

## A Woman's View of the Battle of the Brandywine

### As seen through the eyes of Annie Doolin, Revolutionary War Camp Follower

Tobi Graham

*A "first person" reenactment presented to the American Society of Arms Collectors*

**Author's Note:** This presentation was originally written to be presented to a small group of visitors who would "discover" Annie while touring the battlefields at Brandywine. In the actual presentation, some details were changed to fit the Ball Room setting and the large-audience group indoors at the hotel.

Annie Doolin and her husband, Sean, were created by the author. They are a composite of many actual people of the period. As characters, they represent a "typical" camp follower and her husband, a "typical" Pennsylvania soldier of the American Revolutionary War.

**Setting:** A field, somewhere on the east side of the Brandywine near Chadd's Ford. Annie Doolin, dressed in revolutionary era, middle-class country women's shift, petticoat, short gown, apron, cap and obviously "borrowed" man's tricorne hat, sits on a small stool darning a sock. She is dirty and bedraggled, as are her clothes. In her mid-60's, she is by colonial standards, an "old woman." Nearby is a small fire and a three legged pot is hanging from a tripod over it, Various other cooking utensils, and a regimental back-pack and bayonet are strewn about. Spread on the ground around her are various cloths, several pair of stockings and a man's shirt, drying in the sun.

Annie looks up and notices a group of people approaching her. She puts down her darning, stands up and takes her fan from her pocket. She speaks with an Irish "lilt."

"Good evening sirs! and ladies! Some awful hot it is, isn't it? Let us move a bit further from the fire. Been like this for several days now. What is this day? The 11th day of September if I'm not wrong. Why some years by this date, the geese have begun to fly and we've already had a black frost. Oh, aye! The weather—just another uncertainty of life. We've plenty of those have we not?

Please forgive my curiosity and please do not think I am so brazen as to be engaging in politics, but I must say, you gentlemen have the look of Tories. Seems most folks hereabout are of the loyalist persuasion—many of them Quakers. They say they don't believe in fighting and are neutral in their loyalties. Not to be trusted, say I. Seems to me from what I've seen, their only loyalty is to their purses. No, not to be trusted, say I—Annie Doolin!!!

My husband and I are Irish. Doolin is our name. My husband Sean owns a small farm in western Pennsylvania.



He's a good farmer and we prospered there; raised 12 children there. We were happy there, but when they began advertising for recruits for a regiment for this war, my Sean was the first to enlist! Now I've heard that Declaration for (*sic*) Independence read. I might have you believe that he'd give his life for this war, even presume him to be so noble as to believe that he wanted to fight for those high ideals of 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.' Well, that just isn't so. We've no grievance with the King—'tis not *our* King. The truth is, we Irish just take great delight in any opportunity to do battle with the English.

Well, opportunity we've had a plenty. This war has controlled our life for over two years now. After Sean joined up and left me to manage the farm, he marched to Boston and was there in the summer of 1775 when General Washington took command. He went north to Quebec with Colonel Arnold in the winter of '75. Some cold that was. Never wants to see Canada again he says. Says he wouldn't give a bawbee for the whole country; let the British have it!

I was praying that when his time was up, Sean would be coming home, but in the fall of '76, he re-enlisted for the duration, in Atlee's musketry division. He's been serving under Colonel Walter Stewart in the Pennsylvania State Regiment since June. Quite a macaroni is young Colonel Stewart—the ladies in Philadelphia reportedly call him the "Irish Beauty." Oh aye, that he is!

Last winter when the Army was at Morristown, Sean finally came home. I am ashamed to say that it was soon

obvious to him that I was not doing well managing the farm on my own. I tried, but at my age, with all the men gone and no kin to help, 150 acres and all the beasts were just too much. So we talked it over and decided that it would be best for me to go with Sean when he went back to join the army in the spring. So, we sold our beasts and our surplus grain and the crops in the fields and then, come spring, we closed the door behind us and I began following the army. Walk, walk, walk . . . We had a horse when we started out, and a milk cow, too, but the horse was needed more to pull a cannon than to carry me, and the cow—well, I guess she just got tired of walking. Seems as if I've walked over a thousand miles.

Just before we left camp on the Neshaminy—we'd been there eleven days, nearly eaten alive by mosquitoes along the creek. Even our fires would not drive them away. Just before we left, we heard that the officers had convinced Washington to parade the men through the streets of Philadelphia. The men polished their weapons and we washed and mended their clothes and had them looking pretty dandy. We tidied ourselves and prepared to see the great city! Then, as we approached Philadelphia, we women and the wagon train were sent around to the west of the city to camp at Darby while the men, twelve abreast, marched through, wearing sprigs of evergreen in their caps to signify 'Hope.' I imagine it was a fine sight to see! I thought that Washington was as proud of his many miles long wagon train, as he is of his men, but I guess he didn't count on us women to make a good impression! Truly, he doesn't like us very much.

It is strange—although the General enjoys visits from Lady Washington, and sees that his officers frequently have the pleasure of the company and conversation with their wives, he seems to care little that his men should wish to have their women with them. He cares little for us 'camp followers.' He resents our drawing rations at public expense and says we are an anchor when on the march. He has suggested that we women should return home and find work, or stay in Philadelphia and be nurses for the Invalid Corps. He'd issued orders to be rid of us all, except that he's smart enough to know that most of our men would leave with us! Seeing he's down to less than 15,000 men and a quarter of them sick, he can't afford to lose a single body.

He needs us to do the washing and mending and often the cooking, and most of us have better knowledge of the medicinal herbs than do the surgeons. It is we who keep the camps healthy and running smoothly. We earn our meager keep.

This war is hard for women. If we weren't following the army, the majority of us'd have no place to go. Aye, 'tis true that many women have been able to assume the duties

of their husband's businesses or to manage their farms, but others have had their homes destroyed. They fear the loyalists and the British who've taken over their areas. They don't want to have to quarter troops in their homes and there are plenty of tales of plunder and rape. I think the good General would be surprised to know how many of his men are really desperate women who have disguised themselves as men and are playing soldier alongside their men. Can't count them, or the children, but I'd say this army has about one woman follower to each three dozen men in service. Heard tell the British have herds of women with them—not that I've seen any, 'tho we spent the spring and most of this summer walking to and fro about the Jersey's playing tag and bo-peep with that old toothless Howe and the British Army.

You know, that was quite a Declaration Congress made, but signing it was the easy part. I know . . . some of those brave men have already lost their lives and the fortunes that they pledged, but from what I see, we are still a long way from independence or an end to this war. This Army has been chased and defeated again and again by a larger, stronger, and well supplied army. The Continental Congress may be very good at making declarations, but it is not very good at supplying or feeding an army. It cannot make the colonies do as it says. And of course, right now, Washington is not much in its favor. The Congress seems to delight in denying his every request, while sending all aid and supplies and fulfilling Gate's every whim.

When Sean joined the army, he was promised three things: food, clothing and pay. Well, he's gotten three things: hungry, tired and wet. He's been either too cold or too hot most of the time. The pay when seen is a pitiful little and as for clothing—well this might just as well be an army of Adamites; half-naked are so many of the men.

The ration established by resolution of the Congress calls for a pound of beef or fish, or 3/4 pound of pork, a pound and 1/2 of bread or flour, 1/2 pint of peas or beans or other vegetable for sauce, milk, or rice or Indian meal, spruce beer or cider. Occasionally the men get 1 gill of whiskey or spirits. You can imagine how they welcome that! Once a week, we are to get 6 ounces of butter and 1/2 pint of vinegar. Candles and soap also are authorized essentials. Women are to get rations equal those of the men and children were to be given 1/2 rations. We are lucky to get even 1/2 of what was promised!

If we were allowed to forage we might do very well, but Washington is well aware of the deleterious effect of plundering on the local population, especially on the neutrals and on those wavering in their loyalties. Before we enter an area, he sends scouts ahead with offers to buy the local horses or cattle or other surplus, or he sends directives to the landowners to drive off all cattle and horses, to

leave the country barren and to hide their stores of grain and fodder. Instructions are given to all mills to remove their runners and to carry off the grain. The approach and passing of the army effectively drives off any wild game. Why, I haven't seen a bird or heard one singing for a long time. That is not to say we don't occasionally come upon a stray hen or two or find their eggs hidden in the hedges. Why, even in the best gleaned fields there remain a few potatoes or turnips. The roadsides abound with wild herbs and greens for pottage and tea. Frequently local farmers come into camp with fresh goods for sale. It is now harvest time and we should be well satisfied, but there are so many of us, that still there is a shortage of food and we are often hungry. It is rumored that we are down to only 300 head of cattle. The Lord only knows what hardships this winter will bring.

If our prayers are heard, this war will be over and we won't have to worry.

Just last week Washington called for "one bold stroke to drive the enemy from the land." The General is like the legendary amaranth—trod upon over and over but always springing back up. I think perhaps it is his wish that it might be so that induces him to think that it will be so.

Then, last night after the General had brought us across the Brandywine at Chadds Ford and before posting the men out along the Nottingham Road, we had the consolation of a sermon preached by the Rev. Joab Trout. 'The doom of the British is near' he intoned to all who were awake enough to hear.

Oh, but it was an uncomfortable night—third in a row we've been without our tents, and very damp and drizzly. The other followers and I camped here on our blankets on the east side of the creek, about 100 yards behind the Great Artillery. I was up this morning earlier than usual. So foggy it was that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face, but I had a promise to keep.

The soldiers are issued one 3-legged pot per each 6 men (the same as it is with the tents) The officers have lids for their pots, so they may bake in them. Regular soldiers do not get lids. Everyone must supply his own utensils, a tin or horn cup and wooden or metal plate. The men usually take turns carrying their pot and while on march, cook for themselves and eat together. I usually cook for my husband and myself. To lighten their loads, the men's pots were added to and sent away along with the provision wagons at Wilmington. So, with no pots, and no provisions, this was to be another day of fasting. However, one of my husband's mates assigned to Major General Greene had been fortunate enough to procure a neat's tongue and some potatoes. Knowing that I had our kettle still with me, he and 2 or 3 others prevailed upon me to fix them a fine breakfast. I

believe they knew that before this day was out, General Howe would finally get the battle he'd been looking for all summer.

Now, regulations call for boiling all our rations, as the General feels this is the most healthful way of preparing them, but as long as we are careful not to get caught and reported, it does not take much ingenuity to fashion a broiler out of an old barrel hoop or to roast meat over the fire on a stick.

I set about getting a small fire going and soon had breakfast prepared. Sean and his mates had spent the night on the heights overlooking the main crossing at Chadds Ford. No sooner had they returned to enjoy their breakfast, than right over there, on that hill—the one ploughed for winter wheat—there, through the lifting fog, we could see a red flag being hoisted on that farm house on the ridge. We had no time to wonder as to the meaning of this as the British artillery followed by green ranks of rangers and riflemen, began coming down the hill towards us. The men politely excused themselves and rushed forward to join our artillery and began a cannonade. Between the fog and the smoke from the guns, it was hard for me to see what was going on, but the artillery could be heard all morning and the fighting went on 'til noon when most of our men who had crossed to the west side of the creek were pushed back to this side. I was hoping that Sean and his friends would stop for their belated breakfast, but I did not see them. All was pretty quiet for a time and some of the other women and I had a nice meal of the neat's tongue. Then about 2:00, the thundering began again—a bit north of here. There was much screaming and hollering: 'incline right, incline left, halt, advance, hold.' Then the battle moved on past here and the noise down by the Ford did not stop until just a short while ago. As it is now getting dark, I suppose it is over for the day.

I don't know how I'll be leaving here. I often ride in one of the Pennsylvania wagons or in one of the two wheeled tumbrils. I like the cover from the sun and rain. The problem today is that there are no supply wagons with us. When Washington heard that the British were marching light, he ordered his men to leave all non-essential baggage including their packs, except for their blankets and one shift of shirt on the same wagons on which he sent the tents and stores on to Chester. I understand another 600 wagons were returned to Trenton. The last of the supply wagons were unloaded at the Frazer home in Thornbury, about seven miles north of here. Mostly they contained officers' bedding, trunks and beds, dress uniforms and swords, some pots and pans and a few barrels and pons and sacks of food stuffs. We women knew the empty wagons would soon carry the wounded. Only those empty wagons and 86 wagons carrying ammunitions and tools were left to accompany the Army here.

Well, I suppose I can always get a ride with Ned Hector. You've no doubt heard of Ned. He's that big free-black in the 3rd Artillery. He drives an ammunition wagon. I thank the good Lord that Mr. Hector looks out for me. I am too much of an old beldame to follow the regulations. You see, the General has forbidden us to ride in the army wagons unless we have 'peculiar circumstances.' I figure my age is a 'peculiar circumstanceff!' At any rate, I think the teamsters appreciate my ballarag and bullying and the wagon masters look the other way most times. They can't report me when I ride with Ned, since he owns his own team and the wagon he drives. So's not to cause trouble, I ride with him when I can. He treats those horses like they was his own bairn—won't let anyone else drive them. Yes, sir, he does love those horses.

Tonight I am too tired and too hot to march. March—that is what the General says we women and children must do, and 'under no pretense' are we to march with the army. We must 'march with the baggage wagons.' Since he sent them on I guess he intended for us to march on along, but many of us have stayed on here to be close to our men. Easier on the mind to be near than to wonder about their welfare from a distance. One kind of gets used to being in the middle of the battles. I know I've said some harsh things about General Washington, but I rather like him. Once, when I was carrying beef and bread to the men in their entrenchments, I was stopped by the General himself. Looking down from his big gray horse, he inquired if I were not afraid of the cannon balls. 'No,' I told him, 'The bullets would not cheat the gallows and it would not do for the men to fight and starve too.' He just wished me safe passage and rode away.

About a dozen women with the Pennsylvania 6th are camped right over there and have been carrying canteens back and forth to their men all day. Many of them have small children with them. Oh, aye! The children are useful for hauling water and gathering firewood or for running errands and carrying messages.

Well gentlemen, I'd best be packing-up. Lt. James McMichael passed by recently—brought news that my Sean has survived this day, but that his regiment suffered terrible losses and that nice young Frenchman, La 'fi-etti' or something like that, was wounded while trying to help them. They have orders to proceed to Chester, and Greene is marching them from Dilworth now. Looks as if we are in retreat, but the British are too exhausted to follow. He said that contrary to our usual line of march, some of the artillery wagons are going ahead down the Concord Road towards Chester already and that the wounded have been being sent ahead in all sorts of carriages all day long. The Providence Great Road is clogged with weary soldiers. He had been told that three stores were ordered to open along the route so the men can draw their rations. Well if it's a wee bit of supper you'd be a wantin' there's some Poor John left in the kettle—made that with the last of my salt fish this afternoon. You're welcome to it—doesn't look like I'll be needing it tonight. It'd be a sin to waste it.

Oh look here, Sean left his pack and his bayonet with me. Just like Congress isn't it? They issue these things to the men and then they don't teach them how to use them. Sean must have decided it was foolish to carry it along if he didn't know what to do with it. I think it makes a good candle holder. (She puts a candle in the socket, lights it at the fire and sticks it in the ground near the stool, takes out her darning, and sits down.)

Times like this, I think of home—wonder what it'll be like if we ever get back there. I miss my brass candlesticks. I miss my Grandma's tea pot. I miss our beasts and our old dog. I miss hearing the birds sing, and I miss my rocking chair by the hearth.

So, it's back to Chester . . . back to where we were in August. Sir Howe and General Washington will be needing their empty wagons and the surgeons and gravediggers will be kept busy this night. It's been lovely talking with you folks; safe journey wherever you're going. I'll just set here, do some mending, and wait for Mr. Hector. Godspeed!"