

GERMAN-AMERICAN HISTORY

FRIEDRICH WILHELM VON STEUBEN

The most famous German-American soldier in the Revolution was Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben. Von Steuben's service to the American Revolution was invaluable. It was von Steuben, who in the words of Alexander Hamilton, "introduced into the army a regular formation and exact discipline" and established a "spirit of order and economy."

Von Steuben was born in 1730 in Magdeburg, Prussia as the son of an officer in the army of Frederick the Great. At the age of 16 von Steuben entered the Prussian army and displayed such outstanding ability that he soon became a member of the Prussian general staff. He fought in several battles in Europe and soon became a favorite of Frederick the Great. After one conflict, the title of baron was conferred on him. He was now Baron von Steuben.

Baron Von Steuben offered his services to the American colonies after the Revolution had begun. In Paris he met with Benjamin Franklin and other Americans who were seeking support for American independence. Baron Von Steuben immediately set sail for America and landed in New Hampshire in December 1777 and was received with the highest honors by the Continental Congress. He offered his services as a volunteer, requesting only a guarantee of his expenses and commissions for his two aides.

He traveled directly to Washington who was encamped at Valley Forge. German-American farmers gave the Prussian general a hearty ovation and welcome along the way to Valley Forge. General Washington was impressed by von Steuben's military ability and experience and became his lifelong friend.

Von Steuben immediately began the hard work of transforming the shivering, ragged, undisciplined army into a well-trained, disciplined army. In 1778 he wrote a book of military regulations called the Blue Book. It became the standard instruction manual for the American army. The good results of his work were soon evident. The American troops were now equal to the best British soldiers. Von Steuben showed his genius by adapting European methods to American conditions. His careful training of the army helped them attain victory on the battlefield.

After the Revolution, von Steuben formulated plans for the founding of a military academy, and thus, laid the basis for West Point. In his outline he showed that he was not merely a soldier, but also a man of culture and refinement. He stipulated that there should be courses on history, geography, law and literature. As a reward for his services the Congress granted him 16,000 acres of land near Utica, New York. He became the first president of the German Society of New York, a German-American society designed to help recent immigrants to New York.

Without the participation of German-Americans, it would have been impossible to attain victory in the American Revolution. At the time of the Revolution the German-Americans were ten per cent of the population. They overwhelmingly supported the cause of liberty. Only about one-third of the Anglo-Americans supported the Revolution.

Von Steuben's achievements presented by
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