

# The lessons of Valley Forge & the war on terror

By WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

**E**XACTLY 225 YEARS ago yesterday, on Dec. 19, 1777, Gen. George Washington and the Continental Army marched into Valley Forge to encamp for the winter while the British occupied Philadelphia, the capital city.

Undernourished, having suffered defeats at Brandywine and Germantown, and with little prospect of financial aid from Congress, the army was little more than a rag-tag band of backwoods fighters and militia men, hardly capable of defeating the British regulars, considered the finest army in the world.

But Washington and his army persevered. Their immediate goal was to secure American independence from Great Britain. Ultimately, however, they, like the Founding Fathers who sent them to war, hoped to establish a free society where liberty and justice would be guaranteed for all.

Not only were those principles eventually institutionalized in our Constitution, but they were also safeguarded by a Bill of Rights drafted specifically to prevent the encroachment of a strong central government on personal liberties.

Today we are engaged in another war: a unilateral, preemptive war against terrorism. In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, President Bush insisted that we would wage that war in the same spirit of



truth, liberty and justice that were inspired by the American Revolution. But just over a year later we are waging a war against the very rights that Washington and the first American army fought to secure against tyranny.

The Constitution protects citizens against illegal searches and seizures and guarantees the right to due process. But

there have already been several cases where U.S. citizens of Saudi and Iraqi extraction have been denied these basic rights because, according to Attorney General John Ashcroft, the unique nature of the war on terrorism demands such extralegal measures.

The Constitution guarantees the right of the people to assemble peaceably. But

it is becoming increasingly difficult to do that here in the Cradle of Liberty when barricades and National Park Service police block access to Independence Square and Mall, supposedly to protect the historic treasures on those sites from terrorist attacks.

The Constitution makes the government accountable via a system of checks and balances and the separation of powers. But the Bush administration, ignoring multilateral efforts for peace, tells us that the president does not need further congressional authorization to expand the war with Iraq. Does that mean the Congress has forfeited its constitutional authority to declare war?

It's difficult to trust the president or his administration when they seem to be creating a police state and justifying it in the

name of national security. Perhaps the administration should heed the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin, who reminded the other Founding Fathers that "those who surrender some of their liberty for security, deserve neither liberty or security." ★

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