousand prisoners were obliged to “camp out”, and another five hundred of the British were granted permission to occupy a church in town.

Valley Forge Cabin
Replica of a cabin at Valley Forge in which soldiers of George Washington's army would have stayed during the winter of 1777-1778. Valley Forge Pennsylvania National Historical Park.

Hessian Hut
Dismantled from the excavated site in New York City and rebuilt on its foundation in 1915. Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation.
Even with the spreading around of the prisoners, another hundred huts were needed, but there was a problem with the local workmen who refused to build them because they had not received pay for those that they had already built. So it was suggested that the best solution would be for the prisoners to do it themselves.\textsuperscript{11}

Stephen Popp was a German prisoner held at Winchester who kept a diary, and in it he described his arrival at the camp like this:

“\textit{We came to Winchester. It is supposed to be a city, but looks quite bad. It is also inhabited by Germans. We marched out of Winchester some four miles into the woods. There was an old tumbledown barracks, called Frederick’s Barracks. It lies in the midst of deep woods – a witch’s place.}\textsuperscript{12} \textit{There we were quartered. We were amazed when we saw it. My flesh creeps yet to think of it. I will describe it briefly. It was built of wood. The gaps were now filled in with laths, but everything was wrecked. Yes, everything was extremely rotted. The roof was still covered in some places with bark. We were not safe from the rain nor the dripping. The snow had free entry, just like the wind on the public street. The fireplace was in the middle of the hut. We couldn’t remain near it, because of the smoke. We were therefore under the necessity of renovating our appointed hut in the worst winter weather. If only we could have a little protection against the rain. Some of our people went to the farmers and borrowed mattocks and saws. Some got picks and shovels, and so everybody went to work. In several days we accomplished it and made things quite comfortable. In each hut there were 32 to 36 men. In all we were twenty days on the march [Döhla stated they marched for sixteen days]. From Yorktown to Winchester are two hundred forty Virginia miles. So far into the country they shipped us. Provisions were short on that march. We received no bread, only flour to make it with. Once in a while we also got some rough and hard bread. But this happened seldom. Twice we received some salt meat on this march, also a little fresh meat and a little salt. We couldn’t complain about the command. They gave us as much freedom as possible. Many of the prisoners went out of the barracks into the surrounding territory and went to their work without a pass. The commandant, Colonel Canada, also permitted us to go into the city free and unhindered. The best of it here then was the freedom. If only the provisions had been better. But on account of the poor provisions we often had to buy what we needed, because it often took a long time, until our supplies came. Hunger and cold we had daily in abundance. Now let us close this year. For in this year we had much to endure.}\textsuperscript{13}”

\textsuperscript{11} Lion G. Miles, p. 18-40.  
\textsuperscript{12} Lewis N. Barton, p. 45.  
\textsuperscript{13} Stephen Popp.  

11
Another German prisoner, Johann Conrad Döhla wrote in his diary:

“5 November. We arrived Winchester...We marched through the place and another four Virginia miles, over two hours farther, to an old and large barracks with two levels, called the New Frederick Barracks, where both our regiments were lodged on the lower level. The English troops still with us were placed on the upper level.

If this is to be our winter quarters, may God have mercy upon us: numerous wretched huts built of wood and clay, most of which have no roofs or poor roofs, no cots, only poor fireplaces, neither doors nor windows, and lie in the middle of a forest. We already had many sick and fatigued people, which was not surprising. During this move we spent sixteen days and made a march of two hundred forty Virginia miles...

6 November. We were divided among our barracks, twenty or thirty men in a hut, where we did not have room enough to stand. We were also locked in like dogs, and our rooms were worse than the pig stalls and doghouses are in Germany.

8 November. We began to improve our barracks a bit. We made cabins and cots therein, for which we had permission from the Americans to get wood from the nearby forests. We closed the roofs and filled all the holes in the walls with wood and clay to protect ourselves from the cold. The worst evil in the huts was the constant smoke from the fireplaces, which often was such that it was impossible to see one another. We also collected bulrushes in the forest and cut grass, which served as mattress filler. Many of our people, with the permission of the American commanding officer, went, with or without passes, into the surrounding region to work for the residents threshing, spinning, cutting wood, or whatever the people had to do, in order to ease the hunger and to earn a shirt to put on their backs. We were allowed...to go into the city of Winchester and outside the barracks, five or six miles, without being stopped. This permission was undoubtedly the best part of our captivity. However, the rations were therefore that much worse, and they were meted out to us very sparingly and of poor quality. We received absolutely no bread except for an occasional uncooked Indian bread from the escort, which was even worse than pumpernickel. And instead of bread, which was to have been furnished according to the surrender agreement, we received a little raw and half-cooked oatmeal, from which we occasionally bake bread pancakes, for which the ever-present stewpot served us.” 14

---

14 Johann Conrad Döhla, p. 189-190.
Conditions at Winchester were so dire that a month after the Yorktown prisoners arrived, a conference was called with George Washington in Philadelphia regarding the “safe-keeping and cheap feeding” of the prisoners. By the end of December a report indicated that there was an “absolute necessity” for breaking up this post. It was decided that they would be ordered out of state in January; the British would go to Lancaster, Pennsylvania and the Germans to Frederick, Maryland.

When the commander of the guard, Colonel Joseph Holmes, received instructions to march the prisoners, he wrote a sensitive letter to Colonel James Wood, Superintendent of Prisoners in Virginia, urging consideration for the prisoners’ welfare at such a harsh time of year:

“I have given the necessary orders, and Disposition of March for the Guard and British Prisrs: they Are to Move to Morrow morning exactly at the hour of 10 OCIk, the British in One Column the Anspach in Another. The extreme coldness of the season have endured Me to refer to your Consideration, the hardship & difficulty both Guard and prisrs must encounter on the March, Many are almost as naked as the hour they were born, & not an ounce of animal food. Whither you could not with propriety detain them a few days, Or One half of them, then there might be a chance of getting into some sort of Shelter at night. It seems to shock the feelings of humanity to drive out of a warm habitation a poor Creature stark naked in Such a season.”

The letter Colonel Holmes wrote prompted Colonel Wood to delay the departure for only twenty four hours. The prisoners would be divided into two divisions, which would march a day apart. The second division would encamp on the ground left by the first. The British prisoners marched from the Barracks on the morning of January 26, and the Germans left the next day.

During its use, about five thousand British and German prisoners passed through the Winchester Barracks, but no large body ever stopped there for more than a couple of months. The camp was a hub of complicated and chaotic activity devoted to the warehousing of prisoners until such a time that they could be shuffled out of state because of severe overcrowding; constant financial crisis; security threats; or the desire to move them north in hopes of a prisoner exchange.

The Barracks continued to hold some prisoners for the next fifteen months, but with the departure of the Yorktown prisoners, its “heyday had come to a not so glorious end”. Left behind were eighty Germans. Some had been sick or injured at the time the main group departed; others had been dispersed out into the countryside, as far away as York, Pennsylvania, and could not be collected back in time to join the march.
The structures themselves at the Barracks most likely fell into ruin quickly after the war from lack of use, having been built in haste and intended only for temporary quarters. No trace of the Barracks at Winchester, Virginia remains today.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Frederick, Maryland}

The group of Yorktown prisoners that had first been sent to Winchester, Virginia had encountered conditions so bad that they were removed from that place after eleven weeks and were now on a grueling forty mile march toward Frederick, Maryland in the dead of winter, where they would be reunited with the rest of the prisoners that were already there.

\textit{Fort Frederick History}

Horatio Sharpe, governor of Maryland, commenced construction on Fort Frederick in 1756 at the outset of the French and Indian War. It was one of the largest fortifications built by English colonists in North America and construction took the better part of two years. It was a substantial stone star shaped structure with an imposing presence situated on a knoll above the Potomac River. The exterior lines were three hundred fifty five feet from bastion point to bastion point. The stone wall was eighteen feet high with at least three major buildings originally standing inside.

Over its lifetime, a number of different types of troops garrisoned Fort Frederick, but the most important group of soldiers were the four hundred fifty men of the Maryland Forces, men raised and supported by Maryland as provincial regulars. The Maryland Forces were eventually disbanded and the Fort was closed.

In 1763 Governor Sharpe reactivated the fort due to a massive Indian rebellion and seven hundred area settlers flocked to the fort for protection. Afterwards, the fort was again abandoned.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Lion G. Miles. p. 47-53.
\textsuperscript{16} Fort Frederick State Park History, http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/ftfrederickhistory.html.
By the time of the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress decided to press the Fort back into military service, this time as a prison camp. In 1778 necessary repairs were made and hastily completed, according to the orders, only “in a rough way”, so that by the time the Yorktown prisoners were ordered there, it was in a state of disrepair, and there was much concern because the fort was in shambles. Following the personal inspection by the Commissary General of all Prisoners, Abraham Skinner, a report was sent to General Washington that the situation at the Barracks at Fort Frederick was “insufficient for the reception of prisoners – indeed they are almost destroyed.”

So even as the group of Yorktown prisoners that had originally been ordered to Fort Frederick were crossing into Maryland, the final decision as to where to confine them had not been reached, and in the end, because of the unfit conditions there, the guard bypassed Fort Frederick and escorted them to the Barracks at Frederick Town. Unfortunately, conditions at the Barracks, it turned out, were not much better than at the Fort.
There remains controversy, even today, whether any Hessian prisoners were actually quartered at Fort Frederick; the line between oral traditions and written histories having become blurred after all these years. There is no doubt that the Fort housed many British prisoners during the Revolutionary War, but no evidence has been uncovered that any Hessian prisoners were ever kept at Fort Frederick.\footnote{P. Kirby Gull, M. DIV., MSW, \textit{A Captor’s Conundrum: The Management of German Prisoners After Yorktown, A Maryland Perspective}, Journal of The Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2003. p. 34-37.}

\textit{Hessian March from Winchester, Virginia to Frederick, Maryland}

Private Döhla’s diary describes the march from Winchester to Frederick, and the conditions at the new barracks once they arrived:

27 Jan [1782]. Early around nine o’clock our two regiments marched from the New Fredericks Barracks...we camped under open skies and had to lie down in the snow. Then we had to endure severe cold and frost the entire night...

28 Jan. Although it was so cold we had to cross over the Oh-Pekoh, a creek or small river, and wade through the water, so that at night we believed the marrow in our bones and feet would freeze. One could hardly believe what men can endure. [Lieutenant Pretchel recorded in his diary that three British soldiers froze to death on the night of January 28th.]

29 Jan. Our march went another nine miles further to a small town called Shepherds-Town, which is on the Potowmack River. Here we had to be transported across by boat, but it was very cold and the river was half frozen over, so we remained on the bank overnight. We made a very large fire but because of the great cold could not close our eyes. God pity us, both for our bad clothing, so completely tattered and fallen to rags, as well as the great cold, which we had to handle not as men but like dogs...

30 Jan. This past night the Potowmack was so heavily frozen over that one could ride and drive across it with wagons and horses, so severe was the cold, and we had to take our night quarters under open skies...

31 Jan. ...At sundown in the evening we arrived and were completely tired and exhausted from the long march. We were led by our escort through the city, and about a half hour beyond, on the east, we were directed into a barracks. These barracks, similar to a barracks compound, are two stories high, built of stone, and have a regular roof...The company received two floors, one upper and one lower, for quarters. Two barracks have been built here, and more than one hundred huts in which many English prisoners lay. It was very cold and drafty in our quarters. In the previous war French also were here in captivity. At present
two Hessian regiments, Hereditary Prince and Bose, remain as prisoners in the poor house in the city, as well as some jaegers.¹⁸

By the time Private Döhla and the Winchester group arrived at Frederick Town in late January, the other group of Hessians that had originally been slated to go to Fort Frederick but had been rerouted to the Frederick Barracks instead, had already been there for weeks.

_Hessian Barracks at Frederick, Maryland_
The Hessian Barracks at Frederick, Maryland was more like a real barracks than the camp at Winchester. There were two L-shaped, two story stone structures situated with the short end of the L’s facing each other, forming a courtyard in between. The rooms were plain, rectangular in shape, with no interior passageway, and the common walls between each two rooms were fitted with fireplaces, back to back. Two sets of wooden stairs inside and out connected the two levels.  

Historical Photo of the Hessian Barracks at Frederick, Maryland  
Maryland Historical File, May 10, 1914.

---

19 Hessian Barracks, National Register Listings in Maryland, Inventory No.: FHD-0243, http://www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net/
Commissioned by the Maryland State Legislature in 1777, the Barracks was part of a plan to construct similar structures at Annapolis and at the head of the Elk River. Though originally intended to accommodate two battalions of soldiers, it was soon put into use to house a large number of Hessians who had been captured at Bennington and Saratoga, and later, the British forces that were taken prisoner at Yorktown.

The location chosen to build the Barracks was at a place called Hollerstown Hill, about a half mile south of the town of Frederick, or Frederick Town, or Friedrichstadt, as the Germans called it. Prisoner Lieutenant Johann Ernst Prechtel described Frederick Town as an “entirely modern little town, beautiful and perfectly planned, about eighty years old, and settled predominantly by Germans”. The community supported agriculture and small scale manufacturing, such as the making of bells, in the German manner, producing linens, hides, honey, butter and apples.

In the summer of 1777, a local man, Abraham Faw, had been contracted to build the Barracks for a cost of £8,000, however, he had great difficulty in finding workers and materials. Pressures increased to complete the construction in preparation for receiving its first group of prisoners, but it appears that Faw failed to meet his deadline, and the work was still unfinished as late as December 1779.

On November 2, 1781, the Council of Maryland warned the Barracks would be insufficient to hold all the prisoners, and empowered the guard to appropriate any structure necessary to house them, including the “Poor House”, the Logged Gaol, and every other empty house. By the first week in December, it was reported that between fifteen and eighteen hundred prisoners had already arrived at the Barracks at Frederick Town, with over 2,000 more expected soon.

The group from Winchester arrived on January 31, 1782. The day after, on February 1, all the English prisoners were transported away to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, leaving the camp for the Germans. The two Hessian regiments already there were moved out of the Poor House and into the Barracks, leaving the Poor House to be used as a field hospital.

The state of Maryland was overwhelmed and unable to handle the impossible task of properly housing and caring for the great influx of so many prisoners all at once. The bitter cold and the acute lack of supplies continued to

---


22 *Diary in Bavarian War Archives Tells of Hessians Here in 1780’s*, newspaper article from research conducted by Dr. Harold J. Clem, July 15, 1946, Frederick, Maryland Newspaper Clipping.


19
make conditions critical all winter long. The captors were unable to obtain suitable beef, pork, flour, firewood, clothing, shoes or blankets for their prisoners. And all the while there were problems with getting and keeping enough guards. Compounding matters was that the Germans’ baggage and back pay were five months late and wouldn’t arrive until April 1782. Because of these dire circumstances, some of the prisoners were allowed to go to work out in the country for a time, and many were forced to sell their clothes and possessions for food.

According to Döhla,

“Frequent epidemics occurred, and bugs and lice in great numbers appeared in our tattered clothing...At present, we receive poor rations, raw bread, almost rotten and stinking, salted meat, and occasionally stinking herring fish. Many of us prisoners went barefoot and half naked; most no longer had a shirt on their body, and many went with only a rag, which was full of bugs.”

Beginning the 4th of June, 1782, Prechtel wrote in his diary that “no one is allowed any longer to give shelter to one of the prisoners of war. In case of violation, the guilty person must pay the sum of five hundred Pounds Sterling, and in case he is not able to pay, he must serve as a marine on an American ship for three years. In case his health does not permit this, he will be punished with thirty nine stripes.”

As the months went by, the summer proved to be hot and humid, and the captives became restless. One routine they could count on was the early morning roll call, held by Major Mountjoy Bailey, Commander of the Guard at Frederick Town. Major Bailey allowed the prisoners lots of freedom. They were not closely monitored and traveled freely into the countryside; they left and returned as they pleased.

According to Döhla, on August 27, 1782, Garrison orders were:

“Every prisoner of war who has the desire to remain in this country shall be set free at once and receive a Certificate from the Minister of War permitting him to enjoy the liberties as a native of the country. In this case he must pay the sum of eighty dollars.”

Signed: John Wood, Colonel

24 Johann Conrad Döhla.
25 Johann Ernst Prechtel.
“From September 1 on, all the captives from Cornwallis’s army who had worked here and there in the country had to return to their regiments and enter the Barracks, by an order of the Congress of Philadelphia. Also, all of the captives from Burgoyne’s army who were scattered in the land, were assembled. However, anyone of them who was married to an American woman was released for a fixed sum, and could again part; the same was true of many who had sworn allegiance to America. All of us captives had permission from Congress to swear our allegiance. Also, for thirty pounds, that is, eighty Spanish dollars, it was possible to buy freedom out of captivity, or to allow an inhabitant to buy our freedom, and we could work off the indebtedness. This order was publicly proclaimed, posted and read in the churches.”26

Negotiations continued for the end of the war and in April of 1783, Congress resolved to arrange for liberation of all prisoners. On May 13, 1783, at noon, the last of the German prisoners left the Frederick Barracks. They had endured fifteen and a half months in confinement before gaining their freedom with the signature of the Treaty of Paris. Those who had not died, deserted, been lost along the way, or who had purchased their freedom departed western Maryland to head north to board ships for their homeland; others, like my ancestor, remained behind to make a new life.

**Frederick Barracks after the Revolutionary War**

The Frederick Barracks has quite a lengthy history after the close of the Revolution.

**1799 – Present**

- For many years, the Hessian Barracks was used as a storage place, and in it was kept the cannons belonging to local artillery companies.
- In 1799, captured French sailors occupied the Barracks.
- During the period following 1801, the Fredericktown Barracks served the State of Maryland principally as a public arsenal and the buildings underwent numerous repairs and modifications over the years.

---

26 Johann Conrad Döhla
Hessian Barracks at Frederick, Maryland
Photo by Sue Reid ©2005.

Inside the Frederick Hessian Barracks
Photo by Sue Reid ©2005.

Fireplace Inside the Frederick Hessian Barracks
Photo by Sue Reid ©2005.
• The Frederick Barracks was also the starting point of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Captain Meriwether Lewis in command. An Army Inspector’s office was established there where the Expedition’s supplies were amassed from the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Lancaster and Baltimore.
• During the War of 1812, United States troops were quartered there.
• From 1840, and for several years thereafter, a portion of the Barracks was used by special permission of the Legislature as a cocoonery, with a white mulberry orchard, consisting of ten acres, in an adjoining lot. The State granted the use of the Barracks building to test the experiment of silk-culture, which created much discussion throughout the country.
• In June 1843, a military encampment was held in the Barracks, known as Camp Frederick, under the command of Colonel James M. Coale.
• The Frederick County Agriculture Society held its exhibitions and Fairs on the Barracks grounds from 1853-1860. Due to the Civil War, no exhibitions were held again until 1868.
• During the Civil War, after the Battle of Antietam in 1862, the Barracks, along with all other available buildings in Winchester, served as a hospital to house the estimated four thousand wounded soldiers from both the North and the South.
• After the Civil War, in 1867, the State of Maryland chose the Barracks grounds for the location of the Maryland Institute for the Deaf and Dumb. Before the construction of the first building in 1871, the school met in the old Barracks. Of the two stone buildings of the Frederick or Hessian Barracks, the West Barracks building was demolished in 1874 to supply materials to erect the Maryland School for the Deaf’s new brick building. The other original building still exists and is listed with the National and State Registry of Historic Sites.
• After the construction of the School’s Old Main Building, the Barracks was put to various uses, including storage, living quarters for staff members, and more recently, as a School Museum. Attempts were made to keep the Barracks in good repair when money was available. By the 1970s it was evident that extensive repairs and reconstruction would be necessary. In 1971 a two phase renovation project was begun, careful to maintain the Barracks’ Colonial character.27

27 Hazel K. McCanner.
The building is located on the grounds of the Maryland School for the Deaf Campus at the corner of Clarke Place and South Market Street.

Its contents belong to the Maryland School for the Deaf and it is currently closed for renovation, after which time it will be used as the school’s museum.
Additional Related Reading and Resources

Ansbach-Bayreueth Troops During and After the Revolutionary War, http://www.jochen-seidel.de/ab-troops/


*Diary in Bavarian War Archives Tells of Hessians Here in 1780’s.* Frederick, Maryland. July 15, 1946.


Calvin Schildknecht, *Two Publications Trace German Roots to Revolution.* The Frederick Post, Frederick, Maryland, September 28, 1990.

*Thesis Features County and German Early War Prisoners.* Unknown Newspaper Article, August 31, 1959.


Johannes Helmut Merz. *Various personal emails.*


Articles of Capitulation Yorktown.
http://various.classicauthors.net/ArticlesOfCapitulationYorktown/

Maryland State Department of Natural Resources, *Fort Frederick State Park History*, http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publications/ftfrederickhistory.html

The Official Tourism Website of Frederick County, Maryland, *Hessian Barracks* http://www.fredericktourism.org/


*Hessian Barracks A Revolutionary War Prison and Civil War Hospital*, http://www.hallowedground.org/component(option,com_jthg/theme,region/task,view/county,Frederick/Itemid,1/id,25/)

*Hessian Barracks, Museums, Frederick County, Maryland*, http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/museums/fr/html/fr.html

*Revolutionary Barracks Frederick County*, Maryland Historical File No. 1008.


AMREV-Hessian Website,
http://freepages.military.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~amrevhessians/

Richard Patterson, “What Was A “Hessian?”
http://www.ushistory.org/WashingtonCrossing/history/hessian.htm

CONTACT:
mariefetzer@tds.net

http://www.rasnickfamily.org