MARCH TO VICTORY

Washington, Rochambeau, and the Yorktown Campaign of 1781

Introduction

On the morning of 19 April 1775, a column of British soldiers marching toward the town of Lexington, Massachusetts, found their advance barred by a small band of seventy-seven colonial militiamen. Hopelessly outnumbered, the Americans began to disperse, when suddenly a single shot rang out. The American War of Independence had begun. Six and one-half years later, on 17 October 1781, Lord Cornwallis surrendered his army at Yorktown, Virginia, to a combined force of Americans and French headed by Gen. George Washington and General Rochambeau. Shortly afterwards, the British House of Commons passed a resolution against "the further prosecution of offensive war on the Continent of North America for the purpose of reducing the revolted colonies to obedience by force."

This pamphlet provides an in-depth account of the most decisive operation of the American Revolution, examining how the Americans and French moved land and naval forces from Rhode Island to Virginia, where they gained the tactical advantage over their opponents at Yorktown. Although the allied forces quickly surrounded the British army on their arrival at Yorktown, the ensuing siege would not have been as successful if the march from Rhode Island to Virginia had not gone as planned. The movement to Yorktown was complex because it had a combined (French and American) as well as joint (land and naval) aspect. French and American military commanders had to overcome formidable barriers of culture, language, tactical doctrine (American and French forces operated under different sets of war-fighting rules), and national political agendas. No one forgot that a mere fifteen years before Yorktown, the American colonists had seen the French and their American Indian allies as implacable enemies.

In writing this work, Dr. Robert Selig has done an excellent job not only of conveying how allied commanders overcame these formidable obstacles, but also in showing how the march itself had a solidifying impact on American communities along the route. These communities willingly laid aside local and regional prejudices in order to provide logistical support to the troops, minimize the potential for civil-military friction, and pave the way for a decisive victory at Yorktown as well as the creation of an independent American republic.

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March to Victory: Washington, Rochambeau, and the Yorktown Campaign of 1781

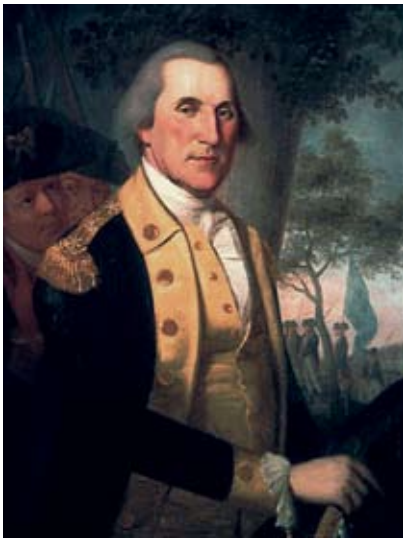
In June 1781, two markedly dissimilar military organizations prepared to converge on British-occupied New York City. One was the Continental Main Army, consisting of twenty-three under-strength infantry regiments, along with their supporting artillery, cavalry, and logistical units—a total of just over 6,650 men—under the command of 49-year-old Gen. George Washington. The troops left their winter quarters in New Jersey and New York State and concentrated at Newburgh, New York, awaiting orders for the year's campaign.

The other contingent was the French expeditionary army quartered in Newport, Rhode Island, which consisted of four regiments of infantry (Bourbonnois, Soissonnois, Saintonge, and Royal Deux-Ponts) and one battalion of artillery (the Auxonne)—nearly 5,300 men in all. A fifth detachment, the Volontaires étrangers de Lauzun, had spent the winter in Lebanon, Connecticut. Better known as "Lauzun's Legion," this unit was a combined-arms force of 300 light cavalry hussars and 100 men each of grenadiers, light infantry chasseurs, and light artillery. The French expeditionary force, under the command of 55-year-old Gen. Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, had arrived in Newport in July 1780. After spending the winter in camp, it was ready to fight. Its presence would prove vital in the upcoming campaign.

Neither the officers nor the men nor even the commanders in chief of the French and American coalition forces could imagine that over the next four months the campaign would take them on a march through nine states and over more than 600 miles on the largest and longest operational movement of the Revolutionary War. None among the frequently unpaid and poorly fed, clothed, and equipped Continentals could have foreseen that they were about to embark on a journey that would end in a decisive victory over the British at a small Virginia port named Yorktown.

The Arrival of Allies

Because Congress was finding it increasingly difficult to raise money without the power of taxation, the army, like the Revolution, seemed to be running on faith, hope, and promises that spring. Patience was wearing thin with the lack of civilian support, even for dedicated officers like Lt. Col. Ebenezer Huntington of Norwich, Connecticut, whose brother Samuel had signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. "The Rascally Stupidity



George Washington*, by James Peale, after Charles Willson Peale* (Independence National Historical Park)

which now prevails in the Country at large, is beyond all descriptions," he wrote in frustration from Passaic Falls, New Jersey, on 7 July 1780. "[T]hey Patiently see our Illustrious Commander at the head of 2,500 or 3,000 Ragged tho Virtous & good Men . . . without Meat without Cloathing, & paid in filthy Rags. I despise My Countrymen." The lack of money for the war effort led him to add that Congress had "left it in the power of the States to starve the Army at pleasure." That an American army was still in the field at all in 1781 was due in large part to Washington's personal charisma and leadership.

Despite the entry of France into the war in 1778, the military situation remained in doubt. In the past year, British troops under Gen. Sir Henry Clinton and Gen. Charles Cornwallis had marched almost at will across the Southern states. They captured Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1780 and routed Gen. Horatio Gates at Camden on 16 August. Only six weeks later, on 25 September, the American army learned of the treason of Gen. Benedict Arnold. As the struggle for independence wore on in July, Huntington warned, "[I]t must Go no farther they can endure it no longer." In late December, Arnold, now a brigadier general in the British army, invaded Virginia with more than 1,000 troops and went on a rampage of destruction to support Cornwallis's campaign against Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene. In January 1781, although not willing to desert the cause, soldiers in the New Jersey and Pennsylvania lines reached the breaking point and mutinied over the lack of pay and scarcity of rations. As winter turned into spring, the Continental Army soldiered on, although nearly exhausted.

Washington realized that for the Revolution to succeed, the army had to avoid destruction. Therefore, American forces remained on the defensive, waiting for opportunities to hurt the British at the least possible cost to the Continentals. Containing the British army in New York City required the Continental Army to remain in its positions in the Hudson

Highlands and the hills of New Jersey. The contest there degenerated into a draining war of attrition the Americans might not lose, but had little hope of winning. Almost in despair, Washington wrote on 9 April 1781: "We are at the end of our tether, and . . . now or never our deliverance must come."

Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau*, by Charles Willson Peale* (Independence National Historical Park)

Although Washington was unable to take the offensive against the British stronghold in New York, the situation in the South had become more favorable to the Patriot cause. In late 1780, American forces inflicted severe defeats on the British at King's Mountain and Cowpens. Gen. Greene's maneuvering then further enabled the Americans to sustain a tactical defeat at Guilford Courthouse in March 1781 that left the Continentals intact but severely damaged Cornwallis's army. The costly victory prompted the British general to leave sufficient forces to defend his bases against Greene's Continentals and a resurgent Patriot militia, which together had wrested the initiative from him. Convinced that the British cause had no chance of success in the Carolinas as long as Virginia remained in rebel control, Cornwallis planned to unite the remnants of his depleted and exhausted command with those British forces operating in Virginia and thus salvage his Southern strategy. He informed Lord George Germain, the Crown's Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, but not his superior Clinton in New York, of his intentions, and left Wilmington, North Carolina, for Virginia on 25 April.

If 1780 had been a year of agony and anguish, 1781 became a year of hope. The "deliverance" Washington was praying for was manifested in the power provided by the military coalition with the French allies. Rochambeau's soldiers were encamped at Newport, and the fleet of Admiral de Grasse had sailed from Brest on 5 April bound for the West Indies. Five years after Louis XVI of France had begun sending equipment, funds, and military experts to aid the rebellious

American colonies in their struggle against the British Crown, he finally provided the crucial component for victory that had always been out of reach: a fleet.

The decision to assist the American rebels had not been an easy one for the king. In 1763, the Peace of Paris at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War elevated Great Britain to the pinnacle of global power and influence. In contrast, France had lost most of its colonial possessions in Africa, India, and the New World, where Canada became a British province and the Louisiana territory went to Spain. Seeking an opportunity to avenge its loss, France kept a close watch on the American colonies, where British policies created a negative political climate.

When news of Lexington and Concord reached Versailles in the summer of 1775, the government of Louis XVI became the first foreign power to provide aid to the rebellious colonies. Following the American victory at Saratoga and near-victory at Germantown in 1777, France made the relationship with the new United States of America formal by signing the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and the secret Treaty of Alliance at Versailles on 6 February 1778. As a means to avenge its humiliating loss in the Seven Years' War, France promised both to fight and also to agree to no separate peace until Britain formally recognized American independence.

The possibility of sending ground forces to fight on the American mainland, however, had been discussed and rejected at that point as impracticable. Both sides were too well aware of the historical and cultural obstacles that had developed during decades of colonial hostilities to assume that the arrival of French troops would be welcomed in the United States. France had hoped for a short war, but Clinton's successful foray into Georgia and South Carolina in 1778 and the failure of early attempts at combined operations at Newport and Savannah in 1779 dashed all such hopes. The January 1780 decision to dispatch ground forces therefore heralded a new turn in both American and French policy.

Until the summer of 1779, even Washington had reservations about the deployment of French ground forces in America. On 16 September, the French minister Anne-César, chevalier de la Luzerne, met with the American commander in chief at West Point to discuss strategy and combined operations for the 1780 campaign. With an eye toward the deteriorating military situation in the South, Washington wondered "whether in case The Court of France should find it convenient to send directly from France a Squadron and a few Regiments attached to it, to act in conjunction with us in this quarter, it would be agreeable to The United States."

Disembarking, July 11, 1778*, by David Wagner* (Courtesy of the artist)

As recorded by his aide, Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's reply indicated: "The General thought it would be very advancive of the common Cause." Washington shared this view with the marquis de Lafayette in a letter dated 30 September 1779, in hopes that the young marquis would soon return to America from leave in France, either in his capacity as a major general in the Continental Army, or as "an Officer at the head of a Corps of gallant French (if circumstances should require this)." Based on Luzerne's own report of the 16 September meeting, and an excerpt of Washington's letter, which Lafayette had sent him on 25 January 1780, the French foreign minister, Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, decided that the time when French soldiers would be welcomed, or at least tolerated, by the Americans, had arrived.

Vergennes wasted no time. On 29 January 1780, he informed his ambassador in Madrid that France would be sending a few ships of the line and 3,000 to 4,000 troops to America. On 2 February the king approved Vergennes's plan and deployment of forces under the code name *Expédition Particulière*. On 2 May, a fleet of thirty-two transports,

seven ships of the line, two frigates, and two smaller warships, with crews totaling about 7,000 sailors, set sail from Brest for the New World. The naval forces were commanded by Charles Henry Louis d'Arsac, chevalier de Ternay, a 57-year-old chef d'escadre (equivalent to a British rear admiral) with forty years' experience. The transports carried the 5,800 troops of the *Expédition Particulière*, commanded by the comte de Rochambeau, a professional soldier with thirty-seven years of service who was more comfortable in camp than in Versailles ballrooms. Rochambeau enjoyed a reputation of being level-headed, able to compromise for the sake of mission, and willing to work with fellow officers—all characteristics that were crucial for cooperation with the Americans.

On 11 July, Ternay's convoy sailed into Narragansett Bay. The men who debarked at Newport during the period 13–16 July after ten weeks on the high seas, however, suffered from scurvy and other ill effects of the voyage that delayed their ability to take to the field. But they were part of a long-service professional army that could hold its own against the British. Following its defeat in the Seven Years' War, the French army underwent a modernization program that brought significant improvements in organization, recruitment, equipment, and training. When Louis XVI succeeded to the throne in 1774, he appointed the comte de Saint-Germain as his minister of war. The reforms abolished illustrious but expensive units, ended the sale of officer commissions, and introduced the model 1777 Charleville .69-caliber musket into service.

Hopes ran high in the Continental Army, and in the states at large, that a campaign would begin soon after the French landed. On 30 May 1780, six weeks before the first French infantryman set foot on American soil, William S. Pennington of the Second Regiment of Continental Artillery recorded in his diary: "Its reported that A Body of French Troops are to Land Near Rhode Island and March by land to Act against New York." Moore Furman wrote from Trenton on 17 July 1780 that "The French Fleet & Army arrived at New Port the 10th I apprehend there can be no other object now but New York worthy of the Attention of the Combined Forces, & that they will Act Offensively towards that, what I wish is that every Man will now aid some decisive blow to put an End to the War." Washington's aide-de-camp, Col. Benjamin Tallmadge, wrote from Cortland Manor on the Croton River to Col. Jeremiah Wadsworth in Hartford on 14 July 1780 to inform him: "We have just been rejoicing on acc[oun]t of the arrival of the French Fleet. How long before they will be ready to cooperate

with us? When will be their first movement? For God's Sake let us go about [this] business soon."

Developing an Allied Strategy

Washington hoped to initiate a military campaign and, as early as 15 July, suggested a combined attack against New York for mid-August. Instead, Rochambeau asked to meet with Washington in Hartford, Connecticut. The conference began on Thursday, 21 September, at Wadsworth's home. The host, together with his business partner, John Carter, served as general contractors of nonmilitary supplies for all French forces in America. Wadsworth's involvement was deemed crucial for the logistical support of any combined military operation. Lafayette and Hamilton, who served as interpreters, brought an eight-page outline for an operation against New York City in the hope that the American commander in chief would be able to convince his French counterpart to agree to such an action before the onset of winter. But eventually Washington conceded that even with adequate numbers of foot soldiers, any attack was doomed without French naval support. With that support unavailable, both generals had no option but to postpone operations until the arrival of infantry reinforcements and a fleet from France.

Immediately upon his return to Newport, Rochambeau sent his son, vicomte de Rochambeau, to Versailles to ask for more aid and a second division of infantry, without which he felt there was no chance of defeating the British forces defending New York City. To support the vicomte in his mission, Washington ordered Lt. Col. John Laurens to accompany the French officer. "Without a foreign loan," he told Laurens, "our present force which is but the remnant of an army cannot be kept together for this campaign, much less will it be increased and in readiness for another." The generals could only wait until the return of vicomte de Rochambeau.

On 7 May 1781, Rochambeau's son returned with urgently needed money and the disappointing news that there would be no reinforcements. Rochambeau was advised to plan for the campaign with Washington and to cooperate with Admiral de Grasse, whose fleet had left Brest for the West Indies on 5 April. Rochambeau and Washington immediately arranged to meet to discuss their options at Wethersfield, Connecticut. During the 21–23 May meetings, the two commanders in chief agreed upon a united Franco-American strategy. Despite some misgivings, Rochambeau decided to use all the resources at his disposal to support Washington's plan.

With Lt. Col. Louis Le Bègue de Presle Duportail, one of the Continental Army's French volunteers, acting as interpreter, Rochambeau wrote his questions in column form on the left-hand side of a sheet of paper. After they had been discussed among the Americans, Duportail translated their answers in a column on the right-hand side of the page. Washington recorded in his diary, "22d (Tuesday). Fixed with Count de Rochambeau upon plan of Campaign." The diary entry explained, "That the French Land force (except 200 Men) should March as soon as the Squadron [in Newport] could Sail for Boston—to the North [Hudson] River—and there, in conjunction with the American, to commence an operation against New York (which in the present reduced State of the Garrison it was thought would fall, unless relieved; the doing which w[oul]d enfeeble their Southern operations, and in either case be productive of capital advantages)."

For Washington, an agreement on the "operation against New York" represented the desired outcome of the conference. He had been urging such an attack ever since the French landed, and Clinton's dispatching forces to the Chesapeake in support of Cornwallis may have sufficiently weakened the New York defenses against a combined Franco-American attack. If that were true, there were numerous military and political reasons the city was the preferred object of the 1781 campaign, the most compelling of which was that it was the conspicuous symbol of the continuing British presence in America. The Continental Army and America at large expected, almost demanded, an attack on the city. It was also the scene of the nation's, as well as Washington's, most humiliating defeat. Its capture would serve as an act of redemption. Rochambeau, on the other hand, was apprehensive of such an undertaking. In his response to Lafayette's urgings of the previous summer, he had told the young marquis, and through him Washington, that he did not wish to suffer another debacle such as the failed siege of Savannah.

If Washington had a list of reasons such as "the waste of Men in long Marches . . . objections to the climate &ca [et cetera]." that made an attack on New York City preferable to any other project for the campaign of 1781, Rochambeau had equally valid ones for favoring an operation in the Chesapeake. First, even the combined Continental and French armies did not sufficiently outnumber the British forces defending the city. Second, a successful siege of a port city like New York required a strong naval component. Except for a few commerce raiders there was no Continental navy, and the state navies were equipped only for coastal defense. Rochambeau had no knowledge of what de Grasse would do, nor did he have the authority to issue him orders. Third, the French heavy

siege artillery was in Newport. Only the vessels of Admiral Barras, who had replaced Ternay as commanding officer of the fleet in Newport after the latter's death from a fever in December 1780, could transport it to New York. But since de Grasse had just been promoted over him, under eighteenth-century French military protocol Barras was not obligated to serve under his new superior. Thus it was uncertain whether the two French naval forces would cooperate.

Even if both admirals sailed to New York and imposed a blockade on the harbor, the sand banks at its entrance presented a natural obstacle. While Royal Navy 74-gun ships of the line drawing twenty-two feet of water cleared them routinely, a comparable French vessel with twenty-seven feet of draft might not. Rather than risk such an attack, Rochambeau preferred conducting an operation against British forces in the South. If the combined forces could lure Cornwallis's army into a general engagement, they might yet inflict the decisive blow. Although Washington remained focused on New York, he was also well aware of the destruction—wrought first by British Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie's invasion in 1780 and later by Benedict Arnold's command—in his home state of Virginia. Furthermore, six years of the war's bitter lessons had taught him not to fixate on a single option. Washington therefore concluded his summary of the conference with the remark that they could always "extend our views to the Southward as circumstances and a naval superiority might render more necessary and eligible."

As Washington and Rochambeau huddled over maps at Wethersfield, Lafayette was in Virginia. Originally dispatched south to assist Greene against Cornwallis, his mission was changed en route to bolster the Virginia militia in countering Arnold's invasion. In the meantime, Cornwallis had marched north from the Carolinas and joined with those British forces already in Virginia. As Lafayette waited for Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne to arrive with reinforcements, the marquis endeavored to keep his force between Cornwallis and the way north. From Wilton, his men observed the redcoats on the opposite bank of the James River in Richmond. On 25 May, Cornwallis encamped at Westover. Despite the obstacle presented by Lafayette's force, Cornwallis decided to continue the reduction of Virginia that Arnold had begun.

Before the commanders in chief were aware of Cornwallis's presence in Virginia, Rochambeau promised his full cooperation in an attack on New York City and returned to his headquarters in Rhode Island. On 28 May 1781, he sent a message to de Grasse in Santo Domingo, carried aboard the frigate *Concorde*, urging the admiral to sail north with all the troops he could transport. In addition, he asked de Grasse to collect

1.2 million *livres* in Havana on the Spanish island of Cuba. Maintaining a French army in America was expensive, and Rochambeau needed to replenish his funds. Two weeks later, French forces set out for New York from Newport.

Preparations for the movement had been in progress for weeks. The generals agreed that regardless of the campaign objective, their two armies would unite between Peekskill and Philipsburg in Westchester County, New York. As early as 14 April, John Carter informed his business partner Wadsworth: "The Quarter Master General sets off tomorrow to mark the Line of March, as soon as that is fixed the Intendant will describe the different Posts where he will want Forage, Wood, Cattle &a [et cetera] provided." Ten days later, on 25 April, French Quartermaster General Pierre François de Béville was back in Newport from his visit to Washington's headquarters in New Windsor, and Carter reported: "Late last Night the Intendant gave me his Orders respecting the Camps as far as Hartford."

Following Rochambeau's return from Wethersfield, the pace of preparations accelerated. As equipment was repaired and maintained, Wadsworth collected the vast amounts of supplies, provisions, and forage needed to feed and sustain thousands of men and animals. The wagon train required the acquisition of 855 horses and 600 oxen, while the artillery required another 500 horses. By mid-May he had also hired men who were "employed in building Ovens and making the necessary preparations for the accommodation of said Army on their march."

Well-compensated in Rochambeau's silver coins, Wadsworth met the challenge. Shortly after their arrival in 1780, the French estimated that their army in America needed 200 head of cattle at an average weight of 400 pounds, with another 200 head in reserve, and 200 sheep every week for the soldiers' meat ration. In accordance with eighteenth-century military practice, Wadsworth's agents established supply magazines at each campsite planned along the route of march. When the French army arrived in Newtown, Connecticut, Wadsworth had 2,520 bushels of corn, 316½ bushels of oats, 62 tons of hay, 19 tons of straw, 22½ cords of wood, and 20 head of beef cattle waiting for them. Once the army was encamped at Philippsburg, Wadsworth contracted Col. Henry Champion of Colchester to deliver 927 oxen and 356 sheep from 5 July to 11 August 1781.

The Allied Armies

A return of French forces compiled on 10 July 1781, following Rochambeau's arrival in White Plains, showed that the army under his

Strength of French Army at White Plains, July 1781

Unit	Present NCOs and Men of All Arms	Detached	In Hospitals Along the Route	Total
Bourbonnois	811	156	63	1,030
Soissonnois	901	111	42	1,054
Saintonge	853	115	44	1,012
Royal Deux-Ponts	831	153	39	1,023
Artillerie	381	100	30	511
Mineurs	—	23	—	23
Workers (*ouvriers*)	33	—	3	36
Lauzun's Legion	581	25	6	613
Total	4,391	683	227	5,302

command started the campaign with 4,400 NCOs and privates and some 350 officers.

These numbers included newly arrived infantry replacements and two companies of artillery. After leaving behind those who were sick, detached for special duty, guarding supplies, or garrisoning Newport, the French forces marching from Providence through Connecticut to New York numbered about 4,250 men.

Like every eighteenth-century army, the French expeditionary force was encumbered by a number of family members, civilian volunteers, employees, and contractors, both male and female, known collectively as "camp followers." To provide for his army's supply convoy, for example, Rochambeau contracted for fifteen brigades of wagons, or 210 vehicles, each drawn by six oxen. This required the hiring of 239 men to act as drivers and conductors, plus fifteen cooks, most of them women.

In contrast to the austere conditions in the Continental Army, where officers' servants were often drawn from the ranks, many of Rochambeau's officers personally employed theirs. Since these attendants had not been brought from Europe, American civilians were hired. Each French general officer had ten or more servants, and even a lowly *sous*-lieutenant often kept two servants and three horses. This practice possibly added as many as 1,000 *domestiques*, the equivalent of an infantry regiment, to the requirement for provisions. The additional horses may have raised the number of animals to 3,000 head, thereby increasing the requirements for forage.

Sailing up the bay to Providence, French forces started departing from Newport on 11 June. A week later, on Monday, 18 June, the First Division was on the march from Providence to Waterman's Tavern. On

Carlton's Bridge*, by David Wagner* (Courtesy of the artist)

21 June Lauzun's Legion departed its winter quarters in Connecticut on a route some 10 to 15 miles south of the infantry to protect its flank.

Rochambeau established an order of march in which each regiment with all of its attachments (which constituted a division) set out on successive days. The order proceeded as follows: Bourbonnois, personally commanded by Rochambeau, 18 June; Royal Deux-Ponts, baron de Viominil, 19 June; Soissonnois, comte de Viominil, 20 June; and Saintonge, comte de Custine, 21 June.

Each division's march route was planned by an assistant quartermaster general and preceded by pioneers (soldiers detailed to repair roads and bridges and remove obstacles). Dressed in tight-fitting woolen underwear, breeches, gaiters (a covering over the shoes and lower legs), and a sleeved vest, each infantryman carried personal equipment weighing almost sixty pounds, plus a musket.

In each division, the horse-drawn carriages and guns of the field artillery, ammunition wagons, and traveling forges followed the infantrymen. The baggage train of the artillerymen came next, followed by that of the staff, and then the ten regimental wagons (one per company) of the infantry regiment. The wagons carried the companies' tents, officers'

luggage, and those items the soldiers did not carry on their persons. A wagon to gather stragglers, several more for the hospital, and those belonging to the butchers came next. Last in the march order was the train of wagons burdened with the army's general supplies, which ranged from leather (to repair harnesses) and horseshoes to soap, writing paper, ink, and quills. The wheelwrights (artisans skilled in making and repairing broken wheels) and farriers (blacksmiths who shod the horses and oxen of the army) brought up the rear with their vehicles.

In order to conserve the army's strength and avoid marching in the heat of the day, reveille sounded around 0200, and the troops were on the road each morning by 0400. Capt. Samuel Richards of the Connecticut Line was home in Farmington on leave in June 1781 when he recorded: "They marched on the road in open order, until the music struck up, they then closed into close order. On the march—a quarter master preceded and at the forking of the road would be stuck a pole with a bunch of straw at top to shew the road they were to take."

The bivouac sites were each located from twelve to fifteen miles apart, so that the columns usually arrived before noon following an easy day's march. After they arrived, the soldiers unloaded their camp equipage and pitched tents. Each eight-man *chambrées*, or "mess," was then issued its daily ration. Captain Richards was among the many spectators who "viewed their manner of encamping over night." He was impressed by "the perfect mechanical manner of performing all they had to do: such as digging a circular hole & making nitches in which to set their camp kettles for cooking their food." While general officers lodged in nearby taverns, the company officers were billeted two to a tent near their men. This routine was maintained, with some minor variations, for the entire march. The midday arrivals provided many opportunities for the local inhabitants to see, do business with, and meet, often for the first time, French soldiers as allies rather than enemies.

On 6 July, the French forces entered camp at White Plains, and two days later, 8 July, they paraded in review for Washington. "We hadn't had more than a day to repair the disorder of the march, but our troops nevertheless appeared in the grandest parade uniform. M. de Rochambeau took his place in front of the white flag of his oldest regiment and saluted General Washington. . . . Our general received the greatest compliments for the beauty of his troops. It is true that without doubt those that we have with us were superb at our departure from France."

American officers agreed. On 13 July, 41-year-old Col. Jonathan Trumbull, Washington's private secretary, wrote to Col. Richard Varick about "The Junction of the two armies [which] is formed at this Place, &

has commenced with high seeming Cordiality & Affection, demonstrated by constant Acts of Conviviality & social Harmony. A very fine Body of Troops compose the French Army, which seems anxious to give some Marks of Heroism, to distinguish their Attachment & Military Pride." Surgeon James Thacher of the Continental Army recorded that "the French army exhibit their martial array to the greatest advantage. In the officers we recognize the accomplished gentlemen, free and affable in their manners. Their military dress and side-arms are elegant; the troops are under the strictest discipline, and are amply provided with arms and accoutrements, which are kept in the neatest order."

The Continental Army was also preparing to march from the Hudson Highlands with Washington at its head in June 1781. It had come a long way toward developing into a professional military force since its inception in 1775. In addition to a number of veterans who had once served as British officers, the army had greatly benefited from about 100 foreign professional soldiers, mostly French, who had either volunteered or, after February 1778, been detailed on orders by the French Crown. They provided crucial expertise in artillery, cartography, engineering, and other technical skills that the American officer corps was still developing.

The Continental Army had developed its fighting ability on bloody battlefields for five years. Although defeated in some engagements, it was never entirely vanquished. The army sharpened its edge in Baron von Steuben's drill at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777–78 and proved its mettle at Monmouth the following June. During those formative years the Continental Army became a diverse organization—young and old, native born and immigrant, black, white, and American Indian—that reflected the multiethnic reality of the colonial population. In July 1779, the forty men of Capt. Matthias Ogden's company of the First New Jersey Regiment, for example, ranged in age from sixteen to sixty-two years and hailed from New Jersey, Ireland, England, France, and Germany. The company even included a deserter from the regiment of Britain's Waldeck auxiliaries as well as a 23-year-old soldier named John Newton, who was described as a barber from "Bengaul" in the East Indies with a "yellow complexion" who spoke good English.

Although black soldiers had been in the ranks since Bunker Hill, and their numbers had steadily increased, their eligibility for service and status in the armed forces had undergone many changes. The most significant of these occurred in February 1778, when the government of Rhode Island, desperate for recruits to fill its assigned quota of troops, passed legislation that empowered the state to purchase slaves from their owners and then enlist them in the Second Rhode Island Regiment. Other states passed

similar legislation allowing black men to serve. When French officers first encountered the Continental Army encamped at White Plains, a number of them remarked with surprise about the number of black troops in the American army.

As of 1 January 1781, the combat strength of the Continental Army was organized into forty-nine regiments of infantry raised by the several states, plus the four battalions of Col. Moses Hazen's Canadian Regiment, known as "Congress' Own." There were four legionary corps and two partisan corps, with their characteristic mix of light infantry and dragoons, or cavalry, which provided the army with a combined-arms capability that was well-suited to conducting reconnaissance and irregular, or partisan, operations in conjunction with militia. Four regiments of artillery supported the infantry forces.

The American Soldier, 1781, *by H. Charles McBarron* (U.S. Army Art Collection)

There were also a number of special-purpose units, such as the Artificer Regiment. Much like a present-day Quartermaster and Ordnance Corps unit, its soldiers were also skilled as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, farriers, and harness makers and excelled in other crafts that made and repaired military equipment. There was a Corps of Engineers, most officers of which were French, as well as a Corps of Sappers and Miners. These eighteenth-century combat engineers built or repaired bridges and fortifications, maintained roads, and provided the line units with experts knowledgeable in conducting siege operations. The Provost Corps, or Marechausee, constituted the military police of the era. The Corps of Invalids was composed of men who had suffered wounds or illnesses that rendered them incapable of going on campaign, but who could perform less arduous service. They were assigned to garrison duty at forts or guard duty at supply magazines, thus freeing more physically fit men for deployment.

To provide for the manpower needs of the army, each state agreed on a quota of soldiers based on its population and economic capability, while Congress itself assumed responsibility for Hazen's regiment and the partisan corps. Each regiment of Continentals was organized with nine companies, eight of the line and one of light infantry. In addition to officers and noncommissioned officers on the regimental staff, each company was authorized to have three officers, one first sergeant, four sergeants, four corporals, a drummer and fifer, and sixty-four privates. The regiments, however, were rarely at full strength. The actual number of men serving in 1781 barely reached 14,000. Those units that received orders to march for White Plains on 21 June 1781 had about 10,300 men on the rolls, of which about 6,500 were fit for duty.

The appearance of the well-appointed French who paraded during the review of 8 July stood in sharp contrast to the ragged Continentals. The next day, when "the American army presented arms, General Washington invited our headquarters staff to come to see it," baron Closen remarked. "I had a chance to see the American army, man for man. It was really painful to see these brave men, almost naked with only some trousers and little linen jackets, most of them without stockings, but, would you believe it? Very cheerful and healthy in appearance."

Lt. Jean François de Lesquevin, comte de Cleremont-Crèvecœur "went to the American camp, which contained approximately 4,000 men. In beholding this army I was struck, not by its smart appearance, but by its destitution: the men were without uniforms and covered with rags; most of them were barefoot. They were of all sizes, down to children who could not have been over fourteen. There were many negroes, mulattoes, etc."

To Marie François, baron Cromot du Bourg, the Continental Army seemed "to be in as good order as possible for an army composed of men without uniforms and with narrow resources." Rochambeau's aide-de-camp, Louis François Dupont d'Aubevoye, comte de Lauberdière, "found them lined up in the order of battle in front of their camp. It was not a very pleasant sight not only because of the attire and the uniform of the regiments, because at present, and ever since they have been in the war, they are pretty much naked." Comparing their equipment, Lauberdière noticed how "the Americans, on the contrary, have nothing but a kind of shirt or jacket and a big pair of trousers. Right now their coat is worn only at three-quarter length; they have no shoes. Each man is also provided a small woolen blanket which he always carries with him. This method is good in a country where the cold of the night follows quickly the searing heat. Since the haversack of the American

Continental Army Strength at White Plains, 6 July 1781

Regiment	Commanding Officer	Strength (Officers and Men)
First New Jersey Regiment	Col. Mathias Ogden	185
Second New Jersey Regiment	Col. Elias Dayton	226
First Connecticut Regiment	Col. John Durkee	250
Third Connecticut Regiment	Col. Samuel B. Webb	256
Fifth Connecticut Regiment	Lt. Col. Isaac Sherman	220
Second Connecticut Regiment	Col. Herman Swift	239
Fourth Connecticut Regiment	Col. Zebulon Butler	233
Rhode Island Regiment	Lt. Col. Jeremiah Olney	298
First Massachusetts Regiment	Col. Joseph Vose	200
Fourth Massachusetts Regiment	Col. William Shepard	193
Seventh Massachusetts Regiment	Lt. Col. John Brooks	192
Second Massachusetts Regiment	Lt. Col. Ebenezer Sprout	215
Fifth Massachusetts Regiment	Col. Rufus Putnam	185
Eighth Massachusetts Regiment	Col. Michael Jackson	233
Third Massachusetts Regiment	Col. John Greaton	193
Sixth Massachusetts Regiment	Lt. Col. Calvin Smith	207
Ninth Massachusetts Regiment	Col. Henry Jackson	223
First New Hampshire Regiment	Col. Alexander Scammel	214
Second New Hampshire Regiment	Lt. Col. George Reid	212
Tenth Massachusetts Regiment	Col. Benjamin Tupper	203
First New York Regiment	Col. Goose Van Schaick	438
Canadian Regiment (Congress' Own)	Brig. Gen. Moses Hazen	263
First Bn., Conn. State Brig.	Maj. Edward Shipman	220
Second Bn., Conn. State Brig.	Maj. Elijah Humphreys	186
Cavalry		
Second Continental	Col. Elisha Sheldon	234
Artillery		
Second Continental	Col. John Lamb	163
Third Continental	Col. John Crane	205
Corps of Sappers and Miners	Brig. Gen. Presle Duportail	46

soldier is not burdened any further this provides light and quick cover, something that we can not give our troops for fear of augmenting a load that is already too heavy."

Despite the American soldiers' condition, Lauberdière reflected what many of his countrymen must have felt when he continued, "But I remember their great accomplishments and I can not see without a certain admiration that it was with these same men that General Washington had so gloriously defended his country." Despite tremendous hardship and in the face of past defeat, these brave Continentals established a tradition of rendering faithful service to their nation rather than seeking safety, personal comfort, or gain.

Though it was still struggling with austere logistical support and ragged appearance in comparison to the French allies, the Continental Army was experienced and professional. The force had recently been reorganized. Some proud but under-strength units had been eliminated, with their soldiers consolidated into others and the resulting supernumerary officers retired from service. Although the process had been painful, it left the most competent officers in command of dedicated veteran soldiers in the ranks of the retained units. Unlike the regiments raised in the early stages of the war, those that remained were composed of men who had enlisted for the duration, not for short terms that always seemed near expiration. They also had a universally revered commander in chief in Washington, who inspired loyalty and confidence. What the Americans lacked in money, naval support, heavy siege artillery, and experience in conducting siege operations could fortunately be provided by France to turn 1781 into the *annus mirabilis*—the "miracle year"—that would ensure America's freedom.

Decisive Opportunity

Once the two armies joined, their leaders saw the capture of New York City as the next step toward securing that liberty. At daybreak on 18 July, Washington, Duportail, Rochambeau, Béville, and Washington's chief engineer, Jean Nicolas Desandroüins, escorted by 100 dragoons, crossed the Kill Van Kull channel from New Jersey to reconnoiter the west side of Staten Island. After they returned that night, Rochambeau pressed Washington for a definite plan. Following the pattern established at Hartford and Wethersfield, he presented the American general a series of written questions on 19 July. When he asked whether preparations for a march southward should not be made, Washington responded that unless certain conditions were met, "the

Supply Depot at Danbury, CT, August 1781*, by David Wagner*
(Courtesy of the artist)

enterprise against New York and its environs has to be our principal object."

Before laying siege to New York, however, it was imperative that the allied armies collect as much intelligence about their enemy's situation and intentions as possible. On the evening of 21 July, nearly 2,000 American and 3,000 French infantry, cavalry, and artillery soldiers, arrayed in three columns, advanced. With Washington and Rochambeau accompanying the center column, the combined armies marched toward the enemy defenses on Manhattan Island. This "grand reconnaissance" sought to locate suitable avenues of approach and identify the weak points in the British defenses that could be exploited or taken by assault in the coming siege.

Shortly after midnight on Sunday, 22 July, French troops of the center column reached Valentine Hill, where they met their guide, Andrew Corsa of Fordham. After reconnoitering British positions around Morrisania (a settlement formerly located within the current Bronx section of New York City), they bivouacked near the ruins of Fort Independence, the scene of an American defeat in 1776. Early the next morning, Rochambeau,

Washington, and their staffs set out for Frog's (Throgg's) Neck and a second day of reconnaissance. When the two armies returned to their camps near White Plains in the evening of 23 July, baron Closen wrote in his diary: "I admire the American troops tremendously! It is incredible that soldiers composed of men of every age, even of children of fifteen, of whites and blacks, almost naked, unpaid, and rather poorly fed, can march so well and withstand fire so steadfastly."

The reconnaissance, however, had been a disappointment for Washington. The general realized that without additional massive reinforcements and materiel, as well as the assistance of a powerful fleet, an assault on New York had little chance of success. At the Wethersfield conference he had left the possibility of a Southern strategy open, "as circumstances and a Naval superiority might render [it] more necessary and eligible." Allied hopes now rested on de Grasse and a fleet.

Washington grew more concerned as the days passed without receiving any word from the French admiral. On 26 July, Lt. Col. Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., wrote to his father Jonathan, the governor of Connecticut: "The Genl is exceedingly anxious & finds himself in a most perplexing & ridiculous situation, not being able to determine on any fixed plan of operation, from the incertainty of his expectations & prospects." Realizing that the recapture of the city was out of reach, on 1 August Washington confided in his diary that he "could scarce see a ground upon w[hi]ch to continue my preparations against New York, and therefore I turned my views more seriously (than I had before done) to an operation to the southward." Remarkably, although unknown to him at the time, events had turned in the allies' favor.

Seeking a base in the Chesapeake Tidewater that could be easily supported by the Royal Navy, Cornwallis had selected the small port of Yorktown. On 2 August, Lafayette drafted a report to Washington that Cornwallis's men had begun erecting fortifications on the banks of the York River. With the first condition for a successful Southern strategy met, Lafayette assumed the task of keeping Cornwallis from leaving Yorktown. But in order to trap Cornwallis's army, a French naval force would have to be inserted between it and the Royal Navy to prevent a British evacuation. If the French fleet could not gain and maintain local naval superiority, any benefit accrued by massing the Continental and French armies against Cornwallis would be short-lived. The outcome now depended on de Grasse.

On 28 May, Rochambeau had informed de Grasse: "There are two points at which an offensive can be made against the enemy: Chesapeake and New York. The south-westerly winds and the state of defense in

Virginia will probably make you prefer the Chesapeake Bay, and it will be there that we think you may be able to render the greatest service. . . . [I]n any case it is essential that you send, well in advance, a frigate to inform Barras where you are to come and also General Washington."

On 28 July, de Grasse sent Rochambeau a message informing him that he chose the Chesapeake. The letter reached the French headquarters at Phillipsburg, New Jersey, on 14 August, and when Rochambeau notified Washington, the two commanders in chief immediately adjusted their plans. As de Grasse had declared that his fleet would stay on station at the Chesapeake only until 15 October, there was no time to lose. On 17 August, the first American forces crossed the Hudson River at Dobbs Ferry to begin their 450-mile march to Yorktown. The next day, more American infantry and the French artillery were marching toward Peekskill, and were soon followed by the French infantry on 19 August.

It was the largest troop movement of the war. Soldiers, vehicles, animals, and supplies moved hundreds of miles with only minimal warning. Drawing on the personal resources of Robert Morris, the superintendent of finance, the American supplies were gathered in Continental depots and acquired by army and civil authorities along the way, all in cooperation with the French allies. [Quartermaster General Timothy] Pickering and his staff met the challenges of bringing the Continental Army to Virginia and of sustaining it throughout the siege. No less an authority than Jeremiah Wadsworth informed Silas Deane afterward, in November 1781, that "[t]he American Army was well supplied with provisions by the Several States the last Campaign without spending a shilling of the money bro[ught] over by Mr. Laurens."

In order to sail north with as much combat power as possible, de Grasse sent a large convoy of merchant ships sailing for Europe escorted by a single 64-gun ship of the line, and temporarily entrusted the defense of the French Caribbean islands to their Spanish allies. Washington also took a number of risks. First, he assigned the defense of the New York Highlands, centered on the key fortress of West Point, to Gen. William Heath and a force of 2,500 men. Although the American positions were strong in natural and manmade defenses, and the Continentals could call on assistance from state and militia troops in the area, Clinton's British army outnumbered the American force by nearly four to one. Second, Washington not only assumed that de Grasse was on his way, but also that the French fleet could overcome any challenge by the Royal Navy. Fortunately, as the French sailed north toward the Chesapeake, Britain's Adm. Sir George Brydges, Baron Rodney, eager to secure his share of the prize money captured on the Dutch island of St. Eustatius

Strength of the Continental Army for the March to Virginia, August 1781

Regiment	Commanding Officer	Strength (Officers and Men)
Commander in Chief's Guard	Capt. Caleb Gibbs	70
Rhode Island Regiment	Lt. Col. Jeremiah Olney	360
First New York Regiment	Col. Goose Van Schaick	390
Second New York Regiment	Col. Philip Van Cortlandt	420
Combined New Jersey Regiment	Col. Mathias Ogden	330
Canadian Regiment (Congress' Own)	Brig. Gen. Moses Hazen	270
Light Infantry Regiment	Col. Alexander Scammel	380
Second Continental Artillery	Col. John Lamb	200
Corps of Sappers and Miners	Capt. James Gilliland	50
Artificer Regiment	Lt. Col. Ebenezer Stevens	100
Total		2,500

Strength of the French Army for the March to Virginia, August 1781

Unit	Present NCOs and Men of All Arms	Detached	In Hospitals Along the Route	Total
Bourbonnois	787	178	64	1,029
Soissonnois	896	116	44	1,056
Saintonge	851	115	77	1,043
Royal Deux-Ponts	842	172	29	1,043
Artillerie	239	240	31	510
Mineurs	—	23	—	23
Workers (*ouvriers*)	32	—	4	36
Lauzun's Legion	593	13	4	610
Totals	4,240	857	253	5,350

the previous February, decided to sail to England not only with his own squadron, but also with four of Rear Adm. Samuel Hood's ships of the line as well. Rodney's decision reduced the strength of British sea power at the decisive hour.

With the combined French and American army set in motion for Virginia, Lafayette's mission changed from annoying and shadowing Cornwallis without risking a decisive engagement, to making sure the British commander kept his army at Yorktown until the arrival of Wash-

CONCENTRATION OF FORCES AT YORKTOWN
April–October 1781
0
100
Miles
VERMONT
NEW HAMPSHIRE
MASSACHUSETTS
NEW YORK
Hudson R
Newtown
CONNECTICUT
RHODE ISLAND
ROCHAMBEAU
JUN-JUL
Newburgh
Newport
Wyoming Valley
New York
PENNSYLVANIA
WASHINGTON (-) AND ROCHAMBEAU
SEP
Trenton
Philadelphia
NEW JERSEY
MARYLAND
Head of Elk
AUG
Baltimore
VIRGINIA
Annapolis
LAFAYETTE
APR
DELAWARE
CLINTON (-)
OCT
DE BARRAS
AUG
Chesapeake Bay
James R
Richmond
YORKTOWN
Petersburg
JUN-JUL
CORNWALLIS
APR-MAY
NORTH CAROLINA
DE GRASSE
AUG
Wilmington

ington and Rochambeau. As they prepared for the march, Rochambeau's forces numbered 4,200 men. After the necessary detachments were made, Washington's had about 2,500, but their numbers would double once they joined with the Continentals already in Virginia with Lafayette, Wayne, and von Steuben. Rochambeau also expected reinforcements in Virginia when the French fleet landed the 3,000 troops it was bringing from the Caribbean. Additionally, newly raised and trained regiments of Maryland Continentals, as well as Virginia state troops and militia, would add an equal number to the American army. Together, these combined forces would provide the three-to-one advantage considered necessary for a successful siege.

Once the decision to march south was made, the army staffs had three equally important tasks to accomplish concurrently:

1. Provide the logistics for the march.
2. Maintain secrecy and deceive British observers of their true intentions as long as possible.
3. Establish and maintain posts on the west bank of the Hudson to observe British forces in New York City.

The last task was the easiest to implement. On 17 August, Washington instructed Col. Elias Dayton to "detach from the [New Jersey] Brigade . . . a Capt. and 50 [men], with Orders to patrole the Country between Closter and the New Bridge, the Officer must not consider either of these places as his post, but continue to range the intermediate space until he receives further Orders." During the night of 18–19 August, Hazen's and the remainder of Dayton's units were ferried across the Hudson at Dobbs Ferry and were posted "to the Heights between Chatham and Springfield." On 27 June, a battalion of the New Jersey state troops, authorized by the legislature and placed "in actual service" for three months by the governor at Washington's request, joined the effort. Led by Col. Sylvanus Seely, the men were "to remain at Dobbs's Ferry [and to] keep scouts and Patroles towards Bergen, and to take every precaution ag[ains]t a surprise" by British forces. To cover the area between Sneeden's Landing in the north and Dayton's to the south, elements of Col. Alexander Scammel's light infantry took positions near Kakeat (today New Hempstead, New York). Together, these covering forces provided the active measures to prevent enemy reconnaissance and to keep allied commanders informed of British activities as the allied forces marched for Philadelphia.

Secrecy and deception provided passive security measures to deny the British intelligence about the allies' plans and intentions. Only a

few officers in either army were informed of the details. Misleading intelligence was included in personal letters and official dispatches and sent via the most dangerous routes so the British could intercept them. Washington ordered boats to be built, ostensibly for the purpose of ferrying the army to Staten Island, issued contracts to deliver foodstuffs to Continental magazines, and had bake ovens built in New Jersey. False rumors about troop movements and allied plans were intentionally leaked to the troops, knowing they would be overheard by Loyalist spies and informants in and near the American camps and passed on to British headquarters. Later, Colonel Trumbull reflected that "some were indeed laughable now," but they achieved their purpose.

The deception had been aided by what would otherwise have been an intelligence coup for the British. Before the change of plans had been effected, Washington had sent encrypted correspondence to Luzerne in Philadelphia, Lafayette in Virginia, Greene in North Carolina, and others informing them of the decision to attack New York. The British intercepted a copy of the letter, a failure in security that caused considerable embarrassment to Washington when he learned of it at the time. The captured letters were sent to London for deciphering but were back in Clinton's hands by 3 August. Their contents made the allied deceptions all the more believable, and Clinton remained convinced that New York City was the Franco-American army's object until it was too late for him to influence the campaign's outcome.

On 16 August, two days after Washington and Rochambeau had read de Grasse's letter (and while all but a handful of other high-ranking officers were ignorant of the change in plans), Clinton's spies reported that the French admiral was on his way north with twenty-eight ships of the line. It was not until 6 September that he realized that Cornwallis was in grave danger. By then the first units of the Continental Army had reached Head of Elk, Maryland, the northernmost port on Chesapeake Bay, and were ready to embark for Williamsburg on the Virginia peninsula.

The responsibility for procuring supplies, reconnoitering roads, and arranging for the transportation needs of the Continental Army and coordinating its efforts with those of the French army lay with the quartermaster general. Col. Timothy Pickering had assumed that duty from Gen. Greene on 5 August 1780, when the latter officer was given command of the Southern Department. Each of the Quartermaster Department's eight deputy quartermasters was responsible for procuring and distributing supplies in a specific group of states. This reflected a change implemented in 1781, prior to which each state had had its own deputy quartermaster. In May of that year, Congress directed that the army employ a procurement

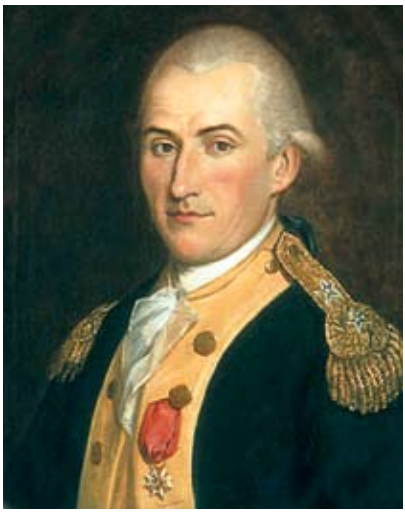
system based on awarding contracts to private suppliers. In theory, these contractors could replace officers previously appointed as commissaries and assistant deputy quartermasters and abolish the vulnerable system of fixed magazines and depots on which the army depended for the distribution of provisions and supplies.

Turning the job of military supply to private contractors was the idea of Robert Morris. In a letter to Oliver Phelps, Morris explained that "experience has sooner or later pointed out contracts with private men of substance and talents equal to the understanding as the cheapest, most certain, and consequently the best mode of obtaining those articles, which are necessary for the subsistence, covering, clothing, and moving of an army." Under this arrangement, a contract for provisions stated the cost of each ration, which was to be delivered by the contractor to each individual soldier for a predetermined price. This method also was driven by unfounded congressional fears that Army quartermasters might unfairly enrich themselves at the expense of the United States. By 1780, however, Continental dollars had lost all value to inflation, leaving the officers and agents of the Quartermaster's Department without resources to purchase supplies. An attempt in 1780 to assign "in-kind" supply quotas to the states also failed. Many of the supplies remained in the depots where they were delivered because the states did not assume the responsibility for transporting them to the troops, and the quartermaster agents had no money with which to hire wagon drivers.

This situation shifted the burden of finding the funds to finance the logistical system to the superintendent of finance. In July 1781, Congress authorized Morris to contract for all supplies needed by the Continental Army, as well as for their transportation. As long as Congress lacked the authority, or refused to accept the responsibility, to raise and collect the taxes necessary to maintain the army, Morris lacked the funds to pay the contractors for their supplies. Initially he pledged his private resources to pay for supplies and to establish depots along the route, but more often than not the regimental supply officers relied on interest-bearing state or Continental loan certificates, promissory notes that were redeemable at some future date, and the goodwill of providers to accept them.

The logistical challenges facing French and American forces on their march to Yorktown were immense. Rochambeau's men were traversing a foreign country over unknown roads through sparsely populated countryside where very few people spoke their language and where the city of Philadelphia was possibly the only community large enough to feed either of the two armies for any amount of time out of its own resources. At least Wadsworth had 400,000 livres in "hard currency"

from Rochambeau to purchase the necessary supplies. Colonel Pickering did not have access to comparable funds, and it stands as permanent testimony to the resourcefulness, dedication, and ingenuity of him and his staff, as well as Superintendent of Finance Morris, that they were able to meet the Continental Army's enormous requirements in 1781.



Louis Le Bègue de Presle Duportail*, by Charles Willson Peale* (Independence National Historical Park)

Chief Engineer Duportail submitted an "Estimate of the number of Horses & Oxen of the Main Army for the Campaign 1781 & of the cost of the Forage requisite for their Support for 182 days." He allotted sixty-four horses and thirty-two oxen for the commander in chief's use. Each infantry regiment was allowed twenty-two horses and thirty-two oxen. An artillery regiment needed twenty horses and forty oxen to draw its baggage and supplies and more draft animals to draw its artillery pieces, ammunition wagons, traveling forges, and other vehicles. The needs of the sappers and miners, artificers, commissary, and staff added hundreds to the requirement. Accordingly, Duportail planned on an initial allocation of 3,106 horses and 2,132 oxen for the main army alone for the 1781 campaign.

On 1 July, Maj. Gen. Henry Knox requested 205 horses for the artillery carriages and another 40 to draw the spare ammunition. On 11 July 1781, Maj. Thomas Cogswell informed Pickering that he also needed 500 horses. When Duportail issued the recall of Continental horses from their winter dispersal stations, fewer horses returned than expected. With General Washington's consent, Pickering informed his deputy, Col. Henry Dearborn, on 20 July that in order to meet Knox's request, they would have to impress 100 large draft horses from "the disaffected"—those inhabitants with known or suspected Loyalist sympathies—in Bergen County. But even that drastic measure proved less successful than Wadsworth's silver when Pickering reported his men had only been able to impress fifty-two additional

horses. Eventually, the transfer of the necessary animals from General Heath's forces, which remained in defensive positions on the Hudson, solved the problem.

With Morris in charge of finding supplies, Pickering and his staff focused on selecting roads and campsites. On 21 August, Colonel Pickering instructed Phillip Pye to conduct a route reconnaissance from King's Ferry "to examine immediately the state of the roads & bridges from hence to the hither end of Pompton from whence you will proceed by Ogden's iron works (without crossing the Ramapaugh River) to the two bridges at the forks. From thence go back to the Yellow House & return to this place by the common road. Be pleased to note particularly all the places where the road & bridges need great repairs & where new bridges must be built for passing of many carriages, mention the size of the bridges necessary to be built. When you have proceeded on the first route as far as Ogden's iron works (without crossing the Ramapaugh) be pleased to send back the express with your report in writing whether that road is practicable for carriages or not, & if practicable, what kind of repairs are requisite to render it a pretty good road."

On 31 August, Pickering wrote to Dearborn about another reconnaissance, saying, "Colonel Neilson will show you a ford at Trenton which he was to try with a waggon if found practicable, you will cross the carriages there on this side of Bristol, instead of coming to Neshaminy Ferry, you take the right road at the fork & go to a fording place—if the tide be up you pass up the river to the second fording place, which may be crossed at all time except in a fresh. The bottoms are good. I was particular in these enquiries yesterday as I passed. The 1st fording place is about a mile above Shamminy ferry, the 2d half a mile above that. I suppose all Cortlandt's regt. & their baggage may go down in the batteaux & their necessary teams go empty by land."

Cooperation between allies in coalition warfare is important, and is especially vital in combined operations. On 2 September, Jacob Hiltzheimer, the Continental Army's assistant deputy quartermaster in Philadelphia, went on a scout "Accompanied [by] Colonel Dearborn, deputy quartermaster, over [the] Schuylkill, to select a site for an encampment for the leading body of French troops." The next day, 3 September, Rochambeau's First Division marched into Philadelphia. This is significant in that Pickering and his staff, after being informed of Washington's decision to march to Virginia, had only four days to accomplish myriad supporting tasks. The American line units had little time for preparation as well. Once the movement commenced, the daily routine began with special instructions issued verbally just

before the march order. Since the Continental Army had already spent years marching across New Jersey and was familiar with the roads, it could easily execute its instructions with a minimum of detail. Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln's orderly book entry for 28 August, on the eve of departure from Chatham, simply read, "The different Routes and Orders of March will be given by the DQM Genl. On Parade at 4 o'Clock [a.m.]."

As the French had on the march to White Plains, Continental units avoided travel during the hottest part of the day. The orderly book for Col. John Lamb's regiment of artillery provides a glimpse of the daily routine for the American units. On 19 August, for example, the drums sounded reveille "at 1/2 past 2 O'clock, the Assemble at three, and the march will commence at 1/3 past three," with the baggage of the artillery preceding the guns and ammunition of the park.

The Continental Army settled into a routine in which the day's movement typically began at 0400. The men marched until reaching the next bivouac site, usually by early afternoon. The soldiers then drew their daily ration, including beef. A company of Continentals was typically divided into messes, usually consisting of six men who ate and were billeted together both in the field and in garrison. The members shared the duties and responsibility for drawing rations, maintaining their common nine-quart cooking kettle, preparing the meals, and erecting and striking the tent or other shelter before the next day's movement.

On 6 August, Colonel Lamb ordered that "[o]ne day's Provision will be drawn, and cook'd the Afternoon." On 4 November 1775, Congress had resolved "That a ration consist of the following kind and quantity of provisions, viz: 1 lb. of beef, or 3/4 lb. pork, or 1 lb. salt fish, per day. 1 lb. of bread or flour per day. 3 pints of pease or beans per week, or vegetables equivalent, at one dollar per bushel for pease or beans. 1 pint of milk per man per day, or at the rate of 1/72 of a dollar. 1 half pint of Rice, or one pint of indian meal per man per week. 1 quart of spruce beer or cyder per man per day, or nine gallons of Molasses per company of 100 men per week. 3 lbs. candles to 100 Men per week for guards. 24 lbs. of soft or 8 lbs. of hard soap, for 100 men per week." Eventually, a small amount of rum or other alcoholic drink was also included, but the basic ration remained unchanged for the duration of the war.

On occasion, the messes would be issued provisions to last over several days. On 24 August at Stony Point, for example, General Lincoln ordered that the Continentals be issued a two-day ration of beef, a two-week supply of soap and candles, and three days of flour, along with instruction to bake their bread "this afternoon." The French, with

plenty of cash available, paid civilians living near their camps to bake their bread for them, whereas the Continental Army "requested" that the local inhabitants make their bake ovens available to bake bread for the soldiers. At Head of Elk, Maryland, Lincoln's orderly book entry for 8 September recorded that as the troops of the First Division were about to embark aboard transports for the move down the Chesapeake, they were to receive six days of flour, four days of pork, and two days of beef. The flour was to be baked into bread that afternoon, and "for this purpose the inhabitants must be requested to lend their Ovens." The comte de Lauberdière, an aide-de-camp to Rochambeau, remarked of the Americans: "They trouble themselves little with provisions: actually they are given just a bit of corn meal of which each soldier makes his own bread."

Although smoked or salted meat was included in the army's supply of provisions, fresh beef was always preferable. An army supply train included a drove of cattle on the hoof to slaughter as needed. When it began its march on 25 August, Lincoln ordered: "The Commissary [with the Cattle] will daily precede the Troops, to the place of Incampment & have the Beef ready to be issued on their arrival, in order to prevent delays, the provision returns will be made out every Evening." The cattle herds with the troops could be quite large. John Hudson remembered that in Baltimore, where the army "encamped on Howard's hill . . . six hundred heads of cattle were slaughtered and salted for our use" on the final leg of the journey to Williamsburg.

Many supplies had to be purchased as the armies moved. Dr. Thacher commented regarding the French: "To their honor, that during their march from Newport to join our army, their course has been marked with the most exemplary order and regularity, committing no depredations, but conducting towards the inhabitants on their route with great civility and propriety. . . . They punctually paid their expenses in hard money, which made them acceptable guests wherever they passed." Hard money, or *specie*, meant gold or silver coins, considered especially valuable in a time when paper money could easily lose its value.

Those selling to the Americans, on the other hand, had to settle for payment in either nearly worthless Continental paper currency or Continental loan certificates. Colonel Tallmadge had foreseen the resulting financial crisis as early as 14 July 1780, when he wrote to Wadsworth, "as you are Agent for the French I shall not be disappointed to find thro[ugh] the Campaign that they are well fed & our Troops starving." Once the campaign had commenced, his fears came true. On 21 August, James Hendricks wrote from Alexandria, "Lord knows what will be done for provisions! Colo. Wadsworth & Carter, the French Agents have their

Riders all round the Country, buying flour & beef with specie, this will effectively prevent the Commissioners from procuring any, as there is not a probability of the People letting the State Agents have an Ounce on Credit while they can get the French Crowns & Louis, I wish the Executive wou'd fall on some method to get the Cash from the French, and furnish the Supplies, without some method or other is fell on, the American Army will be starved."

Like good allies, Rochambeau and Wadsworth did their best to share their resources. On 18 August, Washington informed Rochambeau: "Before Mr. Morris left Camp he made a proposal which he desired might be communicated to your Excellency. He informed me that he understood Mr. Tarlé had between two and three thousand Barrels of Flour upon the upper parts of the North [Hudson] River, and as he imagined it could not now be wanted in that quarter he made an offer of supplying you with an equal quantity to the southward, if that above should be delivered to our Commissary General. I shall be obliged by your making Mr. Tarlé acquainted with the above, and if it can be transacted upon the terms proposed by Mr. Morris, I shall be glad to know the exact quantity and where Mr. Tarlé would chuse to have the Flour which is to be given in exchange deposited." Rochambeau agreed to give the Americans the flour.

In extreme circumstances, to meet the requirements of keeping the Army in the field, American officers frequently had to resort to impressing, or confiscating, supplies in exchange for loan certificates. Colonel Lamb's orderly book entry on 25 August recorded instructions that "[t]he Officers Commanding Corps will appoint some Person to procure forage and Grain for their Horses, and receipt to Mr. Coldcloug, Forage Master to the Park, who will give the necessary Certificates."

Occasionally, when the civilians were unwilling to part with the confiscated property, such incidents had tragic results. On the march to Trenton, Lieutenant Greene of the Rhode Island Regiment had "destroyed the property of an inhabitant," as he reported to General Lincoln on 1 September. When he went to inform the owner of the "accident" and how he had done "all in my power to avoid injuring the hog," the man rushed at him, and Greene "was induced to drop the point of my Espontoon against which he rushed with such force that he buried the blade in his neck—the woman to whom I addressed myself accosted me in very indecent language which I did not think proper to return." The officer closed by saying, since "the troops were marching & being conscious of my own innocence I rejoined my blattoon [*sic*]."

As the troops moved farther south, states had more time to prepare for their arrival. In Delaware, for example, state authorities had supplies

waiting for the Continentals. As early as 16 August, John Yeates, Deputy Quartermaster for Delaware, informed the state's president, Caesar Rodney, that though he had "reason to expect the passage of troops soon thro' the State this happening in our present situation, it would not be in my power to give regular assistance," and asked for cooperation. On 1 September, Rodney ordered Delaware's Treasurer General Samuel Patterson, Col. Henry Darby, and Capt. William McClay to procure the supplies and allocate funds to cover expenses. With this assistance, state and Continental authorities collected and delivered a large amount of much-needed supplies.

On 24 September, William Black and Evan Rice submitted an "Acct of Suplays purchd . . . for the use of the Troops under his Excelency Genrl Washinton on their March to the Southwd Septr 1781," which listed quantities of beef, Indian corn, oats, shorts, bran, "Ship Stuff," buckwheat meal, rye meal, and hay, for which the state of Delaware paid in specie.

In the last days of August 1781, the Continental forces had crossed the Hudson from King's Ferry to Stony Point and entered New Jersey on three separate routes. Maj. Sebastian Baumann led the artificers via Ringwood to Pompton. The main body of the Continental Army moved via Suffern. Hazen's regiment and the two New Jersey regiments crossed at Dobbs Ferry and Sneeden's Landing.

About a mile into New Jersey the main body of the Continental Army divided into two columns. The one on the right, commanded by Col. John Lamb, was composed of the Rhode Island Regiment, the sappers and miners, baggage trains, the Second Continental Artillery, and thirty flatboats on carriages, and proceeded on what today is the Ramapo Valley Road to Pompton. They were joined at that location by the army's headquarters train, commanded by Major Baumann, and reached Chatham in the evening of 27 August.

The second column, commanded by General Lincoln, marched to its assembly point between Chatham and Springfield via Hohokus, Acquackanonk (modern Passaic), and Second River (modern Belleville), before the two columns united to camp between Chatham and Springfield, within seven miles of New York City. Two days later, 29 August, the Continentals broke camp and continued marching south in two columns.

Washington personally led the column that marched via Bound Brook to Princeton and Trenton; the other swung far to the east into Elizabeth before turning west toward New Brunswick, via Quibbletown, and then on to Princeton.

Charles Cornwallis, *engraving by J. Ward from a painting by W. Beechey, 1799*
(National Archives)

French forces, unfamiliar with the territory and therefore dependent on maps, took the most direct route via Peekskill and Stony Point to Pompton, Morristown, Princeton, Trenton, and Philadelphia. By dispersing the French and American armies on multiple routes, the allies maintained the ruse that they were massing for an assault on New York. The dispersal was also a matter of practicality, in that an army on the move consumes vast amounts of food and forage. Had the combined forces taken a single route, the affected area's resources would have been depleted quickly. When the armies reached Princeton, they were not only irreversibly committed to the Southern campaign, but they also had successfully disengaged from one theater and were free to redeploy to another.

By the time the armies marched through Philadelphia in the first days of September and encamped, everyone realized they were heading to Virginia to engage Cornwallis's army at Yorktown. From Philadelphia, the columns crossed the Schuylkill River and continued tramping southward. Meanwhile, the artillery was loaded aboard watercraft and moved down the Delaware River to Christiana in Delaware. The day after the French forces paraded before the Congress on 4 September, Francis Bailey observed in the *Freeman's Journal* that "the appearance of these troops far exceeds any thing of the kind seen on this continent, and presages the happiest success to the cause of America." Despite the optimism, Washington and Rochambeau had still received no word from de Grasse that his fleet, on which success depended, was on the way. It was not until the early afternoon of 5 September, when Washington was already in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania (1½ miles from the Delaware state line), that he received word that de Grasse was in the Chesapeake. As the allied armies were marching to Virginia, Lord Cornwallis and his exhausted redcoats were digging in for what they hoped would be a well-deserved rest and quiet winter quarters.

Virginia was the wealthiest and most populous of the colonies and had hardly been directly touched by the war before General Leslie arrived in 1780 to disrupt American supplies being sent to Greene. When Leslie's command was sent to reinforce Cornwallis, its mission was assumed by Benedict Arnold, the American traitor, who arrived in Portsmouth on New Year's Day 1781 with 1,500 British troops. Although von Steuben was training Virginia state line recruits and militiamen in that area, his troops were no match for Arnold's regulars. The state suffered greatly from enemy depredations. A French attempt to relieve the pressure on Virginia in early March was turned back by the Royal Navy, and Maj. Gen. William Phillips landed later that same month with an additional 2,000 men to take over the command from Arnold.

When Lafayette arrived in Richmond with about 1,200 Continentals at the end of April to cooperate with von Steuben and the Virginia militia, Phillips was finally forced to withdraw to Petersburg. Cornwallis sent word to Phillips that they would join their forces together at the city. Cornwallis arrived in Petersburg on 20 May to bring the number of Crown forces to more than 7,000 men, of which 5,000 were fit for duty. Under Cornwallis's command the British continued to ravage Virginia. Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton led his British Legion toward Charlottesville, dispersed the state assembly, and nearly captured Gov. Thomas Jefferson at his Monticello home on 4 June. At about the same time, the Queen's Rangers, under the command of Lt. Col. John Graves Simcoe, routed von Steuben's militia at Point of Fork and captured the supplies, lately collected there with much difficulty to be forwarded to Greene. Despite the presence of Lafayette's division, the military situation again looked promising for the Crown. Although Anthony Wayne's brigade of three Pennsylvania regiments and a detachment from the Fourth Continental Artillery arrived to reinforce Lafayette, his 2,500 Continentals and 3,200 militiamen could not risk becoming decisively engaged with Cornwallis's far superior force. Instead, the Americans could only shadow and observe their adversary from a safe distance.

On 25 June 1781 Cornwallis rode into Williamsburg. The next day he opened two letters from a very upset superior. Gen. Clinton upbraided his subordinate for conducting what he viewed as an unauthorized foray into Virginia. Since the British commander in chief anticipated an attack by the allied forces on New York, he instructed Cornwallis to detach six infantry regiments, with whatever supporting forces he could spare, to New York and to establish a naval base in the Chesapeake. Though

annoyed with Clinton's orders, Cornwallis reconnoitered the peninsula and concentrated most of his army at Portsmouth by mid-July. Just as the troops Clinton had requested were about to embark on vessels sent by Clinton, Cornwallis received countermanding orders to establish a naval base and winter quarters at Old Point Comfort instead. Not finding the location to his liking, he marched his forces up the peninsula to Yorktown. On 2 August his men began turning the small port on the York River into the fortified naval base Clinton wanted in Virginia. Though Cornwallis was not entirely pleased with the location, he was secure in the knowledge that the Royal Navy was close at hand.

Francois Joseph Paul, comte de Grasse*, engraving by Lemercier from a painting by A. Maurin, 1837*
(National Archives)

Cornwallis might not have been so self-assured had he known that de Grasse's French fleet, with twenty-eight ships of the line plus supporting frigates and smaller warships, was en route to North America. After weighing anchor at Cap Français in Santo Domingo on 5 August, they headed north. The decks were crowded with additional personnel. Besides the regular crew of 750 sailors and marines, each 74-gun ship of the line was also transporting some of the 3,000 men of the infantry regiments Gâtinois, Agenois, and Touraine, plus 100 men of the Metz artillery regiment and their guns, all under the command of Claude Anne de Rouvroy, marquis de Saint-Simon Montbleru. Additionally, there were also 100 hussars of the First Legion of the Volontaires étrangers de la Marine, albeit without their horses, bringing a total of 3,289 officers and men to add to the allied land forces in Virginia. Along the way, the admiral dispatched the frigate *Aigrette* to Havana to pick up the 1.2 million livres Rochambeau had requested in July for his army. It took nearly five hours to collect these funds from public and private sources, and the next day *Aigrette* was sailing north again.

Predicting that de Grasse would head for the American mainland, Admiral Hood left the British West Indies on 10 August. His fourteen

copper-sheathed ships were faster than de Grasse's, and so he passed the French without sighting them. Hood arrived off the Virginia Capes on 25 August, the same day Barras and his squadron sailed from Newport with the French siege artillery. Sighting no French vessels, however, Hood sailed on to New York. After Hood dropped anchor on 28 August, Clinton ordered him to join the naval squadron under Vice Adm. Thomas Graves that was being outfitted to go to Cornwallis's aid at Yorktown. By the time Graves, reinforced by Hood, sailed from New York harbor on 31 August to join Rear Adm. Sir Francis Drake's squadron, de Grasse's fleet was already unloading men and materiel for the siege from their anchorage in the mouth of the York River. Five days later, around 0930 on 5 September, off Cape Charles, the lookouts aboard *Aigrette* reported sighting Graves's fleet of nineteen ships approaching the bay from east-northeast. *Aigrette* hurried back to alert de Grasse.

About noon, the French admiral ordered his captains to cut their ships' anchor cables to catch the advantage of the ebb tide. With some of the sailors ashore, and no time to recall them, many of the ships were underway without full crews. Beating against a wind from the north-northeast, the French had difficulty forming a battle line as their twenty-three ships straggled out of the bay.

Graves, in accordance with the Admiralty's fighting instructions, signaled his fleet to form "line ahead" in order to bring them parallel with de Grasse's ships. The 1½ hours it took to perform this maneuver gave de Grasse time to clear the bay and may have cost Graves the victory. When battle commenced at 1546, de Grasse not only had 1,794 guns versus 1,410 British guns, but thanks to Graves's maneuver, the best French ships were lined up with Graves's slowest and weakest. The ensuing exchange of broadsides went on inconclusively until nightfall, when Graves finally signaled for the British ships to cease firing.

During the next three days, both fleets drifted to the southward without resuming the fight. At nightfall on 9 September, de Grasse headed back north. As he approached the mouth of York River, he saw Barras's recently arrived fleet riding at anchor in Lynnhaven Bay. De Grasse, who knew that Washington and Rochambeau were on the way, had accomplished his objective. With Barras in the bay, he now had thirty-six French ships of the line against Graves's eighteen. Cornwallis was now effectively cut off from his naval support.

Meanwhile, after three weeks of marching, the leading elements of the Continental Army reached Head of Elk, Maryland, on Thursday, 6 September, followed by French forces over the next two days. Once the American rear guard arrived from Christiana on 9 September, the two

armies were ready for the last leg of their march to Yorktown. Washington knew that speed was still of the essence. Gen. Clinton could still launch an operation to go to Cornwallis's relief. Cornwallis might attempt to break out of encircled Yorktown. And, in the same message Washington received from de Grasse on 5 September informing him the French fleet was in the Chesapeake, there was also the warning that the ships would remain only until 15 October.

Previously, on 17 August, Washington had written Robert Morris from Dobbs Ferry that he would have to pay the army at least one month's salary in specie before ordering it to march into Virginia. Morris was aware of Washington's needs and had recorded in his diary that "great S[y]mptoms of discontent had Appeared on their passing through this City" of Philadelphia. In the six days between the army's departure from Trenton and arrival at Head of Elk on 6 September, eleven men deserted from Lamb's artillery regiment alone. On 6 September, the situation had become more critical, and Washington repeated the request to Morris from Head of Elk, "intreating you in the warmest Terms to send on a Month's Pay at least, with all the Expedition possible." But Morris did not have the funds to pay the army. On 7 September he asked Rochambeau for a loan of 26,600 Spanish dollars in specie to pay the American troops, with the promise that he would repay the money. The 26,600 pieces of eight, or 143,640 livres, almost half the amount left in his treasury, was all Rochambeau could lend Morris to pay the American troops.

The effect of the French silver resonated for decades in the minds of the recipients. "This day [8 September 1781]," wrote Maj. William Popham, "will be famous in the annals of History for being the first in which the Troops of the United States received one month's Pay in Specie—all the civil and military staff are excluded. . . . I cannot even obtain my pay as Captain in the Line."

For many a Continental soldier this was the first and only time he received hard money during his years of service. Sgt. Joseph Plum Martin of the Corps of Sappers and Miners remembered that "we each of us received a MONTH'S PAY, in specie, borrowed, as I was informed, by our French officers from the officers in the French army. This was the first that could be called money, which we had received as wages since the year '76, or that we ever did receive till the close of the war, or indeed, ever after, as wages." Pvt. John Hudson of the First New York Regiment, who had celebrated only his thirteenth birthday on 12 June 1781, recalled that it was at Elkton that "I received the only pay that I ever drew for my services during the war, being six French crowns, which

were a part of what Robert Morris borrowed on his own credit from the French commander to supply the most urgent necessities of the soldiers. My comrades received the same amount."

As the allied troops were marching from Phillipsburg, Continental agents attempted to obtain enough vessels to transport both armies to Yorktown. Eighty vessels of various sizes, including twelve sloops, eighteen schooners, and a few dozen smaller private vessels, either hired or impressed for service, waited at Head of Elk. On 8 September, headquarters ordered: "The Commander in Cheafe guards, Light Troops, Genl Heasons Regt artillery Sappers & Miners & the artificiers Will imbark as the first divison of American troops, care will be taken to keep as much as poseble Corps together." This first division numbered around 1,450 Continentals.

When the first contingent was loaded, the second division began boarding. The combined New Jersey regiments, about 330 men, left only enough room in the remaining ships to embark four companies each of grenadiers and chasseurs and a detachment of Lauzun's infantry and artillery, or around 1,200 French troops.

On 9 September, even before those loading at Head of Elk were fully embarked, the remainder of the men, about 4,000 French troops, the artillery, and approximately 1,000 Americans continued marching by land. When the transports weighed anchor at 0400 on 11 September, loaded to capacity, the two New York regiments and the Rhode Island Regiment followed the French.

The convoy of transports arrived in Baltimore on 12 September, just after the news had arrived that de Grasse had sailed from Lynnhaven Bay on 5 September to engage the British fleet. The victorious outcome of that fight was not known until the evening of 14 September. Meanwhile, the convoy of assorted transports was on its way again on 13 September. Rochambeau had hoped to find enough shipping in Baltimore to embark at least two of his regiments. But the seaworthiness of the vessels that awaited him was questionable. The baron de Vioménil, Rochambeau's second in command, refused to place his troops on board and decided to march overland to Virginia. The Americans, however, had no reservations about the condition of their transportation and embarked their remaining contingents at Fell's Point on 16 and 17 September.

Vioménil sent Lauzun's 300 hussars ahead of the baggage and artillery to Gloucester, opposite Yorktown. At 0500 on 14 September, Col. René Marie, vicomte de Darrot, departed Baltimore and crossed the Patapsco River on the way south. The next evening, 15 September,

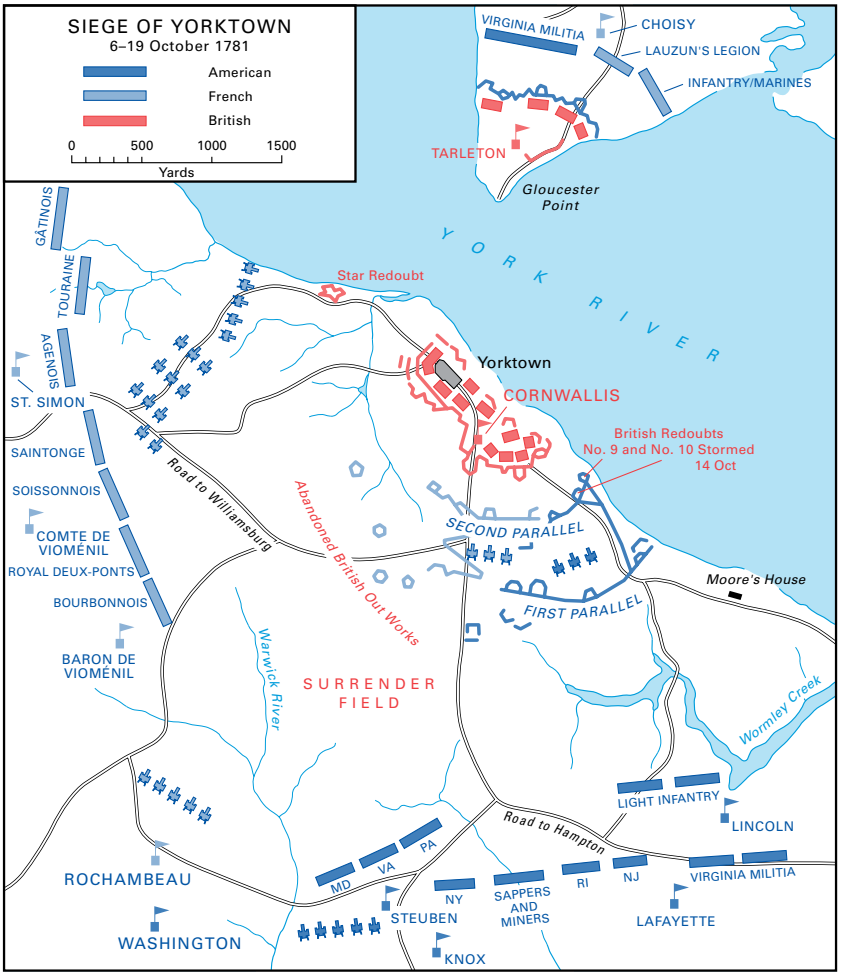
the troops crossed the Potomac at Georgetown and into Virginia. After marching through Dumfries, Fredericksburg, and King and Queen Court House, the column reached Gloucester on 24 September.

On the evening of 17 September a courier got through to Viomésnil with the welcome news. Transports, sent from de Grasse, had arrived at Annapolis to carry most of the French forces. By 0700 on 19 September, after changing their route, French troops reached Annapolis and encamped on the grounds of King William's School (now St. John's College). Over the next few days the infantry regiments and field artillery loaded men, guns, and baggage aboard fifteen French vessels: six warships and nine transports. The supply train, with an estimated 1,500 horses, 800 oxen, and 220 wagons, set off for Virginia. Led by the ship of the line *Romulus*, with 74 guns, the frigates *Gentile*, *Diligente*, *Aigrette*, *Isis,* and *Richmond* (the latter two captured from the British) and the nine transports sailed on 21 September in the afternoon. They arrived in the York River only twenty-four hours later. After being overtaken by the French ships, the makeshift American transport fleet sailed to College Creek Landing, opposite Williamsburg in the James River.

Decisive Victory

In the early evening on 19 September, thirty-six days after Washington decided to try to capture Cornwallis's army, the first elements of the Continental Army came ashore at Archer's Hope (upstream from the mouth of College Creek), marched into Williamsburg, and encamped behind the College of William and Mary. The French grenadiers and chasseurs landed on 23 September at Burwell's Ferry, a mile below College Creek, and bivouacked behind the former Virginia colonial capital. By 26 September, the French transports were unloaded as well, and the troops joined the camp at Williamsburg. Two days later, the combined armies of Washington (including Lafayette's forces) and Rochambeau (reinforced by the infantry under the command of marquis de Saint-Simon Montbleru) set out for Yorktown.

After he left Head of Elk traveling by road on 8 September, Washington was eager to visit his Mount Vernon home for the first time in six years. Briefly stopping in Baltimore early on 9 September, he pushed on the last sixty miles and reached his estate that evening. Rochambeau and his staff arrived the following day and enjoyed the Washingtons' hospitality until 13 September, when the two commanders continued their journey together. After reaching Williamsburg on 15 September, they anxiously awaited the arrival of the combined armies. Three days



later, the two generals visited Admiral de Grasse aboard his flagship, the *Ville de Paris,* for a face-to-face meeting, at which de Grasse agreed to keep his fleet on station until the end of October. The generals were anxious for the battle to begin.

On 29 September, de Grasse sent a landing force of 800 men, line infantry serving as marines on his vessels, ashore from the fleet to operate with the army. Rochambeau ordered them to Gloucester, where they joined Brig. Gen. George Weeden's Virginia militia, bringing the combined allied force there to 2,900 men, under the overall command of Claude Gabriel de Choisy. There they faced Lt. Col. Thomas Dundas's

Distribution of Forces at the Siege of Yorktown, October 1781

American Army		
Continentals	5,850	(return of 9/26/1781)
Militia	3,300	
Total	9,150	
French Ground Forces		
Rochambeau's Army	4,900	(return of 11/11/1781)
Saint-Simon's Forces	3,300	
Marines (at Gloucester)	800	
Total	9,000	
French Naval Forces Afloat		
Ships' crews	24,000	(18,000 de Grasse, 6,000 Barras)
Marines	4,500	
Total	28,500	French forces on sea
British Army		
British Regulars	4,300	
German Auxiliaries	2,000	
Loyalists	700	
Total	7,000	

1,100 British, entrenched behind four strong redoubts with three batteries of nineteen artillery pieces, mostly 18-pounders. Almost half the enemy force consisted of cavalry, including the famed British Legion (about 240 men) of the hated and feared Banastre Tarleton. Lauzun was anxious to cross swords with him, and his opportunity came on 3 October 1781.

Choisy and Lauzun wanted to move their troops closer to the British position at Gloucester Point. Lauzun's Legion, about 250 cavalry and an equal number of infantry, and Lt. Col. John Mercer's Select Battalion of the Virginia militia advanced. At the same time, Tarleton and 240 of his horse soldiers and 350 infantry of the Twenty-third Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 150 of them also mounted, were out foraging. About three miles from Gloucester, Lauzun emerged from the forest onto open ground. Seeing the enemy force before him, he advanced directly toward Tarleton. The British force initially retreated, but rallied and then counterattacked. When the allies checked this charge, Tarleton's troops broke for the protection of a company of the Twenty-third. The fire of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers stopped Lauzun's infantry, but they were in turn driven back by Virginia

Yorktown, 14 October 1781*, by H. Charles McBarron*
(U.S. Army Art Collection)

militia. British casualties numbered thirteen. The French suffered 3 killed and 16 wounded, while the Americans had 2 killed and 11 wounded. Both sides claimed victory, but the allies retained the field. Choisy followed Lauzun's success and pushed his advance posts to within one mile of Gloucester, where they stayed for the remainder of the siege, effectively confining Dundas's garrison to its fortifications.

Across the river, on 28 September, the allied armies advanced on Yorktown. Surprisingly, Cornwallis abandoned his outer defenses without a fight on 30 September. Rochambeau's engineers and von Steuben recommended to their respective commanders in chief to conduct a classic European-style siege as pioneered by French Field-Marshall Sebastien LePrestre de Vauban. That meant digging trenches opposite the defensive lines of the besieged enemy. These zigzagging lines, called parallels, were dug consecutively closer to the enemy's works, thus advancing the forward posts without exposing the infantry to the foe's firepower. In the meantime, artillery subjected the entrenched enemy to continuous bombardment to weaken them and cover the digging. Artillery then moved forward to covered positions and fired a concentrated bombard-

ment to batter the defender's walls. In the final stage, infantry stormed the resulting breech, assaulting from the protection of the closest parallel. Ideally, before the final assault took place, the besieged enemy would realize the futility of continued resistance and surrender.

On 6 October, allied troops began digging the first parallel about 500 to 600 yards from the outer British defenses. Three days later French siege guns opened fire. Two detached earthen forts, however, called Redoubts 9 and 10, blocked the advance. Located 400 yards in advance of the British inner defenses on the extreme right flank, they had to be reduced before completion of the second parallel. On 14 October, allied artillery bombarded Redoubts 9 and 10 for most of the day, preparing them for the coordinated American and French assaults. That evening, an assault by American light infantry commanded by Hamilton took Redoubt 10, while an attack by French grenadiers of the Gâtinois and Royal Deux-Ponts regiments carried Redoubt 9. The capture of these forts enabled the besieging allied forces to finish the second parallel and construct the grand American battery within point-blank range of the British inner defense line.

About 0400 on 16 October, Cornwallis launched a counterattack on unfinished allied batteries just to the left of his center. Although the British managed temporarily to seize two French artillery positions, the effort ultimately proved unsuccessful. An attempt to break the encirclement by assaulting the allied positions at Gloucester Point also failed. As British troops from Yorktown were being ferried across the York River to conduct the attack, a storm disrupted the operation. Cornwallis soon realized that the Americans and French now held a decisive advantage, both tactically and operationally.

The following day, 17 October, a British officer waving a white handkerchief stood on the rampart with a drummer beating for a parley. On 18 October, two British officers met with an American and a French counterpart at the home of Augustine Moore to negotiate surrender terms. Washington granted them the same terms the British had given Benjamin Lincoln's American army that had surrendered Charleston the previous year. (By tradition, a defeated army that had fought well was granted the "honors of war" and allowed to parade with its colors flying while its band played a tune in honor of its opponent. The British had denied Lincoln and his men that mark of respect and now the Americans returned the favor.) About 1400 on 19 October 1781, 7,247 rank-and-file British, American Loyalist, and German soldiers and 840 Royal Navy sailors marched out of Yorktown with their colors cased and bands playing a British march (tradition holds it was "World Turned Upside Down") to

And the Guns Fell Silent, October 1781*, by David Wagner*
(Courtesy of the artist)

lay down their arms. When Cornwallis, claiming to be ill, sent an officer to present his sword to Rochambeau, the French general motioned that the gesture was to be addressed to the overall allied commander in chief, General Washington. When the British officer offered the sword to Washington, the general directed the previously humiliated Lincoln to accept the symbol of British capitulation.

With the campaign won, Saint-Simon's troops began to re-embark on 27 October. On 4 November, without ever setting foot on American soil, de Grasse ordered his fleet to weigh anchor and sail out of Lynnhaven Bay for Fort Royal on Martinique. The Continental Army marched north to winter quarters in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Rochambeau's forces established winter quarters, remaining

in and around Williamsburg until July, when they marched north to an encampment north of New York City, where they arrived in late September. Here Rochambeau received orders to march to Boston and broke camp in late October. On Christmas Day 1782, his infantry set sail for the Caribbean.

Yorktown signaled the much-prayed-for deliverance. Immediately following the events of October 1781, Washington confided that Cornwallis's surrender was "an interesting event that may be productive of much good if properly improved." Other generals agreed with his assessment. In a 26 October 1781 letter written from Virginia, General Wayne called "the surrender of Lord Cornwallis's Fleet & Army . . . an event of the utmost consequence." But he also cautioned that only "if properly improved" would the victory bring the "glorious & happy peace" for which the nation longed. All were optimistic but, like Wayne, doubted that the Americans would again "have it in our power to Command 37 Sail of the line & 8000 Auxiliary veterans."

News of Yorktown did not bring an immediate end to the American War for Independence. The British still held New York City with 10,000 troops and had substantial forces in Canada. In the South, Greene still had to reduce the garrisons at Charleston, Savannah, and numerous British posts in the backcountry. Crown forces and their American Indian allies continued to wage war on the western frontier. Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, however, had removed an army from the battlefield, substantially weakened political will in London, and crippled the British war effort beyond repair. In short, it had a resounding impact that eventually proved to be decisive. The British government recognized the independence of the United States in the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the Revolutionary War in 1783.

The victory at Yorktown strengthened the self-confidence of the Continental Army and proved to the world that it had become a force of professionals, able to plan and execute a complex operation. As victory was made possible only with French assistance, the campaign continues to provide America's army with lessons about joint and combined operations with sister services and coalition allies.

Yorktown was the campaign that had to produce results, the campaign from which, in Washington's own words, "our deliverance must come." More than ever the fate of the nation rested on the skills, motivation, and values that formed the foundations of the Continental Army and that would serve as a legacy shaping the core values of today's United States Army. The Continental Army and its soldiers rose to meet the challenge. A sense of duty and loyalty to the nation had replaced the desperation

and disrespect of the winter of discontent that had led to the mutinies at Morristown. A sense of selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage caused the men to continue their march past Elkton, though many of them feared the climate and diseases in the Southern states.

Yorktown and Cornwallis were waiting at the end of this largest and farthest strategic redeployment of allied forces in the Revolutionary War. On the march to Yorktown and during the siege itself, Washington and his fellow officers depended on the commitment, competence, candor, and courage of each individual soldier in the ranks of the army. That the men had passed the test is evident in the testimony of General Wayne, who proudly informed Robert Morris from the battlefield of Yorktown that "our prowess was such, as to establish our Character as Soldiers."

This change was perfectly visible when the French encountered their ally near Peekskill in September 1782. Clermont-Crèvecœur was "struck with the transformation of this army into one that was in no way inferior to ours." Dr. Thacher reported, "Our troops were now in complete uniform, and exhibited every mark of soldierly discipline. Count Rochambeau was most highly gratified to perceive the very great improvement, which our army had made in appearance since he last reviewed them, and expressed his astonishment at their rapid progress in military skill and discipline. He said to General Washington, 'You have formed an alliance with the King of Prussia. These troops are Prussians.' Several of the principal officers of the French army, who have seen troops of different European nations, have bestowed the highest encomiums and applause on our army, and declared that they had seen none superior to the Americans." The American army, born just seven years before, had come of age.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Beginning with Henry P. Johnston's *The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1881; reprinted, Philadelphia: Eastern Acorn Press, 1975), there are a number of excellent surveys of the Yorktown campaign, including Thomas J. Fleming, *Beat the Last Drum: The Siege of Yorktown, 1781* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963); Burke Davis, *The Campaign That Won America, The Story of Yorktown* (Philadelphia: Eastern Acorn Press, 1970); William H. Hallahan, *The Day the Revolution Ended: 19 October 1781* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2003); and most recently Richard M. Ketchum*, Victory at Yorktown. The Campaign That Won the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004).

A good brief overview of the campaign is Brendan Morrissey, *Yorktown 1781* (Oxford, U.K.: Osprey, 1999). A veritable guidebook to the battlefield at Yorktown is the detailed study by Jerome A. Greene, *The Guns of Independence: The Siege of Yorktown, 1781* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2005). Indispensable background reading is Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

The most readable reminiscences of the war from the American side are still Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle,* George E. Scheer, ed. (Philadelphia: Eastern Acorn Press, 1962). For African-American soldiers, see Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, eds., *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989) and Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

The best general overviews for the French role in the victory at Yorktown are by far Lee Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780–1783* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977) and Samuel F. Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy: The Transformation of the French Army in an Age of Revolution* (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1998). For a British point of view, see Daniel Syrett, *The Royal Navy in American Waters* (Aldershot, Vt.: Vermont Scholar's Press, 1989); Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775–1783* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964; reprinted, Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Robert Harvey, *A Few Bloody Noses: The Realities and Mythologies of the American Revolution* (New York: Overlook Press, 2002); and

Michael Pearson, *Those Damned Rebels: The American Revolution as Seen Through British Eyes* (New York: Da Capo Books, 1972).

Cover:
French Army Encampment at East Hartford,
October–November 1782*, by David Wagner*.
The French army camped in East Hartford
from 30 October through 4 November 1782.
(Courtesy of the artist)

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