The Continental Army at Valley Forge

The winter of 1777-8 was the low point of America's struggle for independence. The troubles began the previous August when the British fleet unloaded a force of Redcoats at the top of the Chesapeake Bay with the objective of capturing the American capital at Philadelphia. The Americans were routed by the British at the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, leaving Philadelphia undefended. Members of the Continental Congress fled the city: first to Lancaster and then to York where they reestablished the capital. The British entered Philadelphia on September 26.

The Continental Army suffered another defeat at the Battle of Germantown just north of Philadelphia on Oct. 4. General Washington led his weary and demoralized army to Valley Forge a few miles away where they would camp for the winter and prepare for battle with the return of warm weather.

Conditions in the camp were horrendous. Forced to live in damp, crowded quarters, Washington's army of approximately 12,000 suffered from a lack of adequate clothing and food. Diseases such as typhoid, dysentery, typhus and pneumonia ran rampant. An estimated 2,000 died. Morale plummeted.

General Washington was in despair as he watched his army disintegrate. However, as time progressed, a transformation occurred. Under Washington's inspired leadership, conditions improved: more food, equipment and new recruits reached the camp lifting spirits. Most importantly, the training efforts of Baron von Steuben increased discipline and reinvigorated pride among the troops. A former member of the General Staff of the Prussian Army, Steuben arrived in camp in February bearing a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin whom he had met in Paris.

Washington immediately assigned the seasoned soldier the task of training his army. Drilling started immediately. From dawn to dusk individual soldiers, companies, regiments and battalions were incessantly schooled in the art of war. What had been a ragtag and undisciplined collection of individuals became a cohesive fighting force.

Out of this terrible winter emerged a new Army, confident and ready to do battle. On June 19, 1778 the British abandoned Philadelphia and marched back to New York City. Washington led his Continental Army in pursuit. The subsequent battle at Monmouth, New Jersey ended in a draw. The War for Independence would last another five years, but a major victory of the spirit had been won during the winter at Valley Forge.
In what ways was the novel historically accurate in portraying the conditions at Valley Forge? Cite evidence from the article that was the same or similar to information provided in the novel.