

Jabez Pottage at Valley Forge: A Native Soldier in the Ranks of Washington's Army

Native soldier, Connecticut private, survivor of Valley Forge and Monmouth, captive in New York's Sugar House—Jabez Pottage, also recorded as Jabez Pottage, carried an American Revolution that was both patriotic and unresolved. He did not leave behind a famous portrait, a polished memoir, or a battlefield monument. His life appears instead in muster rolls, pension testimony, pay records, and the scattered notations of an army trying to keep track of men in motion.

Those fragments are enough to tell a remarkable story. Pottage was a Native American soldier from Windham, Connecticut, likely Nipmuc, Pequot, or of mixed Native ancestry. He served in the 7th Connecticut Regiment, later with the Indian Company connected to the Stockbridge/Nimham force, and then in Sheldon's 2nd Continental Light Dragoons. His connection to Valley Forge rests most directly on his service in Colonel Heman Swift's 7th Connecticut Regiment, which wintered with Washington's army during the encampment of 1777–1778. The 7th Connecticut entered Valley Forge with 536 men assigned and only 358 fit for duty, a stark reminder that the army was never simply “at Valley Forge” in the abstract. It arrived diminished, hungry, sick, underclothed, and still trying to remain an army.

A Native soldier from Connecticut

Pottage's own pension account places him in the center of this story. In 1818, when he was about 68 years old, he testified that in the spring of 1777 he enlisted for three years as a private in Captain Vine Elderkin's company, in Colonel Heman Swift's Regiment of the Connecticut Line. He stated that he served in that company and regiment until the spring of 1780, fought in several skirmishes and at the Battle of Monmouth, was captured near Kingsbridge, imprisoned in New York's Sugar House for four months and two days, exchanged, and then returned to complete his term of service. (AmericanRevolution.org)

That testimony matters because it gives the Valley Forge connection its structure. Pottage enlisted in 1777. Swift's regiment was part of the Connecticut Line during the Valley Forge period. The regiment was at the encampment. Pottage's own statement says he was serving in that regiment across the very years that included Valley Forge, Monmouth, Kingsbridge, captivity, and return.

The surviving record is not as clean as one might wish. Pottage's regiment was at Valley Forge, and his service dates place him in that regiment during the encampment period. That is a strong, historically grounded connection. The ideal final proof would be an individual company

return or muster entry naming him during the Valley Forge months. But even with that caveat, the larger story is clear: Jabez Pottage belonged to the army that endured Valley Forge and marched out of it into the campaigns of 1778.

Valley Forge: not just suffering, but transformation

For Pottage, the encampment would have meant the ordinary burdens of a private soldier: building and living in crude huts, standing guard, drawing inadequate rations, enduring cold and sickness, waiting for clothing and supplies, and submitting to the discipline of an army trying to survive long enough to become effective. He was not watching history from a distance. He was inside the machinery of endurance.

The 7th Connecticut's numbers make the human reality plain. A regiment entering camp with 536 men assigned but only 358 fit for duty was already in a state of strain. The gap between "assigned" and "fit" was the real Valley Forge: men sick, absent, on detached duty, too weak, too poorly clothed, or otherwise unable to stand in the line. Pottage's story belongs to that world of partial survival and daily attrition.

Inside the Connecticut Line

The 7th Connecticut Regiment was part of the broader Connecticut contribution to the Continental Army. Connecticut troops had been present from the earliest stages of the war, and by 1777–1778 they formed part of Washington's Main Army during the Philadelphia Campaign. Pottage served under Colonel Heman Swift, and his company was first commanded by Captain Vine Elderkin and later by Captain Converse, according to his pension testimony.

This places him in a very New England military world. But it was not an exclusively white one. Connecticut and neighboring states included Native and Black soldiers in their regiments. Native men served for many reasons: pay, local obligation, alliance, survival, martial tradition, and sometimes because military service offered one of the few available claims to recognition in a society that otherwise marginalized them.

Pottage reminds us that the army at Valley Forge was more diverse than many older paintings and commemorations suggest. The Revolution was fought not only by men who would comfortably inherit its promises, but also by men whose communities would continue to face challenges after independence.

A Valley Forge idea: Native soldiers and light infantry

Pottage's Valley Forge connection becomes even more interesting when we look at what happened next. During the difficult months of the encampment, Washington and congressional representatives considered how Native soldiers might be used in the coming campaign. In February 1778, a committee at camp near Valley Forge proposed employing Native troops in the American Army. On March 4, 1778, Congress resolved that Washington could, if he judged it prudent, employ up to 400 Native soldiers in ways that would "annoy the Enemy" while preventing injury to those friendly to the American cause.

That plan did not unfold exactly as imagined. The larger Native corps was never fully raised. But the idea shaped what followed. In 1778, Native men already serving in various New England regiments were detached for service with an Indian Company connected to the light infantry. Men such as Jabez Pottage and Joseph Read of the 7th Connecticut, who had fought at Monmouth, were ordered to the Indian Company.

This is the deeper Valley Forge connection. Pottage was not only in a regiment that wintered at Valley Forge. He later became part of a military experiment whose roots lay in the strategic conversations of that same encampment: the use of Native troops, scouts, marksmen, and light infantry to harass, observe, and unsettle the British Army. In that sense, Valley Forge was not just where Pottage endured hardship. It was also where the army's thinking about Native military service took shape.

From Valley Forge to Monmouth

When Washington's army left Valley Forge in June 1778, it was not marching into peace. The British evacuated Philadelphia, and the Continental Army pursued them across New Jersey. Nine days after leaving Valley Forge, the army fought the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778.

Pottage later testified that he fought at Monmouth, often understood as the test of Valley Forge's transformation. The army that had staggered into winter quarters in December emerged in June more disciplined, more organized, and more capable of standing in open battle. Pottage's presence at Monmouth links him directly to that larger arc: survival in winter, reorganization in camp, and renewed combat in the field.

For a private soldier, that arc was not abstract. It meant leaving the huts and moving into heat, dust, confusion, musket fire, and command failures. It meant testing whether the army shaped by suffering and drill could hold together in battle. Pottage's testimony says that he was there when it did.

The Indian Company and Kingsbridge

After Monmouth, Pottage's service took a different turn. Native men from New England regiments were detached to serve with the Indian Company under Captain Abraham Nimham, associated with the Stockbridge/Nimham force. These men were used in the dangerous world of scouting, skirmishing, and operating near enemy lines.

The arrangement placed Pottage near one of the most tragic Native patriot episodes of the Revolution: the fighting near Kingsbridge in August 1778, often called the Stockbridge Indian Massacre. Contemporary and later accounts describe a devastating ambush by Loyalist and Hessian forces under John Graves Simcoe against Native troops operating near the lines. The casualties were severe. Many of the Native soldiers were killed.

Pottage survived, but not untouched. His pension account states that while on a scouting party near Kingsbridge he was captured, taken into New York, and held in the Sugar House prison for four months and two days before being exchanged. That line in the record is almost unbearably compressed. The Sugar House prisons in British-occupied New York were notorious places of confinement. For Pottage, the war after Valley Forge meant not only battle but captivity — the stripping away of movement, freedom, and certainty after months of already difficult service.

And then he returned. After exchange, he rejoined his company and served out the remainder of his three-year term.

A soldier who kept serving

Pottage's service did not end with the 7th Connecticut. After completing his three-year enlistment in 1780, he later joined Sheldon's 2nd Continental Light Dragoons in 1781. That continuation suggests a sustained relationship to military service across nearly the entire Revolution. He had enlisted early, served in the Connecticut Line, endured the Valley Forge period, fought at Monmouth, served with Native troops near enemy lines, survived capture, returned to duty, completed his term, and then entered cavalry service.

Memory, race, and the limits of the founding

Pottage's story reframes Valley Forge in a necessary way. Valley Forge has often been used as a national symbol of shared suffering and patriotic perseverance. But shared suffering did not mean shared citizenship. Native soldiers like Pottage fought within an army and a cause that did not resolve the place of Native peoples in the new republic. That is why his Valley Forge connection is so powerful.

For America 250, Jabez Pottage moves us beyond the familiar tableau of Washington in the snow. It shows why the muster roll matters. The record of Valley Forge is not only a list of names. It is a democratic archive of endurance. It allows us to recover people who were once visible to the army but later became nearly invisible to memory. Men like Pottage were there in the ledgers, the returns, the detachments, the prison accounts, the claims for wages. They were part of the army that survived.

Works Consulted

- Valley Forge Muster Roll Project, “7th Connecticut Regiment,” including regiment history, Huntington’s Brigade assignment, and Valley Forge strength figures (536 assigned; 358 fit for duty). [7th Connecticut Regiment – Valley Forge Muster Roll Project](#)
- Valley Forge Muster Roll Project, “Huntington’s Brigade,” documenting the brigade structure and Connecticut regiments serving at Valley Forge. [Huntington’s Brigade – Valley Forge Muster Roll Project](#)
- [AmericanRevolution.org – “Events Leading up to the Stockbridge Indian Massacre”](#), including Jabez Pottage’s 1818 pension account, service in the 7th Connecticut Regiment, participation at Monmouth, capture near Kingsbridge, imprisonment in New York’s Sugar House, exchange, and later service in Sheldon’s Dragoons.
- [Forgotten Voices of the Revolutionary War – “Jabez Pottage, Native Connecticut Soldier, Redding”](#).
- [The Magazine Antiques – “End Notes: An Overdue Roll Call”](#), discussing surviving pay and service documents connected to Jabez Pottage and other Black and Native Revolutionary War soldiers.
- [Museum of the American Revolution – Forgotten Voices Project Overview](#), regarding archival recovery efforts documenting Native American and African American Revolutionary War service.



"An Indian of the Stockbridge Tribe," Kingsbridge, New York, 1778. Sketch by Lieutenant General Johann von Ewald (1744–1813), pen and ink. The drawing depicts a Native American soldier associated with the Stockbridge Indian forces operating with the Continental Army near Kingsbridge during the Revolutionary War — similar to the Native troops with whom Jabez Pottage later served following Valley Forge. [From the Johann Ewald Diary, Volume II, Joseph P. Tustin Papers, Special Collections, Harvey A. Andruss Library, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania.](#)