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(Theme music)
Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.
(Applause)
Williams: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with author Bob Drury discussing the book *Valley Forge*, which he coauthored with Tom Clavin. I'm your host Jay Williams, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. It's sponsored by Simon and Schuster. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. Eighteen months after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, some-12,000 members of America's beleaguered Continental Army staggered into Valley Forge, a small Pennsylvania encampment some twenty miles northwest of British occupied Philadelphia. Realign from a string of demoralizing defeats by the powerful British Army, the American force was barely equipped to survive the coming winter. Their commander in chief George Washington was at the lowest ebb of his military career. Its treasury depleted, the Continental Congress was in exile, and the American Revolution appeared to be lost. Six months later however the situation was completely changed. There was political intrigue, disease, starvation, and a cold, bitter winter. Despite this Washington and a group of trusted advisors including Alexander Hamilton, John Laurens, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Baron von Steuben transformed a struggling bunch of citizen soldiers into a professional fighting force. This force would eventually deal the British Army a stunning defeat and ultimately change the world forever. In *Valley Forge*, authors Bob Drury and Tom Clavin tell the story of this miraculous turnaround. Relying on new and rarely-seen contemporaneous documents that illustrate how this cast of iconic American characters navigated this particularly vulnerable moment, Drury and Clavin show how the struggles and trials of Valley Forge shaped the American Army and the emerging nation more than any experience on the battlefield. Bob Drury is the author, coauthor, or editor of over nine books including *The Heart of Everything That Is, The Last Stand of Fox Company*, and *Halsey's Typhoon*. 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. Please join me in welcoming Bob Drury to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.
(Applause)
Drury: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you everyone from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Thank you all for coming out tonight. This stop to Pritzker--this is my third time at Pritzker. It's, oh, I always look forward to it the most with excitement and with trepidation. I figure wherever else I go--I was just in St. Louis yesterday. I was in Lewes, Delaware the day before. I was in New York City taping a CSPAN the day before that. I always figure when I'm speaking to a crowd, I know more about the book I'm talking about than they do. This is the only place where I'm worried that you guys know more about it than I do. So thank you for coming out tonight. And I am well aware that the four most important words in any public speakers vocabulary are "and so in conclusion". So I promise to make this short, and I hope, sweet. With that in mind, it's customary at events like this when an author has a new book coming out to maybe read a short passage, perhaps one of the favorite bits that really gets to the heart of the story. So when I turn to page 219 I see I've written a note to myself that says, "You bore yourself when you read aloud. Please don't bore these good people." So that ends the reading portion of our

evening. Instead, how about if I just tell you a couple of stories? And I'll start out with--I hadn't planned this until maybe about a week ago. The number one question I get about this book, about our authorship--my partner Tom Clavin--how did you come up with Valley Forge? And for me it is truly a family affair. My son, his name is Liam-Antoine, with hyphen. His mother is French. He is half French. Dual citizenship. He's been bilingual since he was, oh, early childhood. He now speaks four languages. He's in university in the UK. But six or seven years ago, I guess he was thirteen or fourteen, he was here visiting, and we were down at my wife's mother's house for Christmas. And her whole family had gathered. And I heard this kerfuffle in the TV room, and I was walking towards it. And I saw him-- I guess Liam-Antoine was thirteen or fourteen at the time, as I said. He was walking, his face was red. I said, "What's going on?" It turns out, my wife's brother had said something about the United States bailing out France in two world wars, and Liam-Antoine had shot back at him, "Oh yeah, if it wasn't for the Marquis de Lafayette and the French Army, there wouldn't even be a United States." And not only was I proud of my early teenage son for taking on a forty-something adult, but a light bulb went off over my head, and I said, "Lafayette during the Revolutionary War. What a great book." Now we were just finishing up our Red Cloud book, *The Heart of Everything That Is*, and we had already committed to our WWII book *Lucky 666*, but I talked to Tom Clavin, and I said, "This is it. Lafayette's in the queue after *Lucky 666*." As it turns out as we were working on *Lucky 666* the inestimable Sarah Vowell, a wonderful writer, she came out with her book--she published her book *Lafayette and the Somewhat United States*. So there goes our idea for Lafayette. But Clavin, as is his want, kind of gave me his--"Not so fast. What do you know about Valley Forge?" And I was like, "You know Valley Forge, half-naked, starving soldiers freezing to death in the snow. And let's see, what else do I know? I seem to recall a lot of paintings of Washington sitting on a big great white steed watching half-naked starving soldiers freezing to death in the snow. That's about it." And he said, "Exactly." He said, "That's what most Americans know about Valley Forge, and there is so much more to it, I have a feeling." And so what I did was--and we were still finishing up. We were putting the finishing touches on *Lucky 666*. Three Februaries ago--that would have been 2/15--I made an appointment to go down to Valley Forge and meet the Park Service's chief Valley Forge historian. And I chose February because, pace et, it was the cruelest month of that summer--of that winter of 1777/1778. And along our walking tour with Ranger Bill Troppman, what I learned that I didn't know about Valley Forge, that most Americans didn't know about Valley Forge, just that one day, I came back to Tom and said, "It could fill a book." And as it turns out it did. It's this book. So the bottom line is, Tom and I, we contend that the characters who inhabit the pages of *Valley Forge* and their core values were part of the most productive generation of statesmen in the United States. Now we say this fully aware of Lincoln's team of rivals, of FDR's kitchen cabinet. We'll stand by this statement in this book. What we hope we've accomplished here, as the anthropologists say, to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Now as I say, there were gaps small and large in our knowledge about what occurred at Valley Forge during that fateful winter. For instance, does anybody know that there were 750 black soldiers, black Continental Army soldiers at Valley Forge? They were all free men. Many of them, or about half of them were freed slaves who had been bought out from their New England--no Southerners--from their New England owners, and they formed some of the most ferocious battalions in the Continental Army. This was the last time that black Americans and white Americans would fight next to each other until the Korean War. Yes, I know there were black battalions, black divisions--the Tuskegee Airmen in WWII--but this was an integrated army at Valley Forge, another small myth that was kind of exploding. Oh, it was just Washington's bad luck to choose this winter, this freezing cold winter. Wrong. It was one

of the most mild winters for southeast Pennsylvania at the time. Now granted there were several hellacious snowstorms and ice storms, but they were interspersed with the temperate rising and these warm rains. And it was--Washington, the winter before and subsequently the winter after, would make his winter camp in Morristown. Both of those winters were much more arctic than Valley Forge, and Washington preferred it that way. In the brisk fifteen degrees, his troops could train on hard ground. But here--warm, cold, warm, cold, warm, cold, rains. It was a veritable sea of mud. And it--I read, between Tom and I, we read so many journals, so many diaries. So I personally read close to 2,000 of George Washington's memos, personal letters, public proclamations, general orders, correspondence with the Continental Congress between August 1777 and June 1778. Washington--everybody who wrote a letter mentioned how much it stunk. It was--the miasma that hung over that camp like an illness just almost felled people. It was a combination of these latrines they had were--vaults, they called them--haphazardly dug. And horses dropping dead in the freezing cold starving to death. The ground is frozen. They buried them about a foot deep. The heavy, warm rains would come, overflowing the latrines, washing away the dirt from the dead horses, and this effluvia just hung over them. It was amazing how many people referenced the stench of Valley Forge. I'll give you one more. There's so many of them, but I'll give you one more. Another common myth about Valley Forge, kind of a small one, but the Pennsylvania campaign the previous fall had denuded all the farms surrounding the area. That's why all the men were starving. Well, that's not true either. That fall had seen one of the best harvests in Chester County, in Montgomery County, in Bucks County, the counties surrounding Valley Forge. It's just that the farmers and the merchants, who were overflowing with wheat and corn and poultry and pigs and cattle, they would prefer to smuggle their goods into British-occupied Philadelphia, where they would be paid in pounds sterling, sometimes even gold, as opposed to the worthless Continental script that the Continental Congress was issuing. So there was food to go around, just none of it came to Valley Forge. Of the 2,000 men, of the 2,000 Americans who perished at Valley Forge--of malnutrition, of exposure-- historians guestimate that probably about 1,000 died of starvation. And these men starved to death when the surrounding countryside was bounteous with food. So all those small myths lead up to what we feel Tom and I, is the one great myth of Valley Forge. And that is of George Washington once again sitting on his great white charger. And indestructible George Washington, the father of our country, which by the way was a term that was coined that winter by a Pennsylvania German-language newspaper. And indestructible and indefatigable. And false. Because in essence that winter George Washington was fighting a two-front war. He was fighting militarily against George III's imperial army, although it wasn't called the imperial army. George III's British Army. And he was fighting the political battle of his life against a faction of congress who wanted to depose him, who did not think he was doing the job. We don't remember that; we're not taught that. Now to explain this, we kind of have to back up a little bit. When Congress, the Continental Congress first authorized a Continental Army, which they were loathed to do. A standing army just reminded them of the British oppressors. They would have much rather fought this with militias. But they finally realized we can't do it. We need a standing army. We need a commander in chief. And even though these Boston firebrands wanted one of their own as commander in chief, they also realized we need the most prosperous, the most populous state--colony at the time--in the fold. That was Virginia of course. So they called up Washington, who had a militia background. He had fought with the British during the French and Indian War. And they named him commander in chief. At first the delegates were, especially the New Englanders led by John Adams--they were willing to overlook Washington's loss of New York. He had after all driven the British out of Boston, and then their

forbearance was kind of paid off the previous Christmas with the surprise attack on Trenton and on Princeton that routed the mostly Hessian Army that Cornwallis was commanding. These were victories, by the way, especially Trenton, that caught the eye of the French king, the Boy King Louis XVI, and more important his foreign minister the Count de Vergennes. Now the Count de Vergennes had ten years earlier predicted that the American colonies would rise against the hated Rosbifs, the Roast Beefs across the channel. And his prediction was correct. And he had the ear of the king, and he was constantly, "Look at this. Look at this. Look at what these colonists are doing. They don't even have a professional army, and they're giving the British all they can handle." But after what became known as the Pennsylvania Campaign of late summer and fall 1777 it did not look good for Washington. The commander of the British forces in the United States was a general named William Howe. And along with his brother Lord Richard Howe, who commanded the Royal Navy, they were the ones who had driven Washington and the Continental Army out of New York. Now, in late summer, in August of 1777 Howe decide, "Okay I'm gonna move out of New York. I'm gonna take the nascent capital of the United States, Philadelphia. I'm gonna capture Philadelphia. That will be the end of this small rebellions. We've handled these things in Hong Kong. We've handled these things in India. We're gonna handle this the same way." And throughout that entire Pennsylvania campaign the British General Howe completely flummoxed the American General George Washington. First there was Brandywine. In early September when Washington tried to stop the British from capturing Philadelphia at Brandywine Creek just south of the city, Howe's flanking maneuver nearly resulted in the complete annihilation and/or capture of the Continental Army. Washington was completely taken by surprise by this flanking maneuver. It was only a covering movement by two of Washington's homegrown generals, Rhode Island's Nathanael Greene and Pennsylvania's own Anthony Wayne--Mad Anthony Wayne was a sobriquet he picked up later in the war--was only their converting movement that allowed the Continental Army to escape willy-nilly, running away. This was followed ten days later by what became known as the Paoli Massacre. Washington had ordered General Wayne and a brigade to shadow Howe as he moved on Philadelphia. Tories in Chester County informed Howe he was being trialed by this brigade. He turned the tables, and he ordered a midnight bayonet raid. Wayne made a mistake of camping one night too long in the township of Paoli, very close to Valley Forge as a matter of fact, and at midnight the British surprised his sleeping soldiers. The British were led by a general named Charles Grey. He became known as No Flint Grey, because he ordered all his English and Scottish soldiers to remove the flintlocks from their Brown Bess muskets. This was to be a bayonet attack only. Over 200 Americans were killed in their sleep, running out of their tent half-naked, stabbed to death. Witnesses attested that Americans trying to surrender were run through for sport--surrounded by Red Coats and just run through for sport. Continental doctors who treated the wounded American soldiers, most of whom died within the week, reported that these men were serrated with fifteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty gashes--twenty bayonet gashes. Washington of course called this a war crime. He accused General Howe and No-Flint Grey of war crimes. The British answer to this charge was as ingenious as it was evil. "Sure, we may have called for no quarter," which means take no prisoners, "but we are not bound by the rules of war. We are not fighting another sovereign nation. We are fighting treasonous rebels. Therefore we can do whatever we want." Thereafter Washington said to watch as Howe and his army sauntered into Philadelphia unopposed. Not a shot was fired. In the meanwhile of course as the British Army is moving on Philadelphia, the Continental Congress based in Philadelphia scatters. Most of the delegates go back to their home district. Not even a quorum at any time between eighteen and twenty-three. They head for the interior

Pennsylvania town of York where they set up Continental Congress in exile in the county courthouse. And after Brandywine, after Paoli, after Germantown--because Germantown was Washington's final stab to take back Philadelphia. And even though it came this close, a combination of fog and tactical missteps by the militia, resulted in another resounding retreat. After these three losses, the whispers about Washington's leadership in York especially, and especially among the New England delegates, became full-throated. They were no longer whispers. Following Germantown, Dr. Benjamin Rush--an original signer of the Declaration of Independence, a Philadelphia surgeon, originally a Washington ally--he wrote this anonymous screed against Washington. He called him, let me make sure, "a power mad dictator with no military skills." And by the way Patrick Henry, Washington's good Virginia friend, he recognized—the copies were made of this screed, of this pamphlet. But Patrick Henry got his hand on the original, and he recognized Dr. Benjamin Rush's handwriting, and he warned Washington, "This is the man you're up against. These are not just rabble-rousers. These are leaders. These are statesmen who are beginning to doubt your military abilities." And in between the lost battles of Brandywine and Germantown, an amazing thing happened. The American General Horatio Gates defeated the British Commander General Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne in the upstate New York hamlet of Saratoga. 5,000 Hessian troops and Red Coats, including something like twenty-three generals, surrendered to Gates. It immediately put Gates on the fastback to become Washington's replacement, which was just fine with Gates. He was a political animal to the core. Gates had been born in Britain, but he had fought with the English during the French and Indian War. The Seven Years War, they called it in Europe. And he had settled in what is now West Virginia, The Western Virginia at the time. And when the rebellion—when the American rebellion broke out he volunteered his services to the Continental Congress. He thought he was gonna be named commander in chief. He considered Washington little more than a bumpkin, a provincial bumpkin. And when Washington was named ahead of him, Gates from that day immediately set his sights on Washington's command. So Gates, of course, now he's the hero of Saratoga, he comes down to Pennsylvania, and he takes lodging in York where he can be closer to the delegates, and he starts lobbying them. "I'm your man. This Washington is not doing anything. I'm your man." But he just couldn't get the votes. There were not enough delegates in York, and the New Englanders, who were really the most vociferous about ousting Washington, they couldn't do it without the scattered delegates who had gone back to their own district. So instead they did the next best thing in their minds. They made General Gates the president of the Board of War. Now the Board of War previous to this had been this bureaucratic kind of arm of congress that kind of, where do we put POWs, how are we gonna procure arms, who's keeping the rolls of who enlisted? Gates turned the Board of War into something that commanded an army in the field, and he started making decisions that were obvious slaps in the face to Washington, the most egregious of which was promoting an Irish-born French officer named Thomas Conway to the post of inspector general of the Continental Army. The whole thing--what Alexander Hamilton, who was a Washington ally and acolyte, he called it "an execrable coups d'état." It became known as the Conway Cabal. Now Washington once again worried about General Howe coming out of Philadelphia, defeat his ragtag--and he's got Gates at his back with Conway and John Adams, General Mifflin, and a bunch of other Patriots who don't want Washington in there. All this subterfuge came to a head in late December when Conway arrived in Valley Forge to take up his duties. But Washington, even though his generals--Greene, Mad Anthony Wayne, and of course his acolytes Hamilton and Lafayette--they're up in arms. They're threatening to resign. They're threatening to mutiny. Washington displayed just a preternatural calmness and coolness about this whole uproar happening

around him. And this steely calm helped him to buy some time, ‘cause he knew--he had already requested that a contingent of delegates visit Valley Forge. I want to show you the state of our Army. In essence he knew that without proper and immediate influx of uniforms, shoes, food, arms, tent, everything, visiting foreign military officers who had either arrived at Valley Forge to volunteer their services or came over as observers were shocked. They would enter the compound or they would get close to the compound, and American centuries--when I say naked I'm not talking metaphorically. I'm talking literally. The American centuries would be naked beneath some ragged blanket, barefoot, standing on their hat in the snow trying to keep their feet warm. Once the American delegation of those five delegates came out and saw this, Washington knew he had them. They were so embarrassed they started taking off their own shoes and their own boots and handing them to soldiers. So Washington made a reasonable list of demands. This is what I need. Arms, ammo, shoes, clothes, food. And I need it now. I need it not yesterday and not tomorrow. I need it now. And what he did--he installed what came to be called--these five delegates came to be called the Camp Committee. He installed them in a nearby farmhouse, and everyday he would send over some of his aides de camps. And most of the time it was Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens--young John Laurens. And they would connive, and they would whisper, and they would kind of smooth these delegates into making decisions that the delegates thought were their own, when in truth they were actually Washington's. Washington was becoming a political savvy animal as much as Gates at this point. And the decisions the camp committee was making were mirror images of what Washington wanted. It was almost like the tail was wagging the dog back in York. I mentioned Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens making daily trips to the Camp Committee to schmooze, to cajole, to suggest. I’m assuming here tonight, given a combination of Ron Chernow and Lin-Manuel Miranda, I don't have to talk about Alexander Hamilton. But I will say a few words about John Laurens. He might be my favorite character in the book. Laurens was the son of the South Carolina delegate to the Continental Congress Henry Laurens, who when John Hancock became sick, Henry Laurens assumed the presidency of the Congress. Laurens had been studying law in London after taking his university degree in Geneva when the rebellion broke out in the states, and much to his father's chagrin--his father wanted him to be a politician and a lawyer--he wanted to fight. He found a way back to the states, introduced himself to Washington, and volunteered for anything he could do. He acquitted himself well at the Battle of Brandywine Creek, and he almost reached heroic status at the Battle of Germantown. But in defeat nobody reaches heroic status, but everybody remembered John Laurens’ actions at the Battle of Germantown. And along the way he struck up this profound friendship with the twenty-one year old Hamilton. So we have the twenty-two year old Laurens, the twenty-one year old Hamilton, and the Marquis de Lafayette, who when he arrived in the United States and introduced himself to Washington in August of '77, he was nineteen. He turned twenty right around the Battle of Brandywine. These three young men, these aides de camps, became the surrogate sons--Washington of course was childless. He had a stepson through Martha Custis, but he was childless. They became the surrogate sons that Washington never had. I could go on and on about Laurens, but for now let me just say that the reason I call him the founding father you've never heard of was because he was so headstrong, and he wanted battlefield honors. And by 1783, Washington had released him, and Hamilton for that matter, from what they called their inkwells, and they were in charge of companies. And while Laurens was operating in and around his hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, he was in a sickbed when he heard that there was a Red Coat foraging party venturing out of the city. Now this is towards the end of the war. The British were weeks away from evacuating Charleston, South Carolina. They

knew the gig was up. But Laurens was so headstrong, pulled himself out of his sickbed, shaking with malaria, led a company to cut off these Red Coat foragers and was ambushed by a company of British scouts, and he was shot out of his horse and killed at the age of twenty-seven. But these events are far in the future. I'm getting ahead of myself. Back at Valley Forge, seeing the political trouble that Washington was in, not only became one of his most loyal acolytes but also became a back door to his father Henry in New York, who was relaying messages about what the mood of the Congress was. Now when things looks o bleak for the Continental Army in that February of 1778, it was optimists like the young Laurens, the young Hamilton, the young Lafayette, who kept Washington's sagging spirits. Boy, Washington would never show an emotion in front of the troops. But at the farmhouse he had commandeered as his headquarters--and rented by the way. He didn't commandeer. He rented it out. There were seventeen people living in this little three-bedroom house, among them these youngsters, and they saw the burden on Washington's shoulders. And they did everything they could to help lift that burden, whether it was words, whether it was deeds. And there was also a little bit of luck involved that the Americans weren't just wiped out completely because General Howe and the British had taken such care of the Americans at Brandywine Creek, at Paoli, at Germantown—it was cold out, it was rainy out. Do we really want to go out and attack the Americans? Let's take care of them come spring fighting season. That's what they called it. Let's just enjoy the urbane delights of Philadelphia, such as they are, and we'll take care of these American rabble in the spring. And Washington knew well that if General Howe had decided to come out of Philadelphia, all was lost. He would have routed the bobtailed Continental Army, and they would have run for the hills and maybe put up some guerilla resistance, but the key to his hopes for putting together a spring campaign, one of the keys was the Marquis de Lafayette. Now, no other officer--not Greene or Wayne, who were in their thirties--not even young Laurens or Hamilton, was closer to the commander in chief than the Marquis de Lafayette. I think Washington saw something of his own younger self in Lafayette. So eager for battlefield glory, so deferential to the commander in chief. Even like Washington when he was young, Lafayette was still a little cultish, a little oafish like a puppy. In fact before he came to America he had been invited to a masked ball at Versailles, and none other than Marie Antoinette had made fun of his clumsy dancing. But by this point in the war Washington had become so angry at Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane in Paris for sending over these incompetent soldiers of fortune, primarily French--Washington used the great term popinjays. We should use more of that term these days. These popinjays who had no French, who expected to be handled a generalship as soon as they hit American shores. And I can't tell you the amount of letters I read, Washington more than besieging, angrily telling Franklin, "Listen I know we need the French in this war, but please don't send me anymore of these deadbeats. I can't use them." Lafayette was different. Lafayette had taught himself English on the ocean voyage over. And sure he tried to ingratiate himself into Washington, but there was a genuine affection that went both ways between the older man and the younger man. And Washington wasn't politically naive either. He knew that Lafayette's reports back to the foreign minister Count de Vergennes and then subsequently to Louis XVI would go a lot towards bringing the French into the war. He needed those positive reports. I mean, he genuinely had affection for Lafayette, but he also knew that he could use this French aristocrat to his military purposes. Of course in February, not in large part but because Lafayette played a good role, the French came into the war. They signed the treaties of alliance with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane. Now given the vagaries of ocean travel at the time, Washington would not know this for months. But of course French or no French in the war, Washington still had a problem. His freezing and starving army--even though Nathanael Greene who had

replaced Thomas Conway of the Conway Cabal as inspector general. Even though Greene was just getting up, there was a trickle of clothes and arms and ammunition, and by May it would become a torrent. But Greene was doing--and Greene didn't want the job. He wanted battlefield glory, but for the good of the country he took the job. But still by February things looked bleak for this ragtag. It was basically a disparate set of militias. And come spring Washington knew these militias, as big as their hearts are, are going to have to face the most experienced, the most feared army in the world on the battlefield. What can I do? What can change this? And this is where we come to one of my favorite parts of *Valley Forge* and one of my favorite characters, John Laurens notwithstanding. Because in late February arrived in Valley Forge, I want to make sure I get his name right--the Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben. Baron Von Steuben to you and me. This guy was as colorful as his name. He arrived at Valley Forge pulled in a sleigh pulled by a team of cold black Percheron horses he had purchased in France just to make a good entrance. Of course he had bought them on borrowed money 'cause he was dead flat broke. He was dressed in a silk uniform top with two giant horse pistols in his holster, and in his lap--twenty-four jingle bells on his sleigh, and in his lap was his little pocket greyhound. Azor was his name. In his wake was his retinue of servants and assistants and aides de camp and translators and even a French chef. He brought a French chef to Valley Forge. The guy quit within forty-eight hours after seeing the conditions there. But von Steuben, and this is why he just appeals to me--von Steuben also arrived at Valley Forge with a resume more doctored up than the Mayo Clinic. He had been a captain in Frederick the Great's Prussian Army. He had never risen above the rank of captain. And when he ingratiated himself, and finally with the help of the Count de Vergennes, quite a meeting with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, they were leery. They new Washington doesn't want us sending any more soldiers of fortune. What are we gonna do with this guy? But as von Steuben, who had no English. He would converse with Franklin and Deane in French. As he began explaining, "This is what I learned in the Prussian Army." Now at the time, the Prussian Army was a small army, but it was the most feared army in Europe. They used to call Frederick the Great--they used to call it--exactly how did it go? Frederick the Great controlled an army with a country as opposed to a country with an army. But everyone knew that unlike any other army in the western world, including the Continental Army in the United States, Prussian officers lived and worked and trained and drilled hands-on with their enlisted men. No other army did this. They left it to corporals and sergeants. It was beneath officers to get down in the muck and grime. But Frederick the Great himself would often dock his greatcoat and get right into the middle of it when his troops were training, and this is what von Steuben told Franklin and Deane. "This is what I know how to do. I know how to take all these disparate militias that you have and turn them into a well-oiled machine." So after several interviews Deane, Franklin, Vergennes said, "This is the guy we need. But he's a captain. How are we gonna send him over to Washington? We're sending generals. We're turning away generals. How are we gonna send a captain?" Miraculously von Steuben's captain's bars disappeared, to be replaced by general's stars. His papers said that he was not only inspector general of the Prussian Army, but the primary aide de camp to Frederick the Great. And if you want to see his papers, well, they're following him. They're coming, because he left Prussia in such a hurry 'cause he was so anxious to fight for the United States that he left without his papers, his bonafides. But they'll be coming. They'll be coming. This is the von Steuben who shows up at Valley Forge. During his first week in camp he took it upon himself to go on an informal inspection tour. And you can imagine, here are these barefoot, bedraggled, hungry soldiers in their filthy huts. And suddenly this portly--he was a portly man. He was forty-six years old with a double chin, beribboned and be-

medaled-- come into their huts to grill them about their sanitary habits, about did they know the difference between regular march and quick march, about did they know how to twist a bayonet when it was in an enemy's gut. Von Steuben quickly, immediately ingratiated himself into Continental Army, all ranks of it. He started sending Washington memos within the first week he was there saying, “You gotta move these latrines. Put them on the other side of camp from the bread ovens for Christ's sakes. I mean, you’re right next to the kitchen. They’re overflowing. Put them on the downhill slope.” Let's pave. Let’s grade--not pave. Let’s grade the roads in front of the huts to give the army. We’ll name them after regiments and brigades. It will give the soldiers a sense of professionalism. Washington loved this. So what he did was, he took his fifty-man personal guard, added fifty other men from every colony, every state now, represented at Valley Forge, and he said, "Von Steuben, train these men, and then they will be your sub-trainers who we will put out through the Army to train the rest of the Army." So every day von Steuben would take these 100 men out to the parade ground in the middle of Valley Forge. Thousands of other soldiers with nothing else to do would watch, and he would teach--he spent the entire first morning with these 100 men, the entire morning, teaching them the correct way to stand at attention. At night, he would write what he called his Blue Book. I saw an original copy of it back here. They have a copy here. This became the Army's manual for the next three, four decades. He would dictate it in German to his aide de camp who spoke French, who would write it in French, who would hand it over to Hamilton and Laurens, who would put it into English and colloquialism it in English. Hamilton and Laurens fell in love with von Steuben. He was--they were like a couple of star struck Prince Hals following around this Falstaffian character. Washington noticed this, and when he could--as I said before, von Steuben before had no English--he would assign Hamilton or Laurens to translate while he was drilling the soldiers. He would drill, and he was meticulous, and he was a stickler for detail. If somebody would make a mistake during the drilling his double-chinned face would turn red, he'd flail his arms, and he'd look at Hamilton his translator, and spittle would be coming out of his mouth. And he'd yell in French, "Get over here and swear for me." And as Hamilton’s coming over, a string of German and French oaths and curses would be coming out of his mouth. And then by the time Hamilton or Laurens or whoever's translating, by the time they translated this the American soldiers would be doubled over in laughter. It was--they loved this man who would get down on his knees. He would--like Frederick the Great, he'd doff his greatcoat, he'd hand his riding crop to his translator, he'd get down on his belly in the mud. Said, "This is how you read terrain." I mean, he was just--and it was not just the enlisted men. The junior officers, because he was a visiting dignitary so to speak, he had a little more rations than the rest. So in the farmhouse that he was ensconced in, he would have dinner, and he would invite lieutenants and captains and majors for dinner at his house. But on one condition, because the Continental uniforms, they were still so ragged, nobody could have dinner at his house unless they were missing their pants or their pants were so ragged they were just hanging off them. His Sans Culottes suppers, he would call them. And even on the many occasions when he was invited to the Potts house to dine with Washington, he would charm the officers' French-speaking wives with ribald tales of the salons of Europe. If I've spent too much time tonight on von Steuben, I apologize, but he’s just one of my favorite characters in the book. George Washington felt the same way. His last official letter as commander in chief of the Continental Army in 1783 was to the Baron von Steuben. The last letter he wrote before he resigned his commission was to the Prussian in which he thanked the Baron for turning his Army into a professional fighting force. And it showed, because that spring when the Continental Army marched out of Valley Forge, in quickstep, thanks to the Baron von Steuben, and prepared to meet the British on the sandy plains of New

Jersey near a little hamlet called Monmouth Courthouse, the British were--I like to call it, the British Butch and Sundance moment. They were--who are these guys? They were amazed. This was not the Continental Army we brushed off at Brandywine Creek, we massacred at Paoli, we routed at Germantown. Look at them. They're wiggling into formation, they're separating, they're forming lines. This is a professional army. Butch and Sundance. Who are these guys? Which brings me to the four words I promised you earlier--and so in conclusion (chuckles), if you'll allow me to just finish up by saying, I'm really proud of the way Tom and I, what we think--the way we describe what is a vivid detail description of what came to be know as the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse. Washington had put another general--General Charles Lee, a sniveling little man, nobody saw what saw in Washington him. But he had put Charles Lee in charge of the attack that day, and Washington was bringing up the reserve troops. By the time Washington got to the front lines, the Continental Army was in retreat. An orderly retreat, thanks to the Baron von Steuben, but nonetheless a retreat. Washington's aides had never seen him explode in public like he did. He found--he galloped up and down the lines trying to turn the troops around. He found General Charles Lee, and upbraided him in public before sending him o the rear. It was a blistering hot day. Washington riding up and down with his sword out, "Will you fight? Stop. Turn. Will you fight?" A mile and a half away by now you could see a sea of red as 10,000 Red Coats had doffed their packs and were in a bayonet charge. The British artillery was close enough to the American lines that grapeshot is whizzing passed Washington's head. A cannonball lands in a muddy field like ten feet from him. Splatters he and his horse. It was his second horse, by the way, because he galloped so much. Temperatures were over a hundred degrees. His first horse collapsed beneath him and died of heat exhaustion. He took the reigns of another, galloping up and down turning the men with his sword saying, "Will you fight? Will you fight?" And whether they fought or not, you're gonna have to read the book to find out. Thank you very much. I appreciate you coming out tonight. (Applause)

1: Yes, I have a question. I remember watching a TV show a while ago, *One Step Beyond*. It deals with supernatural stuff, and it dealt with Valley Forge and gives some of the background of discontent, etcetera. But the hook was in this show they said that Washington had a vision beyond what was gonna happen to the nation.

Drury: Well, he never wrote about it, I can tell you that, and I read all--I read every single thing he dictated. He didn't really write; he dictated at Valley Forge. And one of the smaller myths--maybe I shouldn't call it a myth. It's never been proven, but most historians don't believe--Washington was not a religious man. He would occasionally attend Episcopalian services, but he would always leave before the communion rite. And years and years later third hand, these stories sprung up about--one was Isaac Potts who owned the Potts house where Washington made. Another was Peter Muhlenberg, a Virginian. There were witnesses who saw Washington alone--you've seen the famous painting--praying in the glade, his sword in the snow, his hat in the snow. He's on his knees. But most historians dispute that this ever happened. But perhaps--I did not see the show you're speaking of, but perhaps that was the hook they based this on. Praying to the Almighty to do--for dispensation for his army.

2: Another member of Washington's staff Henry Knox was a close friend of Washington's and was with him most of the time. I was wondering if you would describe if he had a prominent role during this period--

Drury: Oh my god, Henry Knox--how many times can I say "one of my favorite characters"? But I love Henry Knox. Henry Knox--300 pounds. He had been a Boston Brawler. He had been a bookstore owner, and then when the stamp act disallowed any literature to come into Boston he went out of business, so he started training militias,

with militias. And at the siege of Boston Washington so admired Henry Knox's company campsite. It was so put together, it was so clean, it was so military, Henry Knox got the gumption up to introduce himself to Washington. Fort Ticonderoga had just been captured by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold, and he said, "General, allow me and my brother and a small company to go to Fort Ticonderoga, and there's howitzers, there's mortars, there's cannons there. I will bring them back to you." This is in November. Washington said, "You're gonna drag them over the Berkshires in a New England winter? Okay, well if you think you can do it, go ahead." Boom, early March, Henry Knox arrives with all the artillery. Washington was astounded, stunned. The British woke up on St. Patrick's Day 1776 to see that the heights surrounding the town were ringed with artillery. They evacuated Boston that day, and it was all Henry Knox. And Henry Knox--an he was kind of a-- Washington trusted him, sometimes to his detriment. It was Henry Knox that during the Battle of Germantown that the British had--a company of about a hundred Brits had occupied this mansion called the Chew House. It belonged to Benjamin Chew. And instead of all Washington 's generals, this was when they had the British on the run. All the British generals said, "Surround it. We'll take care of it later." And Henry Knox said, "No I have my artillery here." And they lost precious hours, and it was in those hours that the British were able to mount a counterattack under Cornwallis. So Henry Knox was wrong at that point, but Washington had great, great, great respect for Henry Knox. I remember I read some letter, and I can't remember who it was. It's in the book. Someone described--because Henry Knox was a 300-pound man, and his wife was not far behind, and it was described as, "She's as round as one of Henry's cannonballs."
(Laughter)
Drury: Yes, sir?
3: Did Washington and Lee ever reconcile?
Drury: No. In fact, Lee brought charges against or tried to bring charges against--first of all, it was my victory in hand until Washington came and took all the credit. And then when he demanded a court of inquiry, a court martial, to clear his name. And the court martial actually found him guilty of several charges--cowardice, disrespecting his commander in chief--Congress suspended him from the Army for one year. During the year he started to write these vituperous--vituperous/ vituperous--letters to Congress accusing them of all manners of crimes and indecencies, and finally Congress said, "Enough, you're out." He finally retired to an estate near Gates' old estate in Western Virginia. And on a trip to Philadelphia he got the fever, and he died in Philadelphia in the upstairs of a tavern, and he dictated his last will and testament saying, "Don't bury me in any cemetery that includes a Patriot." And they just said screw you, and they buried him in the same cemetery where Benjamin Franklin is buried. And one quick footnote to that. Lee had been captured and was held captive by the Brits for nine months. He had been captured in late 1776, and he was treated like a rock star, if I can mix metaphors a little bit. And there was always these rumors that Lee was cooperating with his old friends the British, because Lee had also fought for the British in the French and Indian War. Never proven. Washington's generals, they couldn't understand what faith he had in this guy. This guy was a--Lee admitted he preferred the company of his hunting dogs to people, and most people that met Lee felt the same way. The guy was a blister of a man. And in 1856 the chief librarian for the state of New York was going through old papers, and he found letters later authenticated to be in Lee's handwriting written to Howe, to both Howe, Richard Howe and--this is how you defeat the insurgence. So in other words nearly a century after--well, three quarters of a century after, it was proven that Charles Lee was a traitor. Didn't get the ink Benjamin Franklin got, but.--and again I guess we're done here, so I want to thank you all again for coming out tonight. It's been wonderful.

(Applause)
Williams: Thank you to Bob Drury for an outstanding discussion and to Simon and Schuster for sponsoring this program. The book is *Valley Forge*, published by Simon and Schuster. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.
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