

THE *EXPÉDITION PARTICULIÈRE* IN RHODE ISLAND,  
11 JULY 1780 TO 10 JUNE 1781

9.1 The Transatlantic Journey

To put an end to the British "wreaking havoc on this beautiful country" was indeed the goal of the *expédition particulière* assembled in Brest in March 1780. By 6 April, the troops were embarked; Rochambeau boarded the *Duc de Bourgogne*, one of only five 80-gun vessels in the French navy, on 17 April. Everything was ready, but for days the fleet had to wait in the rain for the wind to change. The first attempt to clear the coast failed, but on 2 May the convoy of 32 transports and cargo ships protected by seven ships of the line, four frigates, four flutes, a cutter and a schooner finally left Brest. Besides their crews of about 7,000 sailors, his ships carried the troops of the *expédition particulière*, about 450 officers and 5,300 men commanded by Rochambeau.<sup>142</sup> Conditions on board ship were less than comfortable.

Baron Ludwig von Closen, an *aide-de-camp* to Rochambeau as well as a captain in the Royal Deux-Ponts was traveling with two servants on the *Comtesse de Noailles*. The *Comtesse* was a 300-ton ship of about 95 feet length on the lower deck, a width of 30 feet and a depth of 12 feet in the hold. For the next 70 days, she was home to 12 naval and 10 army officers and their domestics, of crew of 45, and 350 enlisted men from the Royal Deux-Ponts. Given the limited space available, even officers had to sleep ten to a cabin. At mealtime, 22 people squeezed into a chamber 15 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 4 1/2 feet high.<sup>143</sup> Closen complained that odors from "men as much as from dogs," not to mention cows sheep and chickens, "the perpetual annoyance from the close proximity" of fellow officers, and "the idea of being shut up in a very narrow little old ship, as in a state prison," made for a "vexatious existence of an army officer ... on these old tubs, so heartily detested by all who are not professional sailors." Closen would have liked it better on the *Duc de Bourgogne*. In order to provide Rochambeau and his officers with the foodstuffs they were

---

<sup>142</sup> The naval aspects have recently been analyzed in John B. Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy, and American Independence* (Newport, 2005), pp. 58-68; the numbers are from pp. 53-56. The frigates *Bellone* accompanied the fleet to Ushant before returning to Brest. The *Gentille* left Brest on 26 June and arrived in Newport via Martinique on 30 September 1780.

<sup>143</sup> Closen, *Journal*, pp. 6-8. Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger, a Swiss officer, had entered the Royal Deux-Ponts as a 17-year-old *cadet-gentilhomme* in February 1780; he also traveled on the 550-tons *Comtesse de Noailles* carrying 250 soldiers. His journal of the American campaigns is published in *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783* Howard C. Rice, Jr. and Anne S. K. Brown, eds. 2 vols., (Princeton and Providence, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 117-188.

accustomed to, she even carried an oven to bake fresh bread! "There is nothing more ingenious," so the anonymous Bourbonnois grenadier, "than to have in such a place an oven for 50 to 52 loafs of bread of three pounds each! There is a master baker, a butcher, a cook for the officers and a scullion for the sailors and soldiers."

For enlisted men, conditions were much worse. War Commissary Claude Blanchard traveling on the *Conquerant*, a 74-gun ship of the line that drew 22 feet of water at the bow, had to share her with 959 men.<sup>144</sup> The anonymous grenadier of the Bourbonnois embarked on the *Duc de Bourgogne* claimed to have counted 1,432 persons incl. the companies of the Bourbonnois embarked on her at the time of departure, though the ship manifest recorded only 1,089.<sup>145</sup> Either way, conditions were unimaginably crowded. Private Flohr, lodged on the *Comtesse de Noailles*, describes the first day of the journey thus: "Around 2 o'clock after the noon hour we had already left the French coast behind and lost sight of the land. Now we saw nothing but sky and water and realized the omnipotence of God, into which we commended ourselves. Soon the majority among us wished that they had never in their lives chosen the life of a soldier and cursed the first recruiter who had engaged them. But this was just the beginning; the really miserable life was yet to begin." Soldiers slept in linen hammocks, which were attached to spars on the four corners and described by Flohr as "not very comfortable." Since two men had to share a hammock, "the majority always had to lie on the bare floor." Flohr concluded by saying: "He who wanted to lie well had better stayed home."<sup>146</sup>

Provisions on troop transports have always had a bad reputation, and the food served by the French navy was no exception. According to Flohr "these foodstuffs consisted daily of 36 loth *Zwieback* (=hardtack) which was distributed in three installments: at 7 in the morning, at 12 at noon and at 6 at night. Concerning meat we received daily 16 loth, either salted smoked ham or beef and was prepared for lunch. This meat however was salted so much that thirst was always greater than

---

<sup>144</sup> See the *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>145</sup> A ship the size of the *Duc de Bourgogne* with a displacement of around 1,800 tons (190 feet long, a 46 foot beam with a hold of 22 feet and a somewhat smaller draft) carried a regular crew of some 940 men. Most of them were needed to man its 80 cannons (30 36-pound guns, 32 18-pound guns, 18 8-pound guns): it took 15 men to work one of the 36-pounders during battle. All numbers from Jean Boudriot, "The French Fleet during the American War of Independence" *Nautical Research Journal* vol. 25, no. 2, (1979), pp. 79-86.

<sup>146</sup> On the transatlantic journey as seen by an enlisted man see my "Nothing but Sky and Water: Descriptions of Transatlantic Travel from the Journal of Georg Daniel Flohr, Grenadier, Royal Deux-Ponts, 1780-1783" *Naval History* vol. 13 no. 5, (September/October 1999), pp. 29-34.



hunger. In the evening we had to make do with a bad soup flavored with oil and consisting of soybeans and similar ingredients. Anyone who has not yet seen our grimy cook should just take a look at him and he would immediately lose all appetite." Since starvation was their only alternative, the soldiers forced the food down, living proof for Flohr of the proverb that "Hunger is a good cook." The soup was cooked in a huge copper kettle large enough to feed 800 to 1,200, sometimes up to 1,400 men at a time! These were huge kettles indeed: if everyone on board ship received 2 cups of soup per meal, it took 150 gallons of soup for 1,200 men. If we add another 20 per cent space for cooking to prevent boiling and spilling over, the kettles would have held a minimum of 180 gallons!

A common complaint on all transatlantic passages was the poor quality and the small quantity of drink available. According to Flohr, each man received 1 and 1/2 *Schoppen* of "good red wine" distributed in three installments at morning, noon, and night with the meal. If they received *Branntwein* i.e., liquor, instead, he received 1/8 of a *Schoppen*. Of water they received "very little, most of the time only 1/2 *Schoppen* per day."<sup>147</sup> This poor diet lacking in vitamins and minerals soon started to claim its victims, and Flohr witnessed "daily our fellow brothers thrown into the depths of the ocean. No one was surprised though, since all our foodstuffs were rough and bad enough to destroy us."<sup>148</sup>

## 9.2 The Old World Meets the New World: An Overview

Arrival in Newport was anxiously awaited, and joy was universal when the convoy sailed into Narragansett Bay on 11 July 1780. By July 15, 1780, Barneville reported that "les boulangers," i.e., the bakers, and "les bouchers," i.e., the butchers," sont établis au camp." In late July 1780, Lafayette wrote to Washington that in Newport "Chicken (sic) and pigs walk Between the tents without being disturb'd."<sup>149</sup> But Lafayette's pastoral landscape of the French camp in Newport is deceiving. Though invited by Congress and Washington, His Most Christian Majesty had taken a considerable risk by sending troops to the New World: it was by far not certain that they would be welcome! In New England French forces entered a difficult

---

<sup>147</sup> 1 *Schoppen* = about 1/2 pint or 1/4 liter. 1 *Loth* = about 16 Gramm; 36 *Loth* = 576 Gramm or 1.3 lbs US; 256 Gramm = 0.56 lbs US.

<sup>148</sup> A detailed account of the embarkation in Brest and the transatlantic journey lie outside the scope of this study. Very few officers were informed of their destination; William de Deux-Ponts records that even the colonels of the regiments were not told until 3 June 1780.

<sup>149</sup> Lafayette to Washington, 31 July 1780. *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution. Selected Letters and Papers, 1776-1700* Stanley J. Idzerda, ed., 5 vols., (Ithaca, 1979), vol. 3, p. 119.

cultural environment and it speaks most highly of the diplomatic skills of Rochambeau and his staff that very few incidents of American-French hostilities are known to have occurred. Before Rochambeau's troops set foot on American soil only a small minority of Americans had ever met a Frenchman off the battlefield. Even Lafayette felt compelled to give General Heath in a "Confidential letter" on 11 June 1780 "some previous hints about the people who are Coming, and Communicate to you, such ideas as derive from my thorough knowledge of theyr Manners, prejudices &c. &c."<sup>150</sup> For their part Frenchmen knew Americans only as members of the British Empire, as enemies, not allies, and fifteen years of uneasy friendship before the alliance of 1778 had not been long enough to wipe out old prejudices. More positive concepts of America as a continent inhabited by noble savages and English settlers forming lone outposts of European civilization in the American wilderness were mere ideals formed in the minds of *philosophes* rather than by reality.<sup>151</sup> "In the eyes of their American hosts," as Samuel F. Scott has pointed out, "most Frenchmen remained alien, objects of suspicion and potential hostility." Many Americans saw the French as "the adherents of a despicable and superstitious religion, as the slavish subjects of a despotic and ambitious prince, as frivolous dandies lacking in manly virtues, as physical and moral inferiors whose very dress and eating habits evidenced this inferiority."<sup>152</sup> They were not afraid to express their feelings, before, and even more so, after, the failed sieges of Newport and Savannah. Throughout its existence, the Franco-American alliance was under severe strains. That the military cooperation achieved any results at all provides the greatest testimony to the leadership capabilities of Rochambeau and Washington.

---

<sup>150</sup> Idzerda, *Lafayette*, vol. 3, p. 53.

<sup>151</sup> Durand Echeverria, "Mirage in the West: French *Philosophes* rediscover America" in: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité: The American Revolution and the European Response* Charles W. Toth, ed., (Troy, 1989), pp. 35-47. Most insightful analyses can be found in Jean-Jacques Fiechter, "L'aventure américaine des officiers de Rochambeau vue à travers leurs journaux" in: *Images of America in Revolutionary France* Michèle R. Morris, ed., (Washington, DC, 1990), pp. 65-82, and François Furet, "De l'homme sauvage à l'homme historique: l'expérience américaine dans la culture française" in: *La Révolution Américaine et l'Europe*, pp. 91-108. See also Pierre Aubéry, "Des Stéréotypes ethniques dans l'Amérique du dix-huitième siècle" *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* vol. 6, (1977), pp. 35-58.

<sup>152</sup> Samuel F. Scott, "Foreign Mercenaries, Revolutionary War, and Citizen Soldiers in the Late Eighteenth Century" *War and Society* vol. 2 (September 1984), pp. 42-58, pp. 42/45. For American attempts at counter-acting these images see William C. Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance* (Syracuse, 1969), Chapter VIII: "The Press and the Alliance," pp. 104-117, and Chapter IX, "French Propaganda in the United States," pp. 118-132. The French side of the Atlantic is covered in Peter Ascoli, "American Propaganda in the French Language Press during the American Revolution" in: *La Révolution Américaine et l'Europe* pp. 291-308. For Connecticut see Charles L. Cutler, *Connecticut's Revolutionary Press* Connecticut Bicentennial Series XIV (Hartford, 1975).

Samuel Breck's remembrances of life in Boston in the 1770s could almost be used to describe William Hogarth's anti-French caricature:



« *Soup maigre à la Sabot royal* »  
 « Meager Soup and the Royal Boot »

« *Vengeance, avec le bon Bier et bon Beuf d'Angleterre* »  
 « Vengeance and the good beer and beef of England »

William Hogarth, *Soup Maigre et la Sabot Royale* (1756) <sup>153</sup>

The poem under the cartoon reads:

With lantern jaws and croaking gut,  
 See how the half-star'd Frenchmen strut,  
 And call us English dogs:  
 But soon we'll teach these bragging foes  
 That beef and beer give heavier blows  
 Than soup and roasted frogs.

The priests, inflam'd with righteous hopes,  
 Prepare their axes, wheels, and ropes,  
 To bend the stiff-neck'd sinner;  
 But should they sink in coming over,  
 Old Nick may fish 'twixt France and Dover,  
 And catch a glorious dinner.

<sup>153</sup> [http://cle.ens-lyon.fr/anglais/william-hogarth-france-97974.kjsp?RH=CDL\\_ANG110201](http://cle.ens-lyon.fr/anglais/william-hogarth-france-97974.kjsp?RH=CDL_ANG110201)

Breck wrote:

*Before the Revolution the colonists had little or no communication with France, so that Frenchmen were known to them only through the prejudiced medium of England. Every vulgar story told by John Bull about Frenchmen living on salad and frogs was implicitly believed by Brother Jonathan, even by men of education and first standing in society. When, therefore, the first French squadron arrived in Boston, the whole town, most of whom had never seen a Frenchman, ran to the wharves to catch a peep at the gaunt, half-starved, soup-maigre crews. How much were my good townsmen astonished when they beheld plump, portly officers and strong, vigorous sailors! They could scarcely credit the thing, apparent as it was. Did these hearty-looking people belong to the lantern-jawed, spindle-shank race of mounseers?<sup>154</sup>*

While many of the prejudices can be explained by simple ignorance and lack of contact, they need to be understood within their broader historical, religious, and cultural context. For decades, the French had been the traditional enemy for New Englanders.<sup>155</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, ministers from Maine to Massachusetts had encouraged repatriated prisoners of the Franco-Indian wars to record their experiences and read them from the pulpits of their churches. Their accounts were invariably anti-French and anti-Catholic, and "confirmed the longstanding Protestant tradition that linked the Catholic Church with violence, tyranny, immorality, and theological error."<sup>156</sup> This practice had reached new heights during the French and Indian War and had been re-enforced as late as 1774. On 22 June of that year, Parliament had passed the Québec Act, thereby extending the Province of Quebec south to the Ohio River and west to the Mississippi; its

---

<sup>154</sup> H.E. Scudder, *Recollections of Samuel Breck with Passages from his Note-Books (1771-1862)* (Philadelphia, 1877), pp. 24/25.

<sup>155</sup> The English tradition of French-bashing also played a role. Reflecting on a journey to England in the 1750s, Louis Charles Fougere de Monbron wrote in his *Préservatif contre l'Anglomanie* (à Minorque, 1757), p. 52 : "Nous sommes la seule nation de l'Univers que les Anglois ne méprisent pas. En revanche ils nous font l'honneur de nous haïr avec toute la cordialité possible. Leur aversion pour nous est un sentiment qu'on leur inculque dès le berceau. Avant de savoir qu'il y a un Dieu à servir, ils savent qu'il y a des François à détester, & les premières paroles qu'ils peuvent bégaiier, ce sont des imprécations contre nous, le Prétendant & le Pape. Une chose qui doit nous flater, c'est que tout étranger à Londres, est toujours un *French dog*, lorsqu'il se fait remarquer par sa bonne mine & ses ajustements."

<sup>156</sup> Gayle K. Brown, "'Into the Hands of Papists': New England Captives in French Canada and the English Anti-Catholic Tradition, 1689-1763" *Maryland Historian* vol. 21, (1990), pp. 1-11, p. 9.

repeal became a major demand of colonists. The act not only ignored western land claims of Virginia, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, but also guaranteed the traditional language, civil law, and the Roman Catholic faith of its new French subjects. New Englanders were irate and began celebrating anti-Pope Day on 5 November (derived from the English Guy Fawkes Day, a Catholic who had tried to assassinate King James I on 5 November 1605) with a vengeance. In Rhode Island, every single issue of the *Newport Mercury* from 2 October 1774 to 20 March 1775 contained “at least one invidious reference to the Catholic religion of the Canadians”<sup>157</sup> and the anti-Pope Day in Newport saw not just one but two popes burned in effigy.<sup>158</sup> On 5 November 1775, Washington forbade “the observance of that ridiculous and childish Custom of burning the Effigy of the pope—He cannot help expressing his surprise that there should be Officers and Soldiers, in this army so void of common sense, as not to see the impropriety of such a step at this Juncture; at a Time when we are solliciting, and have really obtain’d, the friendship & alliance of the people of Canada, whom we ought to consider as Brethren embarked in the same Cause. The defence of the general Liberty of America: At such a juncture, and in such Circumstances, to be insulting their Religion, is so monstrous, as not to be suffered, or excused; indeed instead of offering the most remote insult, it is our duty to address public thanks to these our Brethren, as to them we are so much indebted for every late happy Success over the common Enemy in Canada.”<sup>159</sup>

Another telling example of the inter-dependence of Catholicism and oppressive government, i.e. France, as seen by New Englanders was provided by James Dana, pastor of the First Church of Wallingford, Connecticut, in "A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut at Hartford on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 13, 1779." In this sermon, delivered more than a year after the signing of the Franco-American alliance, Dana reminded the legislators that "the preservation of our religion depends on the continuance of a free government.

---

<sup>157</sup> Charles H. Metzger, *Catholics and the American Revolution: A Study in Religious Climate* (Chicago, 1962), p. 33.

<sup>158</sup> “The Pennsylvania Gazette said the legislation would now allow ‘these dogs of Hell’ to ‘erect their Heads and triumph within our Borders.’ *The Boston Evening Post* reported that the step was ‘for the execution of this hellish plan’ to organize 4,000 Canadian Catholics for an attack on America. [...] Rev. John Lathrop of the Second Church in Boston said Catholics ‘had disgraced humanity’ and ‘crimsoned a great part of the world with innocent blood.’ Rev. Samuel West of Dartmouth declared the pope to be ‘the second beast’ of Revelation”. Steven Waldman, *Founding Faith: How our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty* (New York, 2009), p. 50.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted from the on-line edition of the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gw040073\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(gw040073)))

Let our allies have their eyes open on the blessings of such a government, and they will at once renounce their superstition. On the other hand, should we lose our freedom this will prepare the way to the introduction of popery."<sup>160</sup> Enough members of the Connecticut legislature remembered this warning in their spring 1780 session and refused to vote funds to supply the French even though their fellow Connecticutian Jeremiah Wadsworth had been hired by the French as their purchasing agent.<sup>161</sup> Despairingly Jedediah Huntington wrote to Wadsworth on 5 May 1780, of his fears that the French aid might not materialize at all: "I assure you I have apprehensions that our good Allies will [only] stay long enou' to cast upon us a look of chagrin and pity and turn upon their heels."<sup>162</sup>

What worried some of the legislators was the very idea of a military establishment. Even a century and a half after Oliver Cromwell and the Republic, the watchword of "No Standing Army!" still was an integral part of American political culture and had indeed been one of the rallying cries of 1776. In the Declaration of Independence the revolutionaries accused King George of having "kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures." For many Americans, a standing army was a potential instrument of tyranny. That included their own Continental Army, reduced to a single regiment of 1,000 men as soon as the war was over!

In 1765, Baron de Kalb had reported that the Americans would not welcome a French army. In early 1778, Vergennes had sent agents across the ocean to probe American sentiments concerning the dispatch of an expeditionary force. Their reports were not encouraging. A year later, an agent recorded Americans not at all disposed toward supporting foreign troops on their soil: "It seems to me that in this regard the Americans harbor an extreme suspicion." Other officers reported that

---

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Stinchcombe, *American Revolution* Chapter VII: Pulpit and Alliance, p. 96. In *A SERMON, PREACHED BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COLONY OF CONNECTICUT, AT HARTFORD, ON THE DAY OF THEIR ANNIVERSARY ELECTION, May 11, 1775*, Joseph Perry, Pastor of the first Church of Christ in East Windsor, had warned the legislators of the impending danger of "absolute despotism, and as the certain consequence, cruel tyranny, and the total slavery of all America" that had originated in "an act of a late parliament, commonly known among us by the name of the *Quebec Bill*." Unless they kept up the fight that had begun three weeks earlier at Lexington and Concord they would soon need to swap 'the best religion in the world' for "all the barbarity, trumpery and superstition of popery; or burn at the stake, or submit to the tortures of the inquisition." The sermon can be found at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N11371.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

<sup>161</sup> Richard Buel Jr., *Dear Liberty. Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown, 1980), p. 226. Journals for this legislative session "have disappeared."

<sup>162</sup> "The Huntington Papers" *Connecticut Historical Society Collections* vol. 20 (1923), p. 150.

they too had taken up the issue with the Continental Congress though without much success. "The most enlightened members of Congress, though convinced of the necessity of this course of action, have not dared to propose it for fear of alarming the people by the introduction of a foreign army."<sup>163</sup> From Philadelphia, French Resident Gérard had warned Vergennes that "the manners of the two peoples are not compatible at all. ... Should there be too close contact between the French soldier and the American colonists ... there can be no other result but bloody conflict."<sup>164</sup> Fears of bloodshed are also expressed in the diary of the Rev. Christian Bader of Hebron Moravian Church in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. On 22 March 1779, he recorded the rumor that "on the first of April the French fleet is to arrive at Philadelphia. Then all without exception are to swear allegiance to the king of France and, whoever does not, will be handed over to the French and stabbed to death."<sup>165</sup> The French of course had no intention of doing any such thing.

If there were tensions, they were caused more often by a clash of cultures based upon the social status and expectations of those involved rather than by ill will. Not surprisingly it was the court nobility that had the most difficulty adjusting to the New World. The "simple necessities of life" with which Americans made do were quaint and fun to watch in others, but for a member of the high aristocracy such a life-style betrayed a serious lack of culture. Cromot du Bourg thought it "impossible to dance with less grace or to be worse dressed" than the women of Boston.<sup>166</sup> The *till*, a dance in this "still somewhat wild country," was "a sad piece of stupidity."<sup>167</sup> Many French officers, such as Clermont-Crèveœur, thought the girls "pretty, even beautiful [but] frigid." Unless you "assume the burden of conversation, animating it with your French gaiety, [all] will be lost," and summed up his judgment by declaring that "one may reasonably state that the character of this nation is little adapted to society" -- at least not society as defined by the standards of Versailles and French court aristocracy.

---

<sup>163</sup> Quoted in Kennett, "L'expédition Rochambeau-Ternay," p. 92. See Lee Kennett, "Charleston in 1778: A French Intelligence Report" *South Carolina Historical Magazine* vol. 66, (1965), pp. 109-111, for reports of anti-French riots, and Scott, "Strains," pp. 80-100.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in Kennett, "Rochambeau-Ternay," p. 100.

<sup>165</sup> John W. Heisey, "Extracts from the Diary of the Moravian Pastors of the Hebron Church, Lebanon, 1755-1814." *Pennsylvania History* vol. 34 no. 1, (1967), pp. 44-63, p. 57.

<sup>166</sup> Marie-François Baron Cromot du Bourg, "Diary of a French Officer, 1781" *Magazine of American History* vol. 4, (June 1880), pp. 205-214, p. 214.

<sup>167</sup> "Letters of a French Officer, written at Easton, Penna., in 1777-78" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 35, (1911), pp. 90-102, p. 96.



As far as these men were concerned, the concept of *noblesse oblige* went beyond the intellectual horizon of the average American, who seemed "rather like their neighbors the savages." Their accounts are filled with complaints about the poor quality of American bread and monotonous dinners of vast amounts of meat washed down with innumerable toasts. In-between they drank either "very weak coffee,"<sup>168</sup> Blanchard thought that "four or five cups are not equal to one of ours," or "vast amounts" of strong tea with milk. Eating seemed to be the major occupation for Americans, "who are almost always at the table; and as they have little to occupy them, as they go out little in winter and spend whole days along side of their fires and their wives, without reading and without doing anything, going so often to table is a relief and a preventive of *ennui*."<sup>169</sup> After dinner "each person wipes himself on the table-cloth, which must be very soiled as a result."<sup>170</sup> Looking back, such misunderstandings appear humorous, but one can only wonder about the hurt feelings of the host in Marion, CT in June 1781, when an officer, invited to tea, pointed to some sprigs on the table with the comment that "one do give dis de horse in my country." Another "felt insulted that his dog should be suspected of drinking" his milk from the "cracked bowl" that Tavern Keeper Asa Barnes had poured it in.<sup>171</sup> And all prejudices of the people of Windham, Connecticut, were confirmed when French soldiers, hardly encamped, came down upon the frogs in the town pond and feasted on them during that memorable night of 20 June 1781.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Clermont-Crèveccœur, "Journal," p. 20

<sup>169</sup> Blanchard, *Journal*, p. 78.

<sup>170</sup> Closen, *Journal*, p. 51.

<sup>171</sup> H. R. Timlow, *Ecclesiastical and other Sketches of Southington*, (Hartford, 1875), p. 53.

<sup>172</sup> Forbes, "Marches," pp. 271/72. A few weeks earlier, French officers had been served real frogs by Nathaniel Tracy, owner of today's Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters in Cambridge. The occasion had been the arrival of Admiral Barras in Boston on 8 May 1781 aboard *La Concorde* who replaced Admiral Ternay who had died in December 1780. The dinner is described by Samuel Breck (1771-1862), who was 10 years old at the time.

"Mr. Nathaniel Tracy, who lived in a beautiful villa at Cambridge - right here - made a great feast for the admiral - Barras - and his officers. Everything was furnished that could be had in the country to ornament and give variety to the entertainment. My father was one of the guests, and told me often after that two large tureens of soup were placed at the ends of the table. The admiral sat on the right of Tracy, and Monsieur de l'Etombe on the left. L'Etombe was consul of France, resident at Boston. Tracy filled a plate with soup, which went to the admiral, and the next was handed to the consul. As soon as L'Etombe put his spoon into his plate he fished up a large frog, just as green and perfect as if he had hopped from the pond into the tureen. Not knowing at first what it was, he seized it by one of its hind legs, and, holding it up in view of the whole company, discovered that it was a full-grown frog. As soon as he had thoroughly inspected it, and made himself sure of the matter, he exclaimed, "Ah! mon Dieu! un grenouille!" then, turning to the gentleman next to him, gave him the frog. He received it, and passed it round the table. Thus the poor *crapaud* made



Some disagreements laid bare the acute cultural differences between the allies. In November 1778, Admiral d'Estaing informed the Navy Minister: "One must also fawn, to the height of insipidity, over every little republican who regards flattery as his sovereign right, ... hold command over captains who are not good enough company to be permitted to eat with their general officers (one must be at least a major to enjoy that prerogative), and have some colonels who are innkeepers at the same time." Much to his credit, however, d'Estaing continued "It is his knowing how to turn all that to advantage, to put it in its place and remain in his own that has most impressed me in the difficulties that M. le Marquis de Lafayette has overcome."<sup>173</sup> Compared to eighteenth-century France, New England society was a society composed largely of equals. In 1782, French traveler Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur observed that in America "the rich and poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe." He defined an American as someone who had left "behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners," who saw no reason to defer to someone because he wore epaulettes or had a title of nobility.<sup>174</sup> Commoners in France had no right to question a nobleman's actions, yet the constable of Crompond (modern-day Yorktown Heights, New York) arrested Rochambeau for damage done by his soldiers.<sup>175</sup> The *chevalier* de Coriolis explained the strange rules of warfare in America thus: "Here it is not like it is in Europe, where when the troops are on the march you can take horses, you can take wagons, you can issue billets for lodging, and with the aid of a gendarme overcome the difficulties the inhabitant might make; but in America the people say they are free and, if a proprietor who doesn't like the look of your face tells you he doesn't want to lodge

---

the tour from hand to hand until it reached the admiral. The company, convulsed with laughter, examined the soup-plates as the servants brought them, and in each was to be found a frog. The uproar was universal. Meantime Tracy kept his ladle going, wondering what his outlandish guests meant by such extravagant merriment. "What's the matter?" asked he, and, raising his head, surveyed the frogs dangling by a leg in all directions. "Why don't they eat them?" he exclaimed. "If they knew the confounded trouble I had to catch them in order to treat them to a dish of their own country, they would find that with me, at least, it was no joking matter." Thus was poor Tracy deceived by vulgar prejudice and common report. He had caused all the swamps of Cambridge to be searched in order to furnish them with a generous supply of what he believed to be in France a standing national dish." *Recollections of Samuel Breck*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>173</sup> D'Estaing is also pointing out one of the discrepancies of revolutionary ideology and political reality. In the French army, the colonel was expected to keep an open table for any officer of his regiment, no matter what rank he held. The letter from d'Estaing to Navy Minister Sartine of 5 November 1778, in Idzerda, *Lafayette*, vol. 2, pp. 202/03.

<sup>174</sup> Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York, 1957), p. 36.

<sup>175</sup> The story is told by Rochambeau's son in Jean-Edmond Weelen, *Rochambeau. Father and Son. A life of the Maréchal de Rochambeau and the Journal of the Vicomte de Rochambeau* (New York, 1936), pp. 259/60 in and Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 1, p. 168.

you, you must go seek a lodging elsewhere. Thus the words: 'I don't want to' end the business, and there is no means of appeal."<sup>176</sup> The *vicomte* de Tresson, a captain in the Saintonge whose father had commanded the regiment until replaced by Adam Philippe, *comte* de Custine, put his finger squarely on the problem when he wrote his father: "Here they have more respect for a lout than they have for a duke in France."<sup>177</sup> Could it be that a colonist had pointed out to de Tresson that in America we "have no princes for whom we toil, starve and bleed"?<sup>178</sup> Such language was anathema in the ears of a nobility used to be accorded deference in Europe. They might find it amusing that the New England militia contained "shoemakers who are colonels," who asked their French counter-parts "what their trade is in France."<sup>179</sup>

They might even chuckle as they told anecdotes such as this told by the *chevalier* de Pontgibaud:

*One day I dismounted from my horse at the house of a farmer upon whom I had been billeted. I had hardly entered the good man's house when he said to me,*

*"I am very glad to have a Frenchman in the house."*

*I politely enquired the reason for this preference.*

*"Well," he said, "you see the barber lives a long way off, so you will be able to shave me."*

*"But I cannot even shave myself," I replied. "My servant shaves me, and he will shave you also if you like."*

*"That's very odd," said he. "I was told that all Frenchmen were barbers and fiddlers."*

*I think I never laughed so heartily. A few minutes later my rations arrived, and my host seeing a large piece of beef amongst them, said,*

*"You are lucky to be able to come over to America and get some beef to eat."*

*I assured him that we had beef in France, and excellent beef too.*

*"That is impossible," he replied, "or you wouldn't be so thin."*

*Such was, -- when Liberty was dawning over the land, -- the ignorance shown by the inhabitants of the United States Republic in regard to the French.<sup>180</sup>*

---

<sup>176</sup> "Lettres d'un officier de l'Armée de Rochambeau: le chevalier de Coriolis" *Le correspondant* no. 326, (March 25, 1932), pp. 807-828, p. 818.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Kennett, "Rochambeau-Ternay," p. 100.

<sup>178</sup> Crèvecoeur, *Letters*, p. 36.

<sup>179</sup> Cromot du Bourg, "Diary," p. 209.

<sup>180</sup> Pontgibaud served as *aide-de-camp* to Lafayette from September 1777 through the siege of Yorktown. Charles Albert *comte* de Moré, *chevalier* de Pontgibaud, *A French volunteer of the War of Independence* Robert B. Douglas, trans. and ed., (Paris, 1898), pp. 50/51.

But if the curiosity of Americans toward noble titles and aristocracy could be ascribed to ignorance, their strange foodstuffs to local customs, their provinciality to remoteness from European culture, their greed, seen as lack of devotion to the cause of American liberty, bordered on treason. In Europe, food and lodging for the army would simply be requisitioned, but here everything had to be paid for, and quite dearly at that. The French government had been aware that their allies lacked virtually everything, and that Rochambeau's forces would have to bring much of their supplies with them. When Rochambeau arrived in Newport, conditions were worse than expected. In July 1780, he already pleaded with the War Minister: "Send us troops, ships and money, but do not count upon these people or their means," adding the sober warning that "this is going to be an expensive war."<sup>181</sup>

What the French did not or could not bring they had to purchase at what was generally agreed were very high prices. Rochambeau felt himself "at the mercy of usurers."<sup>182</sup> Axel von Fersen, who on 8 September had informed his father that the "most entire confidence exists between the two nations", wrote deeply disillusioned in January 1781 that "the spirit of patriotism only exists in the chief and principal men in the country, who are making very great sacrifices; the rest who make up the great mass think only of their personal interests. Money is the controlling idea in all their actions." They "overcharge us mercilessly ... and treat us more like enemies than friends. ... Their greed is unequalled, money is their God; virtue, honor, all count for nothing to them compared with the precious metal."<sup>183</sup> Count William de Schwerin, a 26-year-old sub-lieutenant in the Royal Deux-Ponts, like most diarists thought the inhabitants of Newport anxious to cheat them out of their money. Schwerin quoted 22 sols for a pound of better bread for officers and even Flohr complained that a 3-pound loaf of bread cost him 40 to 44 sols, when a common soldier received only about 150 sols cash per month! André Amblard, the enlisted man in the Soissonnois Regiment, also gave 22 sols as the price of bread while meat cost 12 sols per pound in the fall of 1780.

Out of these words speak as much frustration over the lack of activity as disappointment that the idealized French image of the self-sacrificing, virtuous American did not stand up to the test of reality. Upon arrival in Newport, the French, used to an economic system based on price and wage controls, received a lesson in

---

<sup>181</sup> Quoted in Kennett, *French forces*, p. 72.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Scott, "Strains," p. 91.

<sup>183</sup> Fersen, *Letters*, p. 371.

free market economy and the laws of supply and demand. Colonel Thomas Lloyd Halsey of Providence, one of Wadsworth's business partners, explained to Peter Colt, one of their agents, the high freight costs in his accounts thus: "I am sure they might have been lower had they even had asked a day before they wanted but they never would or did. They commonly sent to me at Sunsett to obtain what they wanted for the Morning, which is no way of taking the advantage of Business."<sup>184</sup> But trying to take "the advantage of Business" was a universal human trait, and Brisout de Barneville took the prices in stride when he declared that "The merchants sell to us just as dearly as ours did to the Spanish when they were in Brest last year."<sup>185</sup>

Americans had long since lost faith in the paper money issued by their government and insisted that unlike their own army, the French pay in specie: gold or silver. Spend the French did, to the tune of millions, and much to the chagrin of the purchasing agents for the Continental Army, who found out that no farmer was willing to sell to them for worthless paper as long as Rochambeau's agents paid in livres or Pieces of Eight! Finance Minister Jacques Necker had arranged for a first-year credit of 7,674,280 livres in early March 1780, some 2.6 million of which Rochambeau took with him in cash. But when Rochambeau arrived in Newport he found out that his purchasing agent Ethis de Corny had already spent some 700,000 livres. In addition he needed a minimum of 375,000 livres each month to keep his army going, on top of almost 90,000 livres he needed to prepare winter quarters for his troops. By the time an emergency shipment of 1.5 million livres in specie arrived in Boston on the *l'Astree* on 28 February 1781 the navy, which had only brought half a million, was down to a mere 800 livres in cash. But Rochambeau had been feeling the pinch as well. On 20 February 1781, John Barker (Church) Carter had told his business partner Wadsworth from Newport that "The Intendant could not give me any hard Money, they have none, and have stopp'd the Pay of the Staff Officers."<sup>186</sup>

In early May, Rochambeau's son brought another 6.6 million livres in cash and bills of exchange, but by the time the French and American armies joined forces at Philipsburg, they were almost gone too. When the frigate *Resolue* sailed into Boston on 25 August 1781, it carried 2.5 million livres, more than 400,000 écus worth 6 livres each. "Fourteen wagons hauled by fifty-six oxen and lead horses conveyed the

---

<sup>184</sup> Halsey to Colt, 23 October 1781, Wadsworth Papers, Correspondence July 1781 to February 1782, Box 132, CTHS. An autobiography of Colt, written in 1818 when he was living in Paterson, NJ is in Special Collections, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, Ac 652.

<sup>185</sup> Barneville, "Journal," p. 241.

<sup>186</sup> Wadsworth Papers Box 131, Correspondence December 1780 to June 1781, CTHS.

specie” across Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey to Philadelphia.<sup>187</sup> To replenish French coffers, Admiral de Grasse brought another 1.2 million livres from Cuba in August 1781. Altogether there were nine shipments of specie from France for a total of about 10 million livres, in both Spanish as well as French coin. The importance of the French bullion spent to maintain Rochambeau’s army for the American war-time economy cannot be overemphasized. Historian Timothy R. Walton estimates that “on the eve of the American Revolution, about half the coins used in the British North American Colonies, some 4 million Pieces of Eight [21 million livres], were pieces of eight from New Spain and Peru,”<sup>188</sup> while historian Lee Kennett estimated French forces may have spent more than the 20 million during their stay in the United States.<sup>189</sup> If loans arranged by private lenders, estimated at between 15 and 20 million livres, are added, the *expédition particulière* may have doubled the amount of specie circulating between Yorktown and Boston.



French *écu* of six livres or 120 sols

---

<sup>187</sup> Gregory D. Massey, *John Laurens and the American Revolution*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 190–191.

<sup>188</sup> Timothy R. Walton. *The Spanish Treasure Fleets* (Sarasota, 1994), p. 183. Spanish milled dollars and French *écus* remained legal tender in the United States until 1857.

<sup>189</sup> Lee Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780–1783* (Westport, 1977), p. 68.

Unfortunately the military proficiency of New Englanders was vastly inferior, at least thus it appears in French journals, to their skills in "fleecing," to use Fersen's term, their allies. The French prided themselves in their expertise and derived great satisfaction from the high level of proficiency of the armed forces under their command. French officers, though impressed with the skill and even more so the devotion of the Continental Army, had little faith in the fighting abilities of the militia, an opinion shared by their American counterparts. They were not afraid of expressing their views, but few descriptions of that soldiery can match the pen of the *chevalier* de Pontgibaud describing Rhode Island and Connecticut militia gathering for the siege of Newport in 1778.

*Hardly had the troops disembarked before the militia, -- to the number I believe, of about ten thousand men, horse and foot, -- arrived. I have never seen a more laughable spectacle; all the tailors and apothecaries in the country must have been called out, I should think; -- one could recognize them by their round wigs. They were mounted on bad nags, and looked like a flock of ducks in cross-belts. The infantry was no better than the cavalry, and appeared to be cut after the same pattern. I guessed that these warriors were more anxious to eat up our supplies than to make a close acquaintance with the enemy, and I was not mistaken, -- they soon disappeared.<sup>190</sup>*

Company grade and junior officers with limited financial resources, *sous-lieutenants* like Schwerin who were sitting in their rooms at night eating potatoes, learning English, counting the days until they might be invited to another evening event, men who turned each livre over twice before they spent it, were much less concerned with the niceties of dancing, the simplicity of the food, and the home-made dresses of their hosts. An enlisted man such as Flohr, not used to finer foods, had few problems adjusting to the diet in New England. Captain Oyré recorded that the only grain grown in Rhode Island was "maÿs [...] of which the inhabitants make a kind of poorly baked and heavy ("mal cuit et pèsant") bread."<sup>191</sup> Flohr thought the bread, even with the corn meal, "very good" though it "sold for a very high price."

---

<sup>190</sup> Pontigaud, *French volunteer*, p. 67. For other appraisals of the militia and the Continental Army see Orville T. Murphy, "The French Professional Soldier's Opinion of the American Militia in the War of the Revolution" *Military Affairs* vol. 33, (February 1969), pp. 191-198 and Durand Echeverria, "The American Revolutionary Army: A French Estimate in 1777" *Military Affairs* vol. 27, (1963), pp. 1-7 and pp. 153-62.

<sup>191</sup> Oyré, "Notes", p. 8 of the typed copy in the Library of the Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, DC.

The "money of the inhabitants was made of paper, about the size of a playing card" and bearing "the seal of the province and the signature of the governor." It did not seem to have much buying power: one had "to add good words" i.e., plead, to get food if one tried to pay with these Continentals.

As they spent the winter of 1780/81 in Newport and began their march south in June of 1781, Rochambeau's troops marveled at a country where "all inhabitants are wealthy and well. One does not see a difference between rich and poor." Here "one does not see a difference between the Sunday clothes and their workday clothes," and women were "always dressed like ladies of the nobility." Many a time Flohr "wondered where their wealth came from since they don't work at all." Looking around he realized that this wealth was created by a relatively equal distribution and free owner-ship of land, where the absence of tenancy leveled social distinctions based on birthright and noble privilege. Americans were "not haughty at all. They talk to everybody, whether he be rich or poor," and common folk live "more ostentatiously than the nobility in Europe." That roles were reversed in America was driven home to Graf Schwerin in Philadelphia:

*On the last day of our stay in Philadelphia I was surprised to see a one-horse-chaise stop before my tent. In it sat two women and a man, who drove it. They said they were from Dierdorf; I asked them to get out of the carriage and recognized the one to be the Henritz who was a servant at the (your) castle and the other to be her sister, who has already been married to a beer brewer in Philadelphia for 18 years and who is very rich. I had dinner with them; they have a perfectly furnished house. In the evening they introduced me to a man named Dichon who had been with you at Dierdorf. ... I had breakfast with him before our departure from Philadelphia. He has a superb house and lots of ready money, because he showed me a little chest full of Louis d'Ors.*

The spirit of equality, freedom and opportunity, was not lost on members of the lower nobility in the officer ranks either: Lieutenant Colonel Esebeck thought that "no one could live more happily than here. There is a freedom here the like of which is found nowhere else."<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> John M. Lenhart, "Letter of an Officer of the Zweibrücken Regiment," *Central-Blatt and Social Justice*, vol. 28, (January 1936), pp. 321-322, and (February 1936), pp. 350-360, p. 322. The letters are dated Jamestown Island, (Virginia) 12 and 16 December 1781.

### 9.3 Arrival in Newport

News of the impending arrival of Rochambeau's forces came to America via the *marquis de Lafayette* on *l'Hermione*, who arrived in Marblehead on 27 April 1780 and stepped ashore in Boston in the afternoon of 28 April "in the midst of an immense crowd. They welcomed me with the roar of guns, the ringing of all the city's bells, the music of a band that marched ahead of us, and the huzzas of all the people that surrounded us. In this way I was led to the house that the council and the assembly of representatives of Boston had prepared for me. There was a deputation from these bodies to welcome me ... In the evening the people gathered in front of the my door and built a great bonfire with much cheering, which lasted until after midnight".<sup>193</sup> Lafayette was accompanied by Commissary Ethis de Corny, who had orders to make arrangements for the arrival of Rochambeau and his aides-de-camp Lieutenant-Colonels Jean Joseph de Gimat de Soubadère and Jean-Pierre du Rousseau de Fayolle.<sup>194</sup> On 2 May 1780, Lafayette, accompanied by Gimat "and three of my servants"<sup>195</sup> departed via Brookfield, Waterbury, Newburgh and Pompton for Morristown, where they arrived in the morning of 10 May 1780.<sup>196</sup>

Three days later, on 13 May, Lafayette, continued his journey to Philadelphia where he handed Vergennes instructions of 5 March 1780 to the *chevalier* de la Luzerne as well as to Congress two days later. On 17 May, Luzerne sent Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress, his memorial of 16 May notifying Congress of French plans to send troops to America; Congress in turn on the same day established a special committee in charge of Franco-American cooperation.<sup>197</sup> The pending arrival of French forces caused Washington to resurrect his dream of

---

<sup>193</sup> Excerpts of the log of *l'Hermione* were published by Antoine Cathelineau in *Deux Voyages au temps de Louis XVI, 1777-1780. La mission du baron de Tott en Égypte 1777-1778 et le Journal de bord de l'Hermione en 1780* Jean-Pierre Bois, ed. (Rennes, 2005), pp. 99-252; Lafayette's arrival on pp. 151/52.

<sup>194</sup> Gabriel de Broglie, "Un compagnon peu connu de La Fayette: Ethis de Corny" *Histoire pour tous* no. 176 (1974), pp. 1-16.

<sup>195</sup> Idzerda, *Lafayette*, vol. 3, p. 7. The letter announcing the arrival of Rochambeau's forces is available at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/lafayette-to-george-washington-27-april-1780/>. Vergennes' letter is printed in Doniol, *Histoire*, vol. 4, pp. 318-20.

<sup>196</sup> For a detailed analysis of Lafayette's route from Boston to Morristown see my *Resource Inventory and Historic Route and Site Survey for the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*. (forthcoming in 2015)

<sup>197</sup> Luzerne's memorial to Congress is available at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mgw:14.:/temp/~ammem\\_130C::](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mgw:14.:/temp/~ammem_130C::); its' response to Luzerne's letter of 16 May of the French decision to send troops to America for the 1780 campaign can be followed in the Papers of the Continental Congress, search by date beginning on 16 May 1780.



taking New York if at all possible still in 1780. Even as he sent Major Guillaume Galvan to Cape Henry to establish look-outs for de Ternay's fleet,<sup>198</sup> Washington informed Lafayette of this plans on 16 May and asked him to sound out Rochambeau and Ternay.<sup>199</sup> A few days later, on 23 May, he sent Lafayette's aide-de-camp Fayolle to Providence with dispatches for Rhode Island Governor William Greene, Rochambeau and de Ternay.<sup>200</sup> In his letter to Greene of the same date he wrote that "a French fleet may be soon looked for on our coast. The place where they will arrive is not certainly known, but they may probably come to Rhode Island."<sup>201</sup>

Corny arrived at headquarters in Morristown on 23 May; following discussions with Washington and Nathanael Greene he set out for Philadelphia on 25 May. Upon arrival in Philadelphia on 27 May he met immediately with Luzerne. On the top of his list stood funding: he had only 50,000 livres in specie but within three days Luzerne managed to gather another 600,000 livres in cash and loans drawn on France.<sup>202</sup> Armed with a letter of introduction by Congress, as well as a letter by Washington written from Springfield on 10 June 1780, Corny, commissioned brevet

---

<sup>198</sup> "A French Fleet being expected shortly upon this Coast, it will be necessary to have Officers stationed at different points to make them Signals upon their first arrival. You being appointed to go down to Cape Henry in Virginia, will be charged with dispatches and communications for the French Admiral and General and will be made acquainted with the signals of recognizance." Washington to Galvan, 16 May 1780, quoted from the on-line edition of the George Washington Papers are the Library of Congress at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gw180430\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(gw180430)))

When de Ternay arrived off Cape Henry on 4 July he did not see any signal flags and proceeded north to Newport. Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy*, p. 58.

<sup>199</sup> A transcript of Washington's letter of 16 May 1780 outlining his plans is available in the on-line edition of the George Washington Papers in the Library of Congress at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gw180426\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(gw180426)))::

<sup>200</sup> Fayolle's diary is published as Jean-Pierre du Rousseau de Fayolle, "Journal d'une Campagne en Amérique (1777-1779)" *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Quest*, 25 (1901), pp. 1-48; it ends with a description of the arrival in Boston on 28 May 1780 and the remark that on Monday, 5 June, « je me tirais d'une affaire malheureuse forte heureusement. » The reference is to a duel Fayolle had fought with Joseph de Valnais, French consul in Boston, mentioned in a letter by Washington to Lafayette of 16 May 1780. Fayolle did not accompany Lafayette to Morristown.

Fayolle arrived back in Newport on 30 May but was killed in the afternoon of 8 June as he was boarding *l'Hermione* just outside Newport harbor when the boat he was on collided with the frigate. Fayolle was struck hard on the forehead, fell back into the boat, died, and was buried in Trinity Churchyard in the evening of 9 June. The accident is described in the *Journal de bord de l'Hermione* pp. 173/74. Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy*, p. 45/46.

<sup>201</sup> Quoted from the on-line edition of the Washington Papers in the Library of Congress [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gw180465\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(gw180465)))

<sup>202</sup> Lafayette had sent Luzerne a copy of Corny's instructions on 17 May; an extract is published in Doniol, *Histoire*, vol. 5 pp. 317-18 and Idzerda, *Lafayette*, vol. 3, p. 47 fn 1.

lieutenant colonel of cavalry in the Continental Army on 5 June, set out for Rhode Island accompanied by a company of dragoons taken from Washington's Life Guard commanded by Lieutenant Philip Strubing of Geneva in Switzerland.<sup>203</sup> Along the way he met with Jeremiah Wadsworth in Hartford on 21 June. Their meeting set in motion a series of events that festered until November.

Among the first tasks Corny was instructed to undertake following his return from Philadelphia was that of establishing a hospital in Providence. To support Corny in this endeavor, Washington on 24 May 1780 ordered Dr. James Craik, "assistant director-general of the hospitals of the Continental army", to Providence

*to provide one or more convenient buildings for the reception of the sick belonging to the fleet and army which you will estimate at about twelve to fifteen hundred. They must have apartments sufficient to contain these without crowding them, and so as to admit a separate distribution and treatment of each particular disease. They must have an airy and salubrious situation; be contiguous to each other, if possible; have yards and gardens, admitting communication from one to the other, so as to unite and facilitate the service.*

*Independent of the apartments for the sick, there must be one or more kitchens; an apothecary's shop; a magazine for drugs and remedies; an oven; a bakery; a deposit for the provisions; lodgings for the director surgeons Physicians and others employed with them; a Magazine near for the effects of the Hospital and in short all the conveniences that may promote this interesting service.*

*You will have provided such a number of oxen sheep poultry and vegetables as you deem necessary for the first demands of the Hospital. I give you a letter for Governor Greene to furnish you with whatever aid*

---

<sup>203</sup> Strubing (1758-1831) was breveted a captain on 15 April 1784. Strubing's papers are held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Corny sent him back to Newburgh on 7 August 1780 when he wrote Washington that "I reserved, agreeable to your permission, the Detachment of the company of herr, untill the arrival of the french army. the dragons were employd in carrying the first accounts. the Count de Rochambeau requested Lieutenant Strubing to charge himself with the parquets of consequence wich it was necessary to send with safety to your excellency and Mr De La Luzerne." Corny's letter is quoted from the on-line edition of the Washington Papers at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mgw:16:/temp/~ammem\\_Gkfa::](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mgw:16:/temp/~ammem_Gkfa::)

*you may want; you will make him an estimate and inform him to what extent his assistance will be requisite.*<sup>204</sup>

Following his arrival in Providence, Craik on 5 June submitted to the Council of War his instructions "to prepare proper Buildings for a Hospital for the Reception of the Invalids which may be on board the fleet of his most Christian Majesty, sent to the Assistance of these United States" he met fierce opposition.<sup>205</sup> The Council appointed John Innis Clark to assist Clark on 5 June and informed College President Rev. James Manning "that the College Edifice is most convenient in every respect for the purpose", neither the town nor the "The College in the English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations", which had only begun to offer classes again on 10 May 1780 after having served as a hospital for Continental Army forces, were prepared to again provide space and locations for a hospital.<sup>206</sup> Fearful of the diseases the soldiers and sailors might bring to Providence, a town meeting on 15 June resolved "to adopt legal and proper Measures to prevent the establishment of an Hospital in this Town for receiving the Sick on Board the fleet of his Most Christian Majesty daily expected to arrive in this State from Europe."<sup>207</sup>

Instead it tried to divert Craik "to Tiverton and Bristol & examine the Barracks in Tiverton and the Buildings on the Estate in Bristol late belonging to Mr. William Vassal and now improved by Mr. Nathaniel Fales Jr. under a charge from this State, and if in their opinion they should be suitable and Convenient for the purpose that they take possession of Part or all of said Buildings and Apply to the Deputy Quarter Master General to have them immediately fitted in the best possible manner for the Reception of said sick as aforesaid." To make the task more palatable to Fales, the Council of War "further Resolved that any necessary Damage which the above mentioned Mr. Fales may suffer in Consequence of the taking the Buildings aforesaid now in his possession for a Hospital shall be hereafter Considered and that he shall

---

<sup>204</sup> Washington's instructions are quoted from the on-line edition of the Washington Papers at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gw180472\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(gw180472)))

<sup>205</sup> *Proceedings of the Council of War* Rhode Island State Archives, Providence.

<sup>206</sup> On 29 April 1780, the *Providence Gazette* announced the beginning of classes on 10 May. On 3 May 1780 the trustees had requested the Rhode Island Assembly to apply to Congress for compensation for the damages done while being used as a hospital, which had "render[ed] it total unfit for the purposes for which it was originally designed." *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England* 10 vols., John Russell Bartlett, ed., (Providence, 1856-1865), vol. 9: 1780-1783 (1864), p. 66. In 1800, the college collected all of \$2,779.13 in damages.

<sup>207</sup> See Howard W. Preston, "Rochambeau and the French Troops in Providence in 1780-81-82." *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* vol. 17 no. 1 (January 1924), pp. 1-23, pp. 2-5.

have a reasonable compensation therefore."<sup>208</sup> The William Vassall property rented by Fales was Point Pleasant in Bristol.<sup>209</sup> Craik had little choice but to give his consent and on 12 June the General Assembly agreed to fulfill Washington's request of 25 May

*to provide hospitals and refreshments for the sick which may be on board His Most Christian Majesty's fleet, now expected in this state, [and] recommended to Ephraim Bowen Jr., Esp., deputy quartermaster general, to cause the buildings on the farm in Bristol, lately belonging to William Vassal, Esq., to be immediately put in proper repair for the said purpose [of receiving the sick sailors and soldiers] and that he cause such additional buildings to be erected on the said farm and on the school farm adjoining thereto, as shall, with the buildings first mentioned, to contain the numbers, and answer the purposes pointed out in the said instructions to Dr. Craig.<sup>210</sup>*

In case additional housing were needed,

**It is hereby recommended to the said Ephraim Bowen, Jr., to cause such barracks as may be at Tiverton, and at the north end of Rhode Island, to be removed to the said farms; and also to make use of a large frame in Tiverton, near Col. Pardon Gray's.**

Corny, as it turned out, approved of the choice of Point Pleasant. On 6 July 1780 he informed Washington that he had

*just arrived from Poppisquash, too much applause cannot be given to the Zeal and attention of Doctor Craig; the dispositions relative to this Establishment entitle him to every grateful Sentiment, and I shall be particularly carefull to acquaint the Count de Rochambeau how much we are obliged to him.*

---

<sup>208</sup> On the lease see *Records of Rhode Island*, vol. 9, p. 362.

<sup>209</sup> Point Pleasant, built in 1690, stood just south of the border of the Poppasquash Farms Historic District. It burned in 1925. See Howard W. Preston, "Point Pleasant. William Vassall's Confiscated Estate." *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* vol. 18 no. 1 (January 1925), pp. 1-8; on the French hospital there see pp. 6/7.

<sup>210</sup> *Records of Rhode Island* vol. 9, pp. 86/87.

*This Hospital will be exceeding useful for Summer, and for the Convalescents, the Salubrity of the Air is excellent, but it must be confess'd that it may be subject to the Attempts of the Enemy, if New Port is not Guarded, and if the Batteries at the Entrance of the Harbor remain unprovided with Cannon.*

*Doctor Craig had in vain requested the Colledge of this Town to be given up to him that the principal Hospital might be Established there, General Heath without doubt reluctantly approved the Objections of the Council of this State, which influenced them to reject the Doctors request. On my Arrival here, I took the liberty to represent in the most firm and pressing Manner, that this House was indispensably necessary; I represented my reasons, in the Requisition I made to the Council, who order'd the Colledge to be imediatly given up to me, and I lost no time in employing Workmen to put it in a proper Condition for the destin'd Service.<sup>211</sup>*

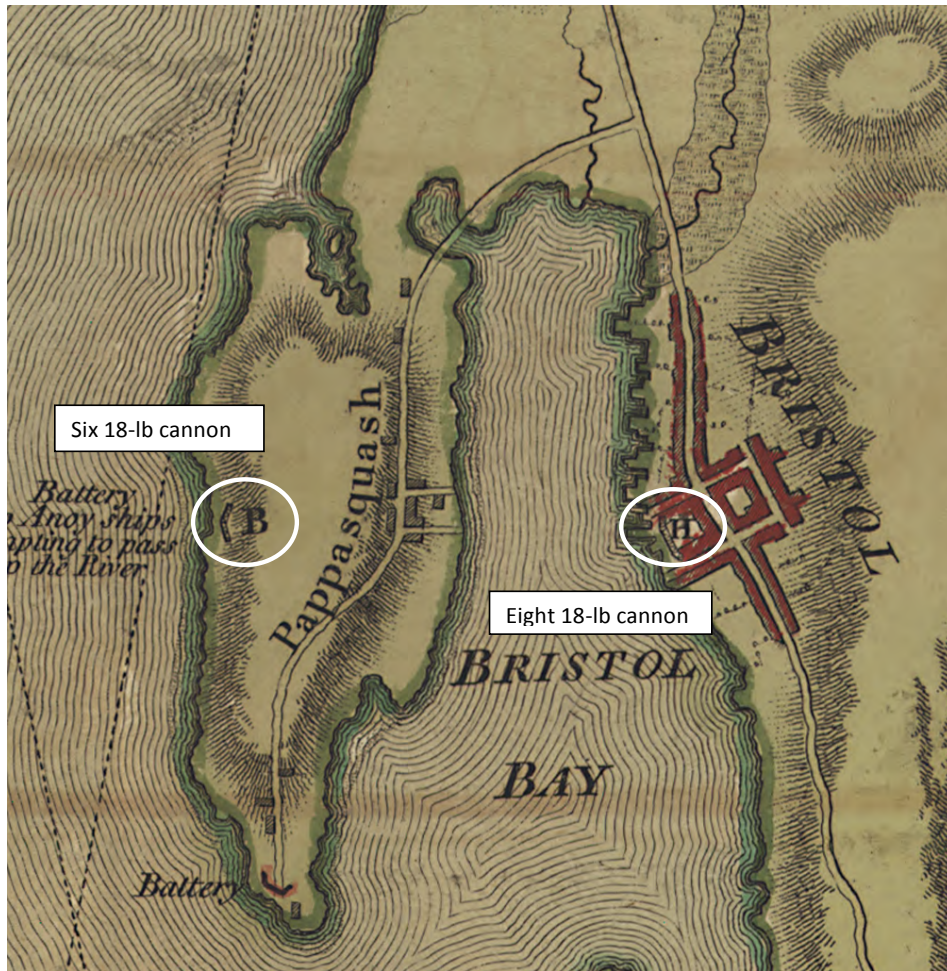
Eventually a number of barracks were built on Fales property, but as Corny's letter to Washington shows, he clearly preferred the "Colledge" as a hospital. The opposition to Craik's and Corny's plan to use the college building was led by the Rev. Manning, who was also the minister of the First Baptist Church on North Main Street, as Corny informed Washington:

*The difficulties encountered in this affair, arise principally from Mr Manning a Minister of this place; who endeavoured to inflame the people, to persuade them that the Town would be infected with a Contagious disorder, in Consequence of the Establishment; I was beyond measure astonished that the two Browns, the Brothers of Colo John Brown, publickly opposed it, they so far forgot themselves as to declare loudly, that they hoped the People would blow up the Hospital, and they threatened the Carpenters who were at work at The College with the loss of the Esteem and Custom of the townsmen and Actions of Damages at Law, if they continued to work; nor could the Workmen (who had left their Business) be prevailed upon to begin again, untill Bonds of Indemnification were given them [...] this Strange Conduct is totally opposite to those Sentiments that Unite the two Nations, and too full of*

---

<sup>211</sup> Corny's letter is quoted from the on-line edition of the Washington Papers at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-in/ampage?collid=mgw4&fileName=gwpage067.db&recNum=947&tempFile=./temp/~ammem\\_svmt&filecode=mgw&next\\_filecode=mgw&prev\\_filecode=mgw&itemnum=7&ndocs=24](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-in/ampage?collid=mgw4&fileName=gwpage067.db&recNum=947&tempFile=./temp/~ammem_svmt&filecode=mgw&next_filecode=mgw&prev_filecode=mgw&itemnum=7&ndocs=24)

*Sedition and disrespect to be tolerated at the Instant His Majesty is sending assistance to his Allies; and will not I trust be pass'd over with impunity.*



Detail from Charles Blaskowitz, *A topographical Chart of the Bay of Narragansett* (London: Engraved & printed for Wm. Faden, 1777)

Washington's reply of 15 July showed the general "exceedingly chagrined at the account you give me of the trouble you have met with in the establishment of Hospitals. The conduct of the persons you mention was highly reprehensible and justly merits the censure of every friend of the Alliance: But I am convinced you will



not draw general conclusions from the behaviour of a few ungenerous and interested individuals.”

When Corny pressed his case for the college building in Providence as the better location for the hospital before the Governor and the Council on 25 June 1780, he eventually won his case. With the General Assembly no longer in session the state’s executive powers rested with the Council of War headed by the Governor. On 25 June the Council Minutes record that Corny “has made a request to this Council in Writing conceived in the most pressing Terms that a suitable Establishment for an Hospital for the Invalids of the Army and Navy who are expected to arrive in this State from France to cooperate with the Army of these United States and hath therein suggested that the College Edifice in the Town of Providence was particularly adopted, fix’d and absolutely appointed by the Court of France and Doctor Franklin as a suitable Place for that Purpose ... It is therefore Resolved That the Request of the said Col. Corny be and the same is hereby granted, and that the College Edifice be deliver’d up to him for the Purpose aforesaid, by the Deputy-Quarters Master General in this Department.”

That same Sunday morning as Manning was preaching in his church, Corny took possession of the College. That left the question of what to do with Manning. Since the house of Rev. Manning was “situated so near said Edifice that it may be disagreeable to him to reside therein so long as the College may be improved as an Hospital,” Ephraim Bowen was to find another house for him. If he chose to move, Bowen suggested to “cause the Vegetables growing in the Gardens of the said Mr. Manning to be appraised by three indifferent Persons, in order that compensation may hereafter be made him for any Damage he may sustain in said Gardens.”<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> The application to establish a hospital in the college is dated 24 June 1780; William Greene Papers Mss 468, Folder 5. The Providence town hospital was located in 1780/81 at the West Rope Walk. Providence Town Papers, vol. 6, January 1781 to August 1782, RIHS. See also General Heath to Gov. Greene, 3 July and 8 July 1780 from Providence. RISA, Letterbooks, Letters to Gov. William Greene, vol. 15, 19 June to 10 November 1780. It had only been on 13 May 1780, that the Council had decided to discontinue the hospital because of the small number of sick troops housed there and the expense required to keep it open.

In the same meeting Bowen was instructed to “provide a suitable House in the Town of Providence for the said Col. Corny” as well as “suitable Quarters for the Officers and Men of the Party of Light Horse who accompanied Col. Corny to this Town.” i.e. Strubing’s dragoons.



"A S.W. View of the COLLEGE in Providence, together with the PRESIDENT'S HOUSE & GARDENS" (ca. 1795).

Both University Hall as well as President Manning's house date to 1774.

Corny had had his way: University Hall had once again become a hospital.<sup>213</sup> On 1 July 1780, Royal Flint informed his employer Jeremiah Wadsworth that upon his arrival in Providence he found the "hospitals ... in great forwardness and provision is made for the sick on their first arrival."<sup>214</sup> Only Corny was still in Providence in a "Public House," i.e., a tavern, looking for quarters for himself, until the assembly assigned him on 3 July a house owned by Major Nathaniel Greene of Woodstock, CT, Corny "agreeing to give a reasonable rent therefor." At the time Captain Abimeleck Riggs was living in the house "on the north side of Westminster Street, east of Exchange Street"<sup>215</sup> but since Riggs had "a very small family, who may be easily accommodated in some other house", Deputy Quartermaster General Ephraim Bowen "to find a convenient place" for Riggs and to "remove his family."<sup>216</sup>

---

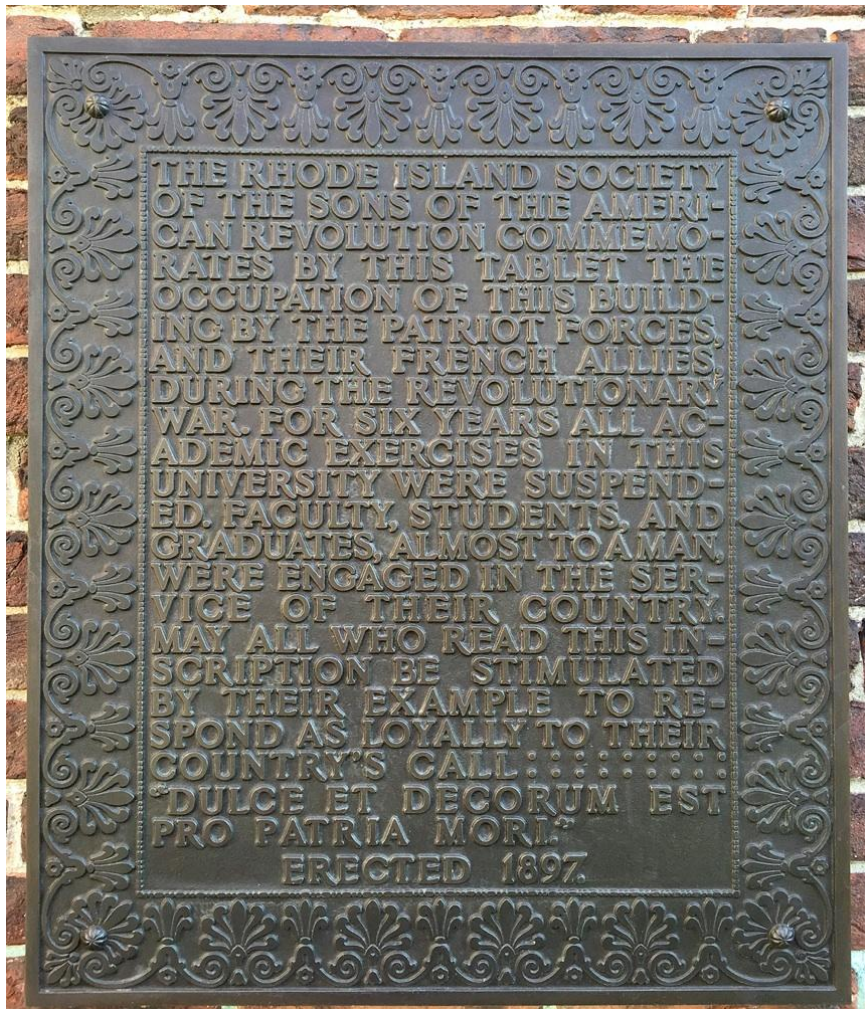
<sup>213</sup> It remained a hospital until 27 May 1782.

<sup>214</sup> Wadsworth Correspondence, April – November 1780, Box 130 a, CTHS.

<sup>215</sup> Preston, "Providence", p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> Heath to Greene, 3 July 1780 from Providence, RISA Letterbooks, Letters to Gov. William Green vol. 15, 19 June to 10 November 1780. The correspondence in *Records of Rhode Island*, vol. 9, p. 120. When in Newport Corny lodged with Simon Pease in Clarke Street.





This tablet commemorating the use of University Hall as a hospital was unveiled on the back wall of University Hall on 20 January 1897. It reads:

*The Rhode Island Society of the Sons of the American Revolution commemorates by this tablet the occupation of this building by the patriot forces, and their French allies, during the Revolutionary War. For six years all academic exercises in this university were suspended. Faculty, students, and graduates, almost to a man, were engaged in the service of their country. May all who read this inscription be stimulated by their example to respond as loyally to their country's call. ...." Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori." Erected 1897*

By the time College Hall was finally prepared for a hospital, Admiral de Ternay's fleet carrying Rochambeau's troops was close to the Capes of the Chesapeake and only a few days sailing away from landfall in Newport. On 7 July, Ternay convened a council of war on the *Duc de Bourgogne* where the assembled decided to head for Newport rather than Boston. In the morning of 9 July, the *Surveillante* found bottom off the Rhode Island coast. By the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>, the fleet anchored in view of No Man's Island. Count Mathieu Dumas, one of Rochambeau's aides-de-camp, recorded that "We had at length reached the country which we so ardently desired to see, where the bare appearance of the French flag would revive the hopes of the defenders of liberty."<sup>217</sup> But the quays of Newport were virtually empty: no-one had informed the defenders of liberty how they would know that it was a French, not a British fleet whose masts they saw rising on the horizon. As Blanchard reported, "What we saw with great satisfaction was a French flag placed upon each of the two shores which were in front of us. This signal, doubtless agreed upon with the M. de La Fayette, who had preceded our squadron, informed us that the English were not masters of Rhode island [*sic*], and that we would be well received there"<sup>218</sup> When Ternay's fleet "mit pavillon François a trois heures d'apres midy le fort americaine Salue de treize Coups de Canon" – when "the French flag was raised at three o'clock in the afternoon" on the masts the gunners in the fort were the only Americans to see it and greet the allies with a 13-gun salute.<sup>219</sup> Georg Daniel Flohr, the enlisted man of the Royal Deux-Ponts confirms that the war-weary Newporters thought that the vessels represented not approaching allies but enemies.

*As soon as we had cast our anchor the scallops already came from the city out to our ships to sell their wares, which consisted of cherries, apples, pears etc. The people in these scallops were all black, that is to say, moors, but we could not talk a word with them because their language was English, but at the same time they could not talk to us.*

*On the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> around 9 o'clock we began to debark, something we were very anxious for if only to meet the inhabitants who lived there. But when we entered the city we could not see anyone except for a few moors here and there, which made us believe that the whole town was inhabited by moors! But that was not the case: the white inhabitants simply had all gone into hiding because they thought we were enemy troops. As soon as they realized, however, that we were*

---

<sup>217</sup> Mathieu Dumas, *Memoirs of his Own Time* 2 vols., (London, 1839), vol. 1, p. 29.

<sup>218</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, p. 38.

<sup>219</sup> *Journal Militaire* of an unidentified grenadier in the Bourbonnois regiment. Library of Congress, Milton Latham Papers MMC 1907. The ms is unpaginated.

*friendly troops and therefore auxiliaries come to help protect them, they one after the other came back into the city. We thought we would be lodged in the city, but no, the road we were directed to follow went straight through the town to the place where we had to set up camp close to the town.*

Though boats sent by La Pérouse, commanding officer of the *Amazone*, out of Newport harbor reached the fleet in the morning of 10 July, Ternay refused to sail into Newport at night. Finally, around 10:30 a.m. on the morning of 11 July, the French fleet, led by the *Amazone*, sailed into Newport and anchored between Conanicut, Rose and Goat Islands.<sup>220</sup> Rochambeau immediately went ashore around 1:00 p.m. to an ambiguous welcome: even he had a difficult time to find a place where he could stay for the night.

The welcome was less than cordial if we believe the accounts of some of the officers.<sup>221</sup> William de Deux-Ponts, colonel-en-second of his regiment, remarked that

---

<sup>220</sup> A stone marker commemorating the landing of French forces was erected in King Park on Wellington Avenue on 9 July 1902. See Asa Bird Gardiner, *Address of welcome ... to the ambassador of France and the general-in-chief of the French army and other members of the official representation of the government of France, appointed to attend the unveiling, in Washington, D. C. of the bronze statue of M. le Maréchal le Comte de Rochambeau ... on the occasion of the visit of the representation to Newport, R.I. on Memorial Day, May 30th, 1902 ...* (New York, 1902).

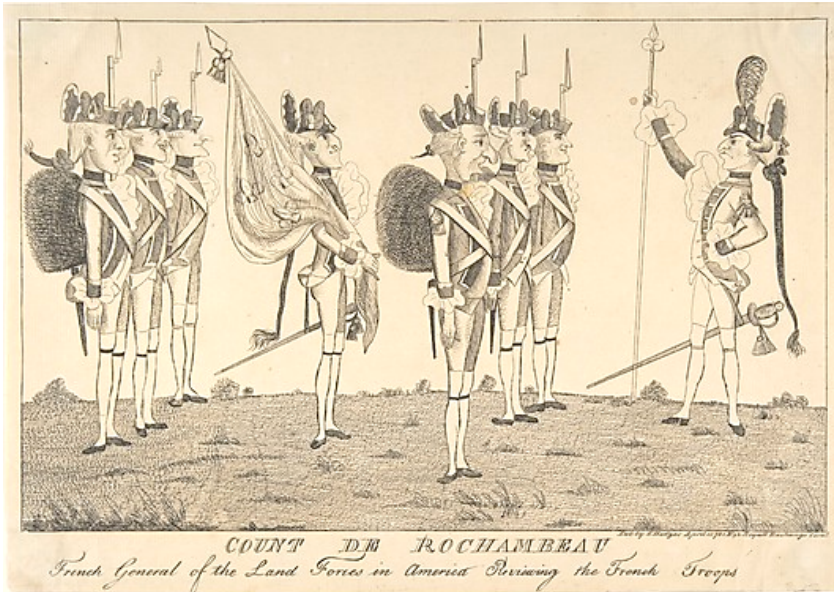
The current stone cairn was erected on 13 July 1928; see "Dedication of the Monument in King Park Newport, R.I. July 13, 1928." *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society* Special no. 66 (September 1928), pp. 1-19. The current Rochambeau Monument was dedicated on 4 July 1940. See Edgar Erskine Hume, *Rochambeau. Marshal of France, Friend of America. Address at the Dedication of the Rochambeau Monument Newport, Rhode Island 4 July 1940* (Newport, 1940).

On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of French forces see John R. Wadleigh, "Fifty Years Ago when Newport Remembered Rochambeau." *Newport History* vol. 54 no. 4 (1981), pp.123-125; on the bicentennial of the landing in 1981 see George Woodbridge, "Rochambeau: Two Hundred Years Later." *Newport History* vol. 53 no. 1 (1980), pp.5-21.

On 11 December 2001, a commemorative plaque was installed by the New England Committee, The American Society of Le Souvenir Français, on the lower half of the 1928 cairn facing Wellington Avenue.

<sup>221</sup> The best introduction to the subject with good maps is still "The French in Rhode Island." *Magazine of American History* vol. 3 no. 7 (July 1879), pp. 385-436. See also "With the French at Newport." In: Forbes and Cadman, *France and New England* vol. 2, pp. 30-46, and "The Marches and Camp Sites of the French Army in New England." *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 131-189, esp. pp. 166-176. See also Rochambeau Commission. *Rochambeau and Rhode Island* (Providence, 1954), and Arthur Tuckerman, *When Rochambeau stepped ashore: a reconstruction of life in Newport in 1780* (Newport, 1955).

the French had "not met with that reception on landing which we expected and which we ought to have had. A coldness and reserve appear to me characteristic of the American nation."<sup>222</sup> Clermont-Crèvecœur believed that "the local people, little disposed in our favor, would have preferred, at that moment, I think, to see their enemies arrive rather than their allies." He thought the British were to blame. They "had made the French seem odious to the Americans ... saying that we were dwarfs, pale, ugly, specimens who lived exclusively on frogs and snails."<sup>223</sup> Nicolas François Denis Brisout de Barneville, at 44 still a *sous-lieutenant*, thought that the image of the papist French had at least in part been formed "by numerous French refugees," i.e., Huguenots who had settled in America.<sup>224</sup>



The *chevalier* de Saint-Cyr, lieutenant-Colonel of the Saintonge Infantry, wrote that the inhabitants were rather alarmed when he arrived. "L'étonnement, la méfiance étaient cependant ce qui y dominait – amazement, suspicion were what

<sup>222</sup> William de Deux-Ponts, *My Campaigns in America* Samuel Abbot Green, ed., (Boston, 1868), p. 91.

<sup>223</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 1, p. 21.

<sup>224</sup> Barneville, "Journal," p. 242. In 1678, 12 Huguenot families established New Paltz in Ulster County, NY; in October 1686, Huguenot refugees established Frenchtown, 10 miles inland from Narragansett Bay, but there were Huguenot settlements all along the coast from Oxford, MA to New Rochelle, NY, Manakin-Town, VA and Jamestown, SC.

dominated then." Using a term applied to the relatively well-off and stylishly dressed young men who led the revolt against Maximilien Robespierre in July 1794, he wrote that the prejudices instilled in the Americans by the English "les avaient dépeints comme des poupées muscadins", had depicted them like dolls wearing musk perfume who occupied themselves only with prettying themselves" as depicted in this famous anti-French cartoon.<sup>225</sup>

**N E W P O R T, July 15.**  
 The Honorable GENERAL ASSEMBLY, of this State, is to meet in this Town on Monday next.  
 Last Tuesday arrived here from France, a Fleet of Men of War and Transports, consisting of 44 Sail, having on board 6000 very fine Troops; the Fleet is commanded by his Excellency Monsieur Le Chevalier de Ternay, and the Troops by his Excellency Monsieur Le Comte de Rochambeau.—In Consequence of which this Town was beautifully illuminated on Wednesday Evening, and Thirteen grand Rockets were fired in Front of the State-House. The brilliant Appearance of the numerous Gentlemen Officers of the Fleet and Army of our illustrious Ally, who were on Shore, with that of the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Town, and the Joy which every Friend to Liberty expressed on the happy Occasion, afforded a most pleasing Prospect of the future Felicity and Grandeur of this Country, in Alliance with the most polite, powerful and generous Nation in the World. We have the Pleasure to inform the Public that both the Fleet and Army are extremely healthy.

*Newport Mercury*, 15 July 1781

But these impressions were not shared by everyone. Different observers saw, recorded and remembered different aspects of their arrival and their first few days in Newport. Baron Closen of the Royal Deux-Ponts refrained from making any comments upon arrival "since my stay among them has not yet been long enough to know their customs, character, commerce etc., etc."<sup>226</sup> Graf Wilhelm von Schwerin informed his uncle Graf Reingard zu Wied in Dierdorf, a village north-west of Coblenz on the Rhine, on 1 August 1780 that "les americain ont ete enchanté de nous voir arivé— the Americans were thrilled to see us arrive to assist them they gave us a welcome that could not have been better"<sup>227</sup> and Captain Oyré, ever the engineer, confined himself in his *Notes* to the simple sentence: "The inhabitants of Rhode Island are generally attached to the old government", i.e. the Crown.

<sup>225</sup> *Extrait des Mémoires du chevalier de Bellemare de Saint-Cyr, lieutenant-colonel d'infanterie [Régt. de Saintonge] régié par lui-même en 1815*, p. 36 of the typed copy. Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Accession no. 4976.

<sup>226</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, p. 30.

<sup>227</sup> Schwerin to his uncle, 1 August 1780. Schwerin's original correspondence is (Spring 2015) owned by Dr. Cliff J. Scheiner of Brooklyn, New York.

André Amblard, the enlisted man in the Soissonnois remembered that on 12 July "tout Le monde était dans Les rues, qui par leurs danses et leurs acclamations de joye formait un très joly spectacle – everyone was in the streets who by their dancing and their acclamations of joy created a very happy spectacle." And Gallatin

All of these were subjective impression often written down immediately after an exhausting transatlantic crossing that had stretched the patience and endurance of French officers and men to the limits. Over the next months and weeks they were subject to change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

An American view of the initial meetings is presented in the diary of Major Daniel Lyman. On 11 July Lyman recorded:

*Last night about 11 we were call'd up by an Express from NewPort informing us of the arrival of the french Squadron of the harbour in consequence of which we prepared to go to NewPort in a Packett go on Board about 4 p.m. small wind breezes up a little before night arrived at New Port about 11 oClock lodged on board the Packett."*

Then, on the 12<sup>th</sup>, Lyman

*Came on shore waited on his Excellency General du Rochambeau L<sup>n</sup> General commanding the French Army consisting of 5,000 men. He informed us that he saild from Brest 2.d May with 40 Transports Convoy'd by 7 sail of the Line 1 40 gun ship & 2 Frigates commanded by Monsieur Chevalier de Terney who are now all safe arrived in the harbour of New Port except one Transport who parted with them in a fog 3 days before their arrival it is expected She will go to Boston in the afternoon we went on board the Admiral who received us very politely – They have 1 Ship of 80 guns 2 of 74 & 4 of 64. The town was beautifully illuminated this evening.*

*13<sup>th</sup> Spent the day with our Allies.*

*14<sup>th</sup> had the honor of General Rochambeau and his principal Officers to dine with us – Extreme hot wind.*

*15<sup>th</sup> was the Duke de Loizun & the next principal Officers of the Army to Dine with us. Spent a very sociable afternoon. The Troops are disembarking and incamping S.E. of the Town. They make an excellent appearance Extreme hot.*



On the 18<sup>th</sup> Lyman dined with Ternay and his principal officers and on the 19<sup>th</sup> again with Rochambeau.<sup>228</sup> Having recovered from their initial shock, the town of Newport as well as the legislatures of Rhode Island and neighboring states rushed to welcome their illustrious guests - everyone had heard of the learned Chastellux.<sup>229</sup> To show their joy at the arrival of their French allies, the City Council of Newport on 11 July informed its citizens that "from the Duty & regard they owe our Country & the Gratitude & respect, which is due from Every Citizen to the Illustrious Ally of these States, as well to afford them the Utmost Aid & Assistance as also to Manifest every Mark of Respect & Esteem, Upon their Arrival, Wherefore resolved, that all Houses in the Streets hereafter Named, be Illuminated tomorrow Evening." In order to leave a lasting mark of the new-found friendship the Newport City Council also voted that as of 12 July 1780, King Street would be known as Lewis Street in honor of the French king and renamed Queen Street to Congress Street.<sup>230</sup> As "13 grand Rockets were fired in the Front of the Statehouse" and the "Bell rang at Newp<sup>t</sup> till after Midnight & the Even<sup>g</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> Newp<sup>t</sup> illuminated, the Whigs put 13 Lights in the Windows the Tories or doubtfuls 4 or 6. The Quakers did not chuse their Lights shd shine before men, & their Windows were broken."<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> Rhode Island Historical Society Providence, Mss 546: Daniel Lyman Papers, diary entries of visit to Newport 13-20 July 1780. Lyman, son-in-law of John Wanton and General Heath's senior aide-de-camp, was the first to welcome the French. I have been unable to identify a "Lavares"; "Mr Bannister" was probably John Bannister, whose house stood on West Main Road just north of the Newport-Middletown city line. It was demolished c. 1955.

During dinner came news of arrival of the missing French transport, the *Ile de France* with 350 men of the Bourbonnois regiment, in Boston. On 22 July 1780, the *Providence Gazette* announced that "a Transport with 350 troops on board and a large quantity of Military Stores which had been separated from the fleet is safe arrived in Boston. The Troops are on their march for this Town on their way to Newport and are expected to arrive here To-day." The *Ile de France* returned to Newport on 26 January 1781.

<sup>229</sup> On 9 October Ezra Stiles while visiting Newport dined with Chastellux "in a splendid manner on 35 Dishes. He is a capital Literary Character, a Member of the French Academy. He is the Glory of the Army." Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, vol. 2: March 14, 1776 - December 31, 1781 (New York, 1901), p. 473.

<sup>230</sup> Newport Town Proceedings vol. 1, 24 November 1779 - 17 April 1818, NHS. Then follows a list of the streets to be lighted on 12 July 1780. For details on these celebrations, addresses and dinners see most recently Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy*, pp. 60-63, as well as the French accounts listed in the bibliography. The texts of the addresses can be found John Austin Stevens, "The French in Rhode Island." *Magazine of American History* vol. 3 no. 7 (July 1879), pp. 385-431.

<sup>231</sup> *Literary Diary*, vol. 2, p. 453 and p. 456.

Over the next few days the troops debarked and marched east on Wellington Avenue, north on Thomas, past the Colony House and Touro Synagogue to their campsites on the hills overlooking the city.

### French encampment in Newport (1780)



- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| 42: Artillery Park    | 46: Soissonnois                               |
| 43: Auxonne Artillery | 47: Saintonge                                 |
| 44: Bourbonnois       | 48: Lauzun's Legion, quartered at Castle Hill |
| 45: Royal Deux-Ponts  | (see following page) <sup>232</sup>           |

<sup>232</sup> Detail from "Amerique Septentrionale. Newport en Rhode Island 1780." Rochambeau Family Cartographic Archive (GEN MSS 146), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

There are numerous other maps of the encampment in existence and reproduced e.g. in *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army*, see vol. 2, pp. 126-127, maps 5, 6, 7. See also the "Plan de la position de l'armée française autour de Newport et du mouillage de l'escadre dans la rade de cette ville. 1780." Map 41 in the Rochambeau Map Collection of the Geography and Map Division in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C, available at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3774n.ar102000> ; *Plan de Rhodes-Island, et position de l'armée française a Newport. 1780.* Ibid. map 38; see <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3774n.ar101700>;





Ridge Road

#### Lauzun's Legion quartered at Castle Hill

"The camp," according to Professor Hattendorf, "ran from east to west from present-day Spring Street, where at the west end it overlooked a marsh and the squadron anchorage. On the east end, it overlooked Easton's Beach." The infantry regiments camped on the east side, the artillery "on the camp's west end close to Spring Street. The area across Spring Street and stretching down to Thames Street

---

*Plan de la ville, port, et rade de Newport, avec une partie de Rhode-Island occupée par l'armée française aux ordres de Mr. Le comte de Rochambeau, et de l'escadre française commandée par Mr. le Chr. Destouches. [1780?].* *ibid.*, Map 39 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3774n.ar101800> and Michel Capitaine du Chesnoy, *Plan de Rhode Islande, les différentes opérations de la flotte française et des troupes Américaines commandées par le major général Sullivan contre les forces de terre et de mer des Anglois depuis le 9 Aout jusqu'a la nuit du 30 au 31 du même mois que les Américains ont fait leur retraite 1778.* par Mr. Capitaine, a. d. c. du Général la Fayette. [1778]. *Ibid.* at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3772r.ar300300>

was laid out as the French Army's artillery park."<sup>233</sup> Lauzun's Legion took up positions at Castle Hill. Next the city council tackled the task of finding lodging for the superior officers and staff of the army and navy. On 11 July already, the Town Council had appointed a committee to identify available lodgings. As Rochambeau established his headquarters in the William Vernon House, his staff officers and the colonels of his units, in all 91 officers and their servants, moved into their assigned quarters as well.<sup>234</sup>



Detail of *Plan de Stationnement des troupes française et de la marine a Newport en 1780* <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulyse/notice?id=FR>

<sup>233</sup> Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy*, p. 62.

<sup>234</sup> NHS, Town Meeting 12 July 1780, where a number of citizens, including Daniel Mason, George Sears, and Samuel Vernon, are "added, to the Committee appointed Yesterday, to Assist the Quarter Master, in providing Houses for the Officers of the French Army & Navy." It is unknown whether these quarters were identical with the LIST OF QUARTERS OCCUPIED IN THE TOWN OF NEWPORT BY THE ARMY UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE COMTE DE ROCHAMBEAU, DURING THE WINTER QUARTERS OF 1780-81 as published by Alan and Mary M. Simpson, "A New Look at How Rochambeau quartered his Army in Newport (1780-1781)." *Newport History* (Spring 1983), pp. 30-67, but at least for some of the officers such as Baron Closen, Simpson suggests as much. (p. 37)

Mr. Thomas Robinson) Newport Sep. 28. 1780  
will give quarters for the Count Noailles  
Col. e. Jabez Champlin 1784  
N.º 614

Quartermen billet for Louis Marie, vicomte de Noailles, Lafayette's brother-in-law and *mestre de camp en second* of the Soissonnois Regiment<sup>235</sup>

Mr. Thomas Forrester) Newport Sep. 28. 1780  
will give quarters for Count Noailles Late  
Jabez Champlin 1784  
N.º 625

Noailles' servants were quartered nearby with Thomas Forrester

Confirming Major Daniel Lyman's observation of the French forces' "excellent appearance", Royal Flint wrote to Jeremiah Wadsworth on 21 July 1780, from Newport that: "The French Officers are the most civilized men I ever met. They are temperate, prudent & extremely attentive to duty. I did not expect they would have so few vices."<sup>236</sup> Similarly William Channing informed Ezra Stiles on 6 August that "The French Troops are a fine body of men, & appear to be well officered. Neither Officers nor men are the effeminate Beings we were heretofore taught to believe them. They are as large & as likely men as can be produced by any nation."<sup>237</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Robinson Papers Box 12, NHS. On Noailles see John K Howat, "A Young man impatient to distinguish himself: The Vicomte de Noailles as Portrayed by Gilbert Stuart." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* vol. 29 no. 7 (1971), pp. 327-337.

<sup>236</sup> Wadsworth Correspondence, April–November 1780 Box 130a, CTHS.

<sup>237</sup> *Literary Diary*, vol. 2, p. 459.



"Large & as likely" as that of any nation they may have been, but the troops debarking in Newport in July 1780 were hardly ready to face the British attack that was appearing off the coast. About 800 soldiers and some 1,500 sailors were afflicted with scurvy; according to Flohr, of companies 100 men strong, "barely 18-20 could still be used" to throw up defenses around the harbor. As the Newporters "could now daily see the misery of the many sick, of whom the majority could not even stand up and move ... they had very great pity on them and did all they could for them." Since fear of contagious diseases had constituted the primary force behind the opposition to the hospitals in Newport and Providence the *Newport Mercury* on 22 July 1780 published a note reassuring the populace that it had nothing to fear from the French soldiers and sailors:

*WHEREAS fears have arisen in the minds of some inhabitants of this town, that EPIDEMICAL or CONTAGIOUS Diseases would be spread, in consequence of the Baptist meeting houses being occupied as hospitals for the sick of our amicable and generous Allies: We are authorized to assure said Inhabitants (by a physician well acquainted with infectious diseases, and who has inspected their sick) that no Small Pox, Yellow Fever, or other contagious Diseases appears among them; that their chief complaint is the Scurvy, of which they are fast recovering."*

On 14 July, Blanchard placed "some of them in an unidentified establishment hastily formed at Newport", the rest he sent to Papisquash. By 18 July he "visited, in company with M. de Rochambeau, an Anabaptist temple [in Newport], where we established a hospital," i.e. in the First Baptist Church on 30 Spring Street.

The next day, 19 July, he reported 280 sick troops in Papisquash and 400 sick in Newport on 23 July, about 300 of them from the Royal Deux-Ponts.<sup>238</sup> Blanchard thought that "it appears the Germans feel the heat more and are more subject to the scurvy than the French", thus confirming Brissout de Barneville's observation of 21 August: "Le régiment des Deux-Ponts a été inspecté aujourd'hui. Il est superbe, mais il y a beaucoup de malades."<sup>239</sup> Then there were the sick men of the Bourbonnois in Boston. After 10 weeks on the ocean about 100 of them were sick and 12 of them died in Boston between 23 July and 20 September 1780, the youngest of them not quite 20 years old. Blanchard went to see the sick in Boston on 26 July but was back in Newport. All in all Blanchard estimated he had "about 800 sick" out of 5,200

---

<sup>238</sup> Blanchard, *Journal*, pp. 42 et passim. Amblard estimated about 1,200 sick soldiers. The hospital in Papisquash was closed in early August and the sick transferred to Providence.

<sup>239</sup> Barneville, "Journal," p. 254 and Blanchard, p. 46.

soldiers in early August. By 5 September there were still about 500 sick, mostly with dysentery. By early August the first sick had been sent to Providence as well.

On 12 August 1780, the *Providence Gazette* announced:

*Notice is hereby given, That a Number of Sick belonging to his Most Christian Majesty's Fleet and Army are to be sent to the College Edifice in the Town of Providence for whom will be wanted immediately a Quantity of fresh Provisions also Cider and Hay or Straw for which articles a Generous Price will be given, in Hard Money. It is earnestly wished that a full Supply may be immediately brought in; and it is hoped that No Person will be so sordid as to demand extravagant Prices from our great and generous Allies who have come so great a Distance to our Relief.*



Jahleel Brenton House ca. 1720, demolished in the 1920s.  
Photo: Historic American Buildings Survey.

On 12 September he cared for 340 sick in Providence and 200 in Newport, by 20 October there were “not more than 300” sick. Besides in “Anabaptist temple”, the Friends Meeting House on 30 Marlborough Street and Ezra Stiles’ Second Congregational Church on 13-15 Clarke Street were used as hospitals for the land

forces as its hospital between in 1780 and 1781.<sup>240</sup> The French navy used the Presbyterian Church on Broadway as well as the home of Loyalist Jahleel Brenton on Thames Street until late October when the building was converted into barracks.<sup>241</sup> The Colony House too saw service as a French military hospital.<sup>242</sup> Unlike the men of the Continental Army, French soldiers were not inoculated against small-pox. Those suspected of carrying infectious diseases were sent to Coaster Harbor Island, which had served as quarantine station since 1716.<sup>243</sup> Some 400 men were briefly transferred to a house on Conanicut Island serving as a quarantine hospital.<sup>244</sup>



Monument to the French dead at Old North Cemetery in Providence

---

<sup>240</sup> At the request of Governor Greene the French later vacated the Meeting House. Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People. Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1992), p. 163.

<sup>241</sup> "Petitions to the General Assembly" vol. 18, p. 73, RIHS.

<sup>242</sup> While visiting Newport in October 1780 Stiles wrote in his diary: "My Meeting-house and three others taken up for Hospitals." *Literary Diary* vol. 2, p. 473.

<sup>243</sup> See Dr. Isaac Senter Papers, Mss 165 series 5, Box 2, folder 8, RIHS, which contains a letter by French Chief Physician Coste to the town council in Newport of 14 April 1781, requesting that the furniture of the small-pox hospital be burnt: 10 strawbeds, 10 strawbags, 10 mattresses, 10 bolsters, 10 blankets, 20 shuts, 15 shirts, and 15 shifts. On 18 April 1781, the minutes of the town meeting record: "Voted that Solomon Southwick & Doctor Center, be a Committee, to return the thanks of this town to Monsieur D'Tarley, for his Gen'rous Present of Necessary Bed & Furniture for Coasters Harbour, Voted the Old Bedding be destroyed agreeable to the sd. Monsieur d'Tarley's request." Newport Town Meeting Minutes, 18 April 1781. NHS.

<sup>244</sup> Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy*, p. 62. See also William L. Watson, *History of Jamestown on Conanicut Island in the State of Rhode Island* (Providence, 1949).

Despite the care they received, Flohr thought that "200-300 men [died] every day," but here he got his numbers confused: some 200 men was the total number of deaths in Rochambeau's units during the first few weeks after arrival in Rhode Island. Twelve men of his regiment had died during the crossing; another 58 died either in Newport or in Providence. Those who died in Providence were buried in the Old North Cemetery.<sup>245</sup> The burial ground for the dead in Newport is unknown but it was most likely in the Common Burial Ground, the oldest public cemetery in Newport laid out about 1665 along Farewell Street. When they established the hospital in Poppasquash officials in Providence had assumed that there would be deaths in the hospital there as well and decided that

**Whereas, the officers of His Most Christian Maiesty's hospital have requested this Assembly to appropriate a suitable piece of land on the state's farm, at Popasquash, for the burial of such as may die at the said hospital,—**

**It is therefore voted and resolved, that the principal director of the said hospital be, and he is hereby, permitted to choose and appropriate for the purpose, aforesaid, such a part of the said farm as may be convenient; and that the deputy quartermaster general be, and he is hereby, directed to enclose the same within a pale-fence.**

**It is further voted and resolved, that whenever the said farm shall be sold, this state will make reservation of the said burial ground.**

---

<sup>245</sup> RIHS Mss 591 North Burial Grounds Records, 5 vols. has no record of burials of French soldiers. The cemetery was established in June 1700. Mss 9001-F Box 6: French Memorial, includes a hand-written history of the memorial by Rev. Frederic Denison of 1881 in which he suggests, without sources, that about 100 French soldiers might lie buried there. RIHS French Memorial 274 contains the text of the resolution of 1 October 1881, instructing the city commissioners: "to set apart a portion of ground not exceeding twenty-five square feet, on which a memorial may be erected in commemoration of the services of our French Allies who lost their lives during the war of the Revolution, and who are buried in said ground." On 4 July 1882, a massive coffin-shape stone marker was dedicated on the grounds of the Old North Cemetery on Branch Street near the Y intersection of North Main Street (Route 1) and Branch Street (which leads to I-95/Exit 24). See City Document no. 22, *Dedication of the French Monument by the City of Providence, R.I.* (Providence, 1882).

The soldiers who died in the hospital in Poppasquash were presumably buried there as well.<sup>246</sup> Without having fired a single shot, some regiments such as the Royal Deux-Ponts was 73 men, about 7% of its strength, short by the time it went into winter quarters on 1 November 1780.<sup>247</sup>

Each French regiment had its own medical system that took care of the sick,<sup>248</sup> but at least Rochambeau and his son sent their aides-de-camp to the local doctors. One of those visited was Dr. Isaac Senter who lived in the house of Major Jonathan Otis on 109-111 Spring Street in Newport.<sup>249</sup> His day-book records for 13 July 1780: "Count Genl Roshombo's Aid de Camp to v. Emitter &c for Domestic." The same day, "Viscount Rochombeau aid de Camp to Genl. Rochombeau to v. Inspecting your Domestic."<sup>250</sup> Soon a professional, and personal, relationship developed between the French doctors and their American hosts. On 14 October 1780, Dr. Theodore Foster of Providence, who served as secretary on the Rhode Island Council of War, recorded that "Three of the French Doctors spent afternoon with Me - Grandy Beausien and Manatz." A week later, on 21 October, he recorded how "This afternoon M Pausancon French Commissary come to board with me in my East

---

<sup>246</sup> The state seems to have ignored the stipulation of setting the burial ground aside as no traces of a cemetery are known to exist.

<sup>247</sup> Samuel F. Scott, "The Soldiers of Rochambeau's Expeditionary Corps: From the American Revolution to the French Revolution," in: *La Revolution Américaine et l'Europe*, Claude Fohlen and Jacques Godechot, eds., (Paris, 1979), pp. 565-578, p. 570, puts the death toll in the first four months at almost 200; the Royal Deux-Ponts lost another 8 men before the year was over - fully half of its 162 dead for the whole campaign. Samuel F. Scott's *From Yorktown to Valmy. The Transformation of the French Army in an Age of Revolution* (University Press of Colorado, Niwot: 1998), p. 50, writes that 325 enlisted men of Rochambeau's forces died between arrival in Rhode Island in July 1780 and May 1781. That includes the men killed during the expedition to the Chesapeake and seven executions, but still leaves over 300 enlisted men, most of whom died in the weeks following arrival. The graves for these men in Newport as well as for the naval dead have not yet been located.

<sup>248</sup> See Maurice Bouvet, *Le service de santé français pendant la guerre d'indépendance des États-Unis (1777-1782)* (Paris, 1934), pp. 69-78. I have been un-able to use [Jean-François Olier, Médecins, chirurgiens, apothicaires militaires de l'armée de terre au XVIIIe siècle, 1756-1789 : dictionnaire biographique](#) (Brest, 2003). As of December 2014, the OCLC does not list a library in the US as holding this volume.

<sup>249</sup> Following his resignation as "Senior Physician and Surgeon" in the Continental Army he had only moved to Newport in July 1780, advertising his services in the *Newport Mercury* of 29 July 1780.

<sup>250</sup> Dr. Isaac Senter Papers Mss 165 daybook vol. 1, 20 May 1780 to 29 July 1781, RIHS. Both aides saw the doctor again the following day. Senter does not seem to have charged for the treatment. See also Howard S. Brown, "Newport's Revolutionary Physicians" *Newport History* vol. 54 part 1, no. 181 (Winter 1981), pp. 5-34.



Chamber.” These visits were repeated continuously throughout the fall and it stands to reason that other families in Providence hosted French guests as well.<sup>251</sup>

Selig 4/20/2015 10:02 AM

Deleted: F

Difficult as they were, these initial contacts, this getting-to-know each other, took place in an atmosphere of competing interests, goals and needs. As Rochambeau was taking care of his sick in an effort to establish even a semblance of combat readiness of the forces under his command, 1) a British fleet appeared off the coast, indicating the very real threat of an invasion. This threat negatively impacted what should have been his next priority, 2) assuring the necessary supplies to feed and maintain his forces not just for the summer but long-term into the winter. It would take more than three months to place his logistics on a sound footing. Lastly, while setting up defenses around Newport against a potential invasion 3) Washington and Lafayette kept pressuring him to prepare for a campaign against New York City.

In the middle of the votes of thanks to Rochambeau and Ternay, the dinners and celebrations, the setting up of hospitals and camp and the establishment of a supply system, a British fleet under Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot consisting of 11 ships of the line, five frigates and four smaller vessels appeared off the coast on 21 July 1780. Over the next few days, Ternay positioned his warships in a defensive, V-shaped position between Rose Island and Brenton’s Point.

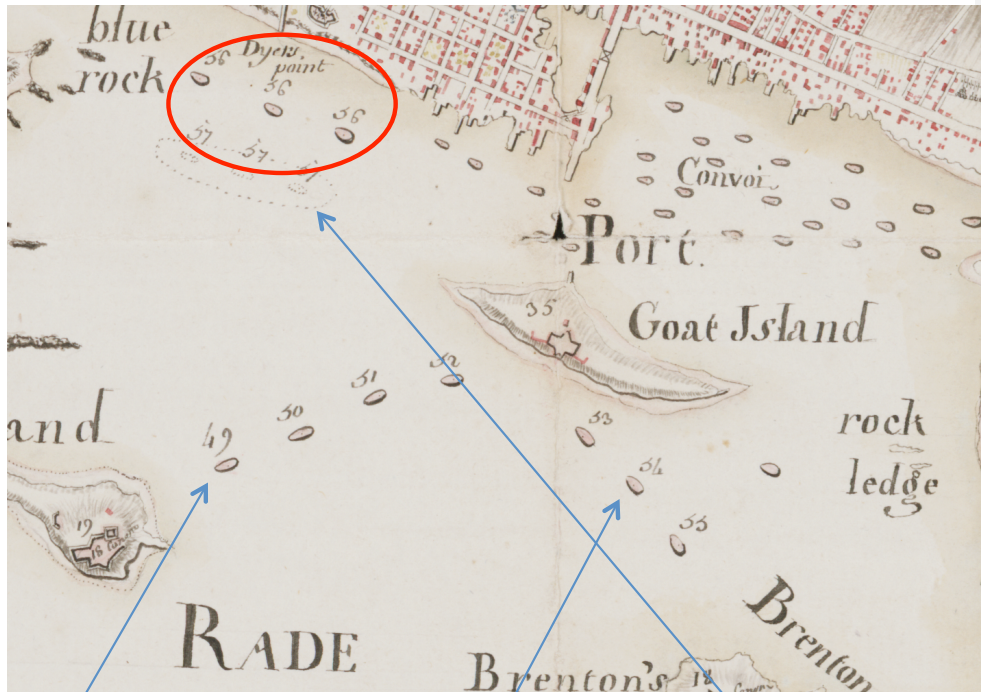
Rochambeau placed as many of artillery pieces as possible into hastily repaired British earthworks on Conanicut Island as well as some larger cannon unloaded from various vessels guarded by some 150 men from the Saintonge and the 2d battalion of the Soissonnois. Fortifications on Goat Island, Brenton's Point, Rose Island and Coaster's Harbor Island were repaired as well. Concurrently Governor Greene called out the militia which responded in record numbers.<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> Mss 424, Series 2 and 3, Box 5 Theodore Foster, 1765-1825, RIHS. His notes are written in the margins of the printed *New-England Almanack or lady's and Gentleman's Diary for the Year of our Lord Christ 1780* and subsequent years. Neither the doctors nor the commissary have been identified.

<sup>252</sup> Service in the militia in Rhode Island was defined in *An ACT for better forming, regulating and conducting the military Force of this State* of October 1779. It stipulated that “all effective Males between the Ages of Sixteen and Fifty, except such as hereafter excepted, shall constitute and make the military Force of this State”. African-Americans are not listed among those exempt from service. In July 1780 the General Assembly instructed a number of people in every town to “form all male Persons whatsoever, of the Age of Sixteen Years and upwards [...] (Deserters, *Indians*, Mulattos and Negroes excepted) into classes” as recruits for the Continental Battalions and in view of the impending arrival of French forces.

It is interesting to note that in this emergency legislation African-Americans are excluded from Militia duty. They are again excluded in the November 1780 act for completing the



- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 49: La Provence         | 54: L'Ardent   |
| 50: Le Jason            | 55: Le Conquerant  |
| 51: Le Duc de Bourgogne | 56: Frigates L'Hermione, L'Astrée,                               |
| 52: Le Neptune          | 57: wrecks of vessels sunk by the British in 1778 <sup>253</sup> |
| 53: Le Veillée          |  |

On 6 August William Channing informed Ezra Stiles from Newport that upon the arrival of a British fleet off the coast

---

state's quota to the Continental Army, keeping in mind that the Rhode Island Slave Enlistment Act of 14 February 1778, was an emergency law encouraging enlistment in the Continental Army, not Militia Laws per se.

A complete overview of militia laws in force in the colonies before 1789 is U.S. Selective Service System, *Backgrounds of Selective Service: Military Obligation, the American Tradition, Compilation of Enactments of Compulsion from Earliest Settlements of the Original Settlements on 1607 Through the Articles of Confederation 1789*. Special Monograph no. 1, vol. 2, 14 Parts in four volumes. (Washington, DC, 1947). On Rhode Island see Part 12: Rhode Island Enactments, the quotes on pp. 87, 144, 147 and 155.

<sup>253</sup> Salvage operations had been least to Newporters; attempts by French sailors to salvage some of the materials led to short-term friction that were quickly solved when Ternay forbade these activities.

*The whole Militia of our State (Rh.Isld) & of the C<sup>o</sup> of Bristol in Mass. Bay were immedi<sup>y</sup> alarmed. --- On no occasion since the War have the Militia so universy turned out & with so much Alacrity --- Persons of the first Rank & character took the Lead & were followed by persons of every Rank & Description. I was informed by Gen Heath that there were upwards of Ten Thous<sup>d</sup> Men assembled at Bristol and Tiverton, 6000 of wc were Inhabitants of this State. And the Number was increasg when the Militia were dismissed. [...] Our Allies are much pleased with the conduct & spirit of the Militia. I dined at Count Rochambeau the French General's last Monday (31 July) last, in Comp<sup>a</sup> with Mr. Thatcher (Minister) of Attleborough, who had led his Parishioners into the Field.<sup>254</sup>*

Though Royal Navy ships would continue to appear off the coast throughout August and into September 1780, by early August Rochambeau's forces had weathered the most dangerous phase of their arrival in Newport.<sup>255</sup>

The virtual blockade of their forces in Newport constituted a vivid reminder to Rochambeau and Ternay of the vulnerability of their position and of how little support they should, or could, count on from local authorities. The response of the Newport town council to the arrival of the fleet showed how much the city had suffered under the British occupation and how little it contributed to the defense of the island despite the enthusiastic vote of the General Assembly of Rhode Island in early July "to take every possible measure for the accommodation of the expected armament of our generous ally."<sup>256</sup> Without weapons to defend themselves, the Town Council on 11 July approached Rochambeau to ask for his assistance.

*Whereas many of the Inhabitants of the Town of Newport, sincerely desirous of Affording their utmost did, of assistance to the fleet & Army of His Most Christian Majesty the Illustrious Ally of the States, now within the Harbour & Town of Newport, Have Associated for the defence*

---

<sup>254</sup> *Literary Diary*, vol. 2, p. 458. The "Ten Thous<sup>d</sup> Men" is in cursive in the text. While the Rev. Thatcher was leading his congregation to war, Stiles was examining two applicants on 15 August 1780 who wanted to enroll at Yale "to become free from Impress or Draught<sup>s</sup> into the military Service in the Time of War." Stiles did not think "this would secure them." *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> The defensive activities in July and August are best described in Hattendorf, *Newport, the French Navy*, pp. 62-67. On the earthworks see also "Butts Hill, Chastellux, and Conanicut Island Forts." In Forbes and Cadman, *France and New England* vol. 2, pp. 61-65.

<sup>256</sup> Quoted in Kennett, *French forces*, p. 40.

*thereof, against the Common Enemy, & whereas the said Inhabitants have been heretofore deprived of their fire arms, & Accoutrements by the said Enemy, & are now in want of a Sufficient Number for Arming & Equiping 200 men. Wherefore Resolved that Major Gen: Heath be & he is hereby requested to apply to Genl Count of Rochambeau, Commander of the Army, of his said Christian Majesty for the Loan of a Sufficient Number of the Necessary Arms & Accoutrement, for the Arming & Equipping sd men, & this town will return the Same when thereto required by Genl Count Rochambeau, & that the Committee who waited on Gen: Heath; Yesterday be appointed to wait on him with this Vote.*<sup>257</sup>

Even if “The Arrival of the Fleet & Army hath given new Life to the Town”, as Channing had informed Stiles on 6 August, it turned out that there were not even 200 men to arm: when the town council decided on 26 July to establish a list of potential defenders by asking inhabitants to sign up “as also that the disaffected may be thereby known” at City Hall on 27 July at 5:00 p.m., “& such as shall not appear, will be deemed Enemies to their Town & Country,” the response must have been disheartening. Not even 200 men when the town (in 1782) was home to 157 males between the ages of 16 and 22 and another 565 males between the ages of 22 and 50.<sup>258</sup> The list of men willing and able to defend Newport compiled that day contained only 68 names, including that of 79-year-old Pardon Tillinghast. Twelve more men refused to sign the list, another six asked for more time to consider. Between them they had 11 muskets. On the other hand, there were names of 50 persons on that list who “should be Immediately Sent of this Island as Inimical to the United States.”<sup>259</sup>

---

<sup>257</sup> Newport Town Proceedings vol. 1, 24 November 1779 – 17 April 1818. NHS.

<sup>258</sup> *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island* vol. 9, p. 653.

<sup>259</sup> Newport Historical Society Vault A, Box 36. In September 1781, the town voted to buy 25 muskets with bayonets and accoutrements but had to return them again on 2 October to Henry Dayton “there not being any Money, at Present, for the payment thereof.”