History of the Campaign

French General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, sailed into Newport, RI, in July 1780, with an army of 5,300 officers and men. The following year, in June and July of 1781, he marched through Rhode Island and Connecticut to join Washington's Army north of New York City.

Abandoning the idea of attacking New York City, which was held by British under General Sir Henry Clinton, Washington and Rochambeau decided to pursue a southern campaign – to attack British General Lord Cornwallis in Virginia. During August and September, Washington and Rochambeau's armies marched south through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, reaching Williamsburg in late September.

Together they attacked and held under siege the British-fortified town of Yorktown. The siege guns had been delivered by Admiral de Barras on French ships from Rhode Island. A French fleet under the command of Admiral de Grasse blocked the Chesapeake Bay from British reinforcement and cut off any potential escape by sea. On October 19, 1781, three weeks after the siege began, General Cornwallis surrendered.

Shortly after the surrender, Washington and the Continentals returned to defend the northern states. Rochambeau and his army wintered in Williamsburg and then marched north during the summer of 1782. Small contingents of French troops remained in southern ports and returned to France the following year. The main body of Rochambeau's army sailed from Boston on Christmas Eve, 1782.
Once again the allied armies came to New Jersey.

In all, nine states formed the route of the march, providing ports, roads, campsites, officers' lodging, and provisions along the way. The states were Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia.

Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in New Jersey (W3R-NJ)

For more information about the Washington – Rochambeau march through New Jersey, please visit our website: www.w3r-nj.org

Contact:
info@w3r-nj.org

Become a Member

W3R-NJ is a non-profit organization that is working to identify, commemorate and preserve the New Jersey routes and associated historic sites used by allied troops during the Yorktown campaign.

For more information, donation or $50 membership payment use the QR codes below or mail your check at: W3R-NJ c/o 411 Elm Street Westfield, NJ 07090.

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Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route NJ

Explore the historic routes taken by Washington's and Rochambeau's troops as they marched through New Jersey to Yorktown, VA, during the final campaign of the Revolutionary War

NJ's Role in the Road to Victory

From the 19th of August 1781, when about 750 men, including New Jersey's two Continental Army regiments, set out from Sneden's Landing, NY, **to September 4th**, when the last troops had crossed into Pennsylvania, **New Jersey was the most important theater at this point in the Revolutionary War.** 3,000 Continental Army troops under the command of General George Washington, supported by 4,600 French soldiers led by the Comte de Rochambeau, traversed New Jersey on their way to Yorktown, Virginia, in what is now called, Washington's Grand Plan.

Washington and Rochambeau united their forces in July near White Plains, NY, for a possible attack on British General Sir Henry Clinton in New York City. But New York City proved too strong, and when the opportunity arose in mid-August to capture Lord Cornwallis in Virginia in cooperation with a French fleet under Admiral François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, Washington quickly shifted his strategy.

French Map of Encampment Site, Pompton, NJ

The success of the Yorktown Campaign depended on the allies' ability to secretly disengage from New York while convincing Clinton the city was still the main target. Departing on August 19th for the crossing of the Hudson River at Peekskill, one column under Washington marched from Suffern, NY, to Pompton, NJ. A third column, that had arrived from Newburgh via Ringwood, joined Washington's column on August 26th. From Pompton, these troops continued their march via the Two Bridges (near modern-day Mountain View) to Chatham.

A second column under General Benjamin Lincoln marched from Suffern on the Franklin Turnpike, past the Hermitage to Paramus, NJ. They then followed the route taken by the other New Jersey regiments to Belleville. On August 27, the Continental Army reunited on the hills above Springfield and Chatham.

General Rochambeau

General Washington

The allies maintained large campfires; built bread ovens in Chatham, manned lookouts between Closter and Springfield; and collected supplies – all to keep up the fiction that they were preparing for an attack on New York City. In reality, however, they were creating a triple screen behind which the French allies entered New Jersey in two divisions and proceeded down the Ramapo Valley Road (now NJ-SR 202), on August 26th and 27th, on their way to their first camps in Pompton and Whippany.

As the first French division left Whippany on August 29th, the Continental Army, including the integrated Rhode Island Regiment of Native American and African American soldiers, broke camp and hurried in two columns, one via Westfield on to New Brunswick, across the Raritan

"The Brave Men Ever Fought" By Don Troiani
(Museum of The American Revolution. Funded by National Park Service W3R National Historic Trail)

River, also camping at Raritan Landing, the other via Scotch Plains to Bound Brook, converging in Princeton then on to Trenton, arriving on August 31st. Some of the troops embarked on vessels bound for Philadelphia the next morning, while others crossed by ferry from that campsite near the Trent House.

French forces were not far behind. Encamped at Liberty Corner, Somerset Court House, and Princeton, the first French division troops arrived at Trenton on the evening of September 1st.

Encampment Site, Liberty Corner, NJ

Feeding the American and French armies on their rapid march across war-ravaged New Jersey was a huge logistical achievement. Towns such as Whippany had only about 30 houses and 200 inhabitants, yet 4,600 French officers and men, with their 2,000 horses and 1,800 draft oxen and beef cattle, camped and grazed on the outskirts of the little towns. Even Trenton, the largest city along the route, only had 100 houses and 500 inhabitants. Yet New Jersey rose to the challenge, and once the last troops had crossed into Pennsylvania on September 4th, there was nothing Clinton could do to impede the march to Yorktown, VA. Six weeks later Cornwallis surrendered. The war for American independence was won.

William Trent House, Trenton, NJ