

THE RETURN MARCH TO RHODE ISLAND

Ten months after their arrival, on 1 July 1782, Rochambeau's forces broke camp and began their return march. Organization, schedule, and campsites were almost identical to that of the previous year though this time the troops marched the whole distance rather than cover parts of the route by boat.⁶⁸⁴ This time, however, the wagon train consisted exclusively of horses. A return of waggons compiled in Williamsburg on 26 November 1781, shows 54 wagons fit for duty and 20 unfit for a total of 74 wagons; another 36 wagons and teams were on duty outside the immediate Williamsburg/Yorktown area for a total of 110. Eighty-nine of the 110 teams were now four-horse-teams, seven were three-horse-teams and two were drawn by two horses for a total of 381 horses. This profound change was caused by a cattle plague devastating livestock in and around Yorktown.

On 8 November, Conductor William Finley presented Wadsworth with this "Return of My Compy of teams that Left Annaplais

Cattel Daid	90
Cattel Living	04
===	
total	94

Carts Presant 16 Carts and Teams"

Josiah Cleaveland reported that of the 109 oxen in his 20 teams that had left "Anapelus", 106 had died and only 3 were still alive. Samuel Northum reported 61 of his 66 oxen that had left Annapolis were dead while Oliver Olmstead reported that of the 14 teams and 84 cattle that left Annapolis with him, 79 had died since the arrival in Williamsburg. Another conductor reported that of 21 teams of 115 oxen that had left Annapolis with him, 110 had died. This means that in the five weeks following their arrival in Williamsburg, the 78 teams with 468 head of draft oxen reporting on 8 November had lost a combined total of 446 of their valuable draft animals while fewer than two dozen were still alive.

Until Fredericksburg was reached, the infantry marched again in four divisions a day apart; thereafter they marched in brigades:

- 1) The Bourbonnois under the command of the *chevalier* de Chastellux
- 2) The Royal Deux-Ponts under the command of *comte* Christian de Deux-Ponts
- 3) The Soissonnois under the command of *vicomte* de Vioménil
- 4) The Saintonge under the command of *comte* de Custine

⁶⁸⁴ Unlike for the march to Virginia no route descriptions exist for the march north in 1782.

The siege artillery and 150 men of the Auxonne artillery remained at West Point, Virginia, as did 400 men, 100 each from each regiment, as a garrison at Yorktown and the sick. Because of the excessive July heat, the troops began their march at 1:00 a.m., marching through the night. Alexandria, 17-20 July 1781, was the final camp of the march north in Virginia.⁶⁸⁵ Following a one-month stay, the First Division, i.e., the Bourbonnois regiment, departed Baltimore for White Marsh Forge on 24 August, then came the camp at Lower Ferry and camp at Head of Elk. Coming from Head of Elk, the First Brigade of the French forces camped on 29 August near Newport and was followed by the Second Brigade on 30 August. Without stopping again in Delaware, the French forces crossed over into Pennsylvania on 30 and 31 August 1781. On the 31st, the Bourbonnois approached Philadelphia, followed by the Royal Deux-Ponts on 1 September. Once again, French forces marched through the city in their full splendor on 2 and 3 September. Almost exactly a year to the day that they had left New Jersey, French forces reached Bristol for the night of 4/5 September and rested at Trenton on 5 and 6 September. The New York State Line was reached on 13 September, and the First Brigade of the French forces camped in Suffern. With that, the French forces were back at the New York State line from where they had begun their march to victory almost exactly 11 months earlier. As Rochambeau's forces crossed the Hudson, a review on 17 September 1782 showed this strength:⁶⁸⁶

REGIMENT	PRESENT OFFICERS AND MEN	ABSENTEES	TOTAL

Bourbonnois	758	214	972
Soissonnois	768	228	996
Saintonge	799	195	994
Royal Deux-Ponts	798	172	970
Auxonne Artillery	312	190	502
Mineurs	0	22	22
Ouvriers	476	80	556

	3,911	1,101	5,012

⁶⁸⁵ Maps of the campsites, where they vary from the 1781 march, can be found in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 2. The route of the return march from Williamsburg to Elkton in Maryland was identical with the route taken by the wagon train and parts of the infantry until their final embarkation at Annapolis in September 1781.

⁶⁸⁶ These data are based on Keim, *Commemoration*. Of the absentees, 477 were on special assignments and 631 were in the hospital. Rochambeau's troop contingent is about 1,000 men larger than on the march south, when the army had stood at about 3,400 officers and men. Since neither the siege artillery, the sick nor Lauzun's Legion made the march to Boston, Rochambeau left Crompond with about 3,700 men.

On the 20th the French army passed in review before General Washington, and then, on the 22nd, Clermont-Crèveœur and his fellow officers "went to watch the maneuvers of the American army and were truly impressed. This proves what money and good officers can do to make good soldiers."⁶⁸⁷ Dr. Thatcher described the scene thus: "The whole army was paraded under arms this morning in order to honor his Excellency Count Rochambeau on his arrival from the southward. The troops were all formed in two lines, extending from the ferry, where the count crossed, to head-quarters. A troop of horses met and received him at King's ferry, and conducted him through the line to General Washington's quarters, where, sitting on his horse by the side of his excellency, the whole army marched before him, and paid the usual salute and honors. Our troops were now in complete uniform, and exhibited every mark of soldierly discipline. Count Rochambeau was most highly gratified to perceive the very great improvement, which our army had made in appearance since he last reviewed them, and expressed his astonishment at their rapid progress in military skill and discipline. He said to General Washington, "You have formed an alliance with the King of Prussia. These troops are Prussians. Several of the principal officers of the French army, who have seen troops of different European nations, have bestowed the highest encomiums and applause on our army, and declared that they had seen none superior to the Americans."⁶⁸⁸

On 22 September, the day of the review, the *duc* de Lauzun, the *comte* de Ségur, son of the war minister, together with a large group of French officers returned from France with orders from court. Before the two armies parted, Washington had the opportunity to decorate a number of French officers. Ségur had brought a number of crosses of the Order of St. Louis. Rochambeau asked Washington to do the honors and the American gladly attached the insignia of the military order to chests of the French officers.⁶⁸⁹

Once the allies had completed their farewells, the French troops departed on 24 September "in a single column" for an eight-mile march to Crompond/Yorktown where they entered their 38th camp of the march from Virginia around Hunt's Tavern, where they would remain until 22 October. On 22 October, the First Brigade, consisting of the Bourbonnois and Royal Deux-Ponts, broke camp and

⁶⁸⁷ Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 1, p. 78. These reviews took place on Washington Hill on land behind St. Mary's Cemetery.

⁶⁸⁸ Thatcher, *Journal*, p. 322. See also Verger's description in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 2, p. 166, and note 154. The Continental Army was between 5,500 and 6,000 men strong at the time.

⁶⁸⁹ Lauberdière, *Journal*, fol. 194.

began the march through Connecticut to Boston. On 29th, the First Brigade arrived in East Hartford and was joined by the Second Brigade the next day.

In East Hartford, Rochambeau announced to the troops that they were to march to Boston and embark for the West Indies while he would return to France. To accelerate the march "the artillery obtained permission to march, from now on, one day in advance of the 1st Brigade, for convenience, and set out early on its way" on 30 October. The First Brigade, now commanded by *baron* de Vioménil, broke camp in Windham, and marched to its next camp, in Canterbury. By now it was early November, and winter was upon New England. Clermont-Crèvecœur could not "express how uncomfortable we were while camping in a country where the cold was already very intense. We were frozen in our tents. And the tents were frozen so stiff that, after the pegs and poles were removed to take them down, they stood alone. So you can judge how cold it was."

On November 4, 1782, Dr. Ezra Stiles, president of Yale University, recorded in his diary: "Lodged at Bolton, where we saw the first Division of the French Army march for Providence. There were counted 170 Waggons of Artillery, filling the Rode fr. The Meeting house to & which is one Mile, besides those we passed yesterday: there were as supposed above 100, so that the Baggage Waggons & Artillery judged 300. Gen. Rochambeau visited us in Eveng at Rev. Mr. Coltons." The next day Stiles "Met & passed the 2d Div. of French Army, probably 1500 men. The whole sd. to be 4000, I judge 3000. We stopt our chaise near half an hour in passing the Troops, & afterwards above half an hour in passing 2 Divisions of Wagons, I judge 200. Some of them sd. they had 500 Waggons for whole Army." On 8/9 November 1782, the First Brigade of Rochambeau's infantry pitched their tents in the fields east of Dorrance Tavern on the north side of the road that would lead them back to Rhode Island from where their march to victory had begun 17 months earlier.

THE RETURN MARCH THROUGH RHODE ISLAND

The artillery which had preceded the infantry, spent the night of 8/9 November at Waterman's Tavern and reached Providence on 9 November. Over the next two days, the infantry brigades followed the artillery into Rhode Island. Following a camp on 9/10 November at Waterman's Tavern, the First French Brigade reached Providence on 10 November and encamped on the same site it had camped 15 months earlier. The Second Brigade joined the First Brigade on the 11th. They did not stay long. Verger recorded that he only "remained two days in camp near the city, and on the third we left town to move into barracks in a wood. A heavy snowfall made us appreciate the barracks, especially since most of our tents were worn out." The "barracks in a wood" were the new campsite on the property of Jeremiah Dexter off of North Main Street. One company of fusiliers from each of the four regiments, which were to embark on the *Fantasque*, were sent to quarters in Pawtucket on 13 November.⁶⁹⁰ The *Fantasque* was in such bad repair, however, that it did not join the marquis de Vaudreuil's fleet when it departed from Boston on 25 December 1782, but remained in Pawtucket until 6 February 1783, when she sailed directly to France. They were the last French soldiers to leave Rhode Island.

The relocation of the French camp onto the property of Jeremiah Dexter on 13 November was necessitated according to Baron Closen because the owner of the land they had encamped refused to let the French cut wood on his property.⁶⁹¹ The amount of wood needed for both the barracks as well as for cooking and warmth was enormous: during their brief stay in Providence, French forces cut a total of 1,681 cords of wood from almost 60 acres of land.⁶⁹² With that wood they built 325 barracks and huts, 266 of which were sold on 31 December 1782, barely a month after the departure of French forces.⁶⁹³

Closen liked Providence because "the army is being very hospitably received here. The residents form a kind, good-natured and gay society, and all who want to cultivate their acquaintances or to make new ones, can only praise the way in which they are treated everywhere." He was fortunate that in preparation for departure he could sell his horses to a fellow officer who would remain in America "at cost"; others were not so fortunate. Verger and many of his fellow officers "disposed of our horses at a very low price. I sold mine, which had cost me 16 *louis*, for 25 piasters."

⁶⁹⁰ Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 1 p. 170, fn. 163, and Bouvet, *Santé*, p. 104, and Acomb, *Closen*, p. 267.

⁶⁹¹ Acomb, *Closen*, p. 267.

⁶⁹² *Colonial Records* vol. 9, p. 656.

⁶⁹³ Preston, "Rochambeau and the French troops," p. 22.

Sixteen gold *louis d'or* are the equivalent of 384 livres, 25 piasters are less than 150 livres. A loss of some 240 livres on a horse in 1 1/2 years was steep indeed: Verger, like Schwerin, was only a lieutenant, for him 240 livres were almost 1/4 of an annual income.— Since virtually all of the oxen had all died in Virginia the wagon train on the way north in 1782, militarily organized under Captain Daniel Olcott of Hartford, the "Father of the Turnpike", consisted almost exclusively horses. Drivers were discharged along the road as they were no longer need; the single largest number at Crompond, modern-day Yorktown Heights, in Westchester County, New York. The Pension Application of John Johnson (R 5634) of Clarke County, Kentucky even includes his discharge dated 21 October 1781.

John Johnson a Driver With Wadsworth
& Carter agents to the French army
is hereby Discharged from said service
on acct of sickness and have
liberty to return to Home
one from Daniel Olcott
Crompond October 21 1781

Upon arrival in Boston most of the horses were purchased by the Continental Army and driven via East Sudbury, Shrewsbury, Brookfield, Hadley, Chesterfield and Pittsfield to Continental Army depots along the Hudson.⁶⁹⁴ In his pension application Charles Atwell of Prince William County in Virginia wrote:

We left Williamsburg I think 1 July following, and proceeded under the Command of Col. Wadsworth with the artillery to Boston, where we arrived about 5th Dec'r. following. On our arrival there, we were sent with the horses of the Artillery to a village near a hundred miles above Boston called Hatfield or Hatley or some such name [probably Hadley

⁶⁹⁴ Pension application, S10064 for Charles Atwell of Prince William County in Virginia. There are about two dozen pension applications by wagon drivers for the year 1782.

MA, 75 mi W of Boston], for the purpose of wintering the horses. A short time after we reached there, we were discharged, received our pay, and returned home." In a second affidavit he elaborated: In the month of February 1782 another call of men taking place to move the artillery from York to the North he again tendered his service, and being appointed Captain, and [one or two illegible words] from a place called Bradley in Prince William County, and marching through Dumfries and Fredericksburg, proceeded with the Troops upon this expedition into Williamsburg to which place the artillery had been removed. they were placed under the command of Wadsworth, and proceeded to Baltimore, where they were some time detained, and moving on, they arrived at Boston in the month of December, where the artillery was deposited. From this place he was sent in charge of the horses up the Country, to the amount of 4 or 500 to winter. They were carried to the neighbourhood of Hatchfield or Hartley (he does not recollect which) where he left them, after eating his Christmas Dinner, and returned home, after a service of at least ten months from the time he left home.

Darius O'Neill of Cocke County, Tennessee deposed (Application W5448) that

At Williamsburg we remained until June [1782]. While at Williamsburg we were regularly paraded, mustered and drilled we were encamped in I fell within sight of Williamsburg. From Williamsburg we were marched under Colonel Olcutt I Hanover Court House, by Fredericksburg, to Falmouth, and by Dumfries on to Baltimore. We stopped two days at Falmouth. We arrived at Baltimore in July where we remained for six weeks encamped in a field adjoining the Town. From Baltimore, we marched in September to Philadelphia by Chester. We remained 2 days at Philadelphia, when we were marched from that city through New Jersey to Trenton, Princeton and Morris town on to King's Ferry on the Hudson River in the State of New York. At King's Ferry we crossed the River and encamped on the other side on the top of the Hill, where we remained three weeks. Thence we were marched to Providence Rhode Island, where we remained for several days. Thence, we were marched to the City of Boston, where we remained 2 days. From Boston we were marched to Chesterfield in the State of Massachusetts, 45 miles from the City of Boston. At Chesterfield we were discharged, having rested there one day.

As during the previous year, supplies came mostly from Connecticut.

Wadsworth & Carter
 To Tho: Water
 To Transporting 80 Bbls Corn from
 Coventry 15 Miles
 Received the above contents in full Nov: 13 1782
 Tho: Water

Receipt for Thomas Waterman for having transported 80 barrels corn from Coventry to Providence on 13 November 1782. Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, CTHS.

1782 Nov. 13
 Wadsworth & Carter
 To Samuel Cleaveland
 To Transporting 1 Load Oats from Canterbury
 to Providence 34 miles @ 2/-
 The above sum being in full for my
 one mentioned — Sam: Cleaveland
 P. B. B.

On 13 November 1782, Samuel Cleaveland was paid for having brought oats from Canterbury to Providence. Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, CTHS.

Mr. Lloyds of Cranston Nov 25 1778
 Nehemiah Rhodes
 and Delivered to M. Lloyds
 24 Bushels of Corn @ 6/ 8 = 7 14
 10 feet of wood @ 10/ 6 = 1 2 6
 10 days work @ 1/ 0 = 1 0
 Total 8 17 6
 Received Eight Pounds 17/ 6
 being in full for the above Bill
 J. Davis

Nehemiah Rhodes of Cranston provided corn and wood from his lot along the Pawtuxet River for French forces while in Rhode Island.⁶⁹⁵

During their time in the barracks on Dexter's property, Thomas Lloyd Halsey of Boston appears to have been the chief supplier of Rochambeau's troops. A file in the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence entitled "My Account against the French Army" gives a good insight into the needs of these forces while quartered in Providence.⁶⁹⁶ It lists thousands of feet of boards for barracks and bunks - Boston, 30th Nov 1782 Thomas L Halsey bot of Jon Davis 3909 feet of boards @ 78/ £ 15 4/ 10d" and "1322 feet @ 78/ £ 5 3/ d2 - as well as firewood, oats, hay and straw for November 1782, viz. "

26 cwt Hay @ 6/ & weigh @ 1/8	£ 7 17/d8
100 Bushels of Oats @ 4/6	£ 22 10/
29 Cords Wood @ 36/	£ 50 4/
	=====
as p. Mons Jallets Receipts to Decr 1 1782	£ 82 11/ 8
plus 100 Bushels Oats @ 4/6	£ 22 10/
	=====
	£ 105 1/ 8

⁶⁹⁵ Nehemiah's slave Richard, "born in Africa" ca. 1760, enlisted in the Rhode Island Regiment sometime in the spring of 1778 "to gain his freedom". He received a musket ball in his right arm at Monmouth on 28 June 1778, served with his regiment at Yorktown and was furloughed on 15 June 1783. See his Pension application W 22060.

⁶⁹⁶ Manuscripts XIV, 1,2. RIHS.

On 30 November, Halsey charged Wadsworth and Carter for

129 ¼ Cords Wood @ 36/	£ 232 13/
420 Bushels of Oats @ 4/6	£ 94 10/
103 Quintals Hay @ 6/	£ 31 6/ 6
4 tons Straw & weighing @ 7/4	£ 9 19/ 4
=====	
	£ 368 8/ 10 ⁶⁹⁷

"Because of the large amount of matériel to be embarked," the artillery departed from Providence on 16 November, barely a week after arrival, and reached Boston three later, where "the troops were lodged in vacant houses, the officers also."

Before leaving Rhode Island and the United States for good, many of the officers were determined made one last visit to Newport. Writing from Asa Barnes' Tavern near Farmington in Connecticut in the evening of 27 October 1782, Fersen told Wadsworth that he wanted to ride to Newport from Hartford via Lebanon and needed a good horse and a guide. Since Fersen feared that Rochambeau might not give him permission for this excursion he warned Wadsworth not to "mention any thing of this to the General or anybody else."⁶⁹⁸ But he was not the officer determined to get to Newport. Traveling via Hartford, Lebanon, New London, Fort Griswold and Westerly, Lauberdière reached Newport on 7 November and before long was joined by Broglie, Ségur, Chabannes, Fersen, Deux-Ponts and Vauban, among others. Determined to have one last big event, they pooled their resources for a ball on 12 November 1782. Clermont-Crèvecœur left Rhode Island, especially Newport, which he visited during his stay in Providence, with fond memories. "It is perhaps the town in all America where the French received the greatest tokens of friendship from the Americans. I confess that I left Newport with regret."⁶⁹⁹

In anticipation of his departure Rochambeau made his farewell visit to Newport on 22 November. By the evening of 23 November he was back in Providence and ready to hand command of his forces over to the *baron* de Vioménil. Anticipating his departure, the General Assembly of Rhode Island on 27 November 1782, expressed its thanks to Rochambeau for his contributions to the American cause:

Nothing can equal our admiration at the manner in which you have participated with the Army of the United States in the fatigues, the toils,

⁶⁹⁷ This listing is not complete but only meant to provide a sample of the goods provided.

⁶⁹⁸ Jeremiah Wadsworth Papers, Box 134, Folder 21-31 October 1782, CTHS.

⁶⁹⁹ Clermont-Crèvecœur in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, vol. 1, p. 81.

and the glory that have attended the allied Arms, but the magnanimity of the Father of his People, and the Protector of the rights of mankind.

Our inquietude at the prospect of your removal would be inexpressible, but from the fullest conviction of the wisdom that directs the Councils of his most Christian Majesty. May Heaven reward your exertions in the cause of humanity, and the particular regard you have paid to the rights of the Citizens. – May your Laurels be crowned by the tinsels of the best of Kings, and the grateful feelings of the most generous People.

In his reply the following day, Rochambeau expressed his "inexpressible pleasure" with which he

and the Troops under my Command have received the marks of Esteem and of acknowledgement which you are so good as to give to the services we have been happy enough to render to the United States, jointly with the American Army, under the orders of General Washington.

This State is the first we have been acquainted with: The friendly behaviour of its inhabitants, now and at our arrival here will give them always a right to our Gratitude. the confidence you have in the Wisdom of the views of our Sovereign, as to the disposition and the march of his troops, must likewise assure you that in no occasion whatever, he will separate his interests from those of his faithfull allies.⁷⁰⁰

While French forces were stationed in Providence, Joseph Brown and James Manning contacted the *baron de Viomenil* on 12 December, asking for his assistance to procure a library of 2000 volumes which Manning had learned had been offered by Louis XVI to Yale but which the college had inexplicably declined. The French king had also offered to establish a professorship in French to be filled "by a Protestant Professor from Geneva" so that Yale would not have to worry about Catholic influences or proselytizing.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰ RISA Letterbooks Governor Greene, vol. 4, Letters from the Governor, 19 January 1780 to February 1807.

⁷⁰¹ <http://library.brown.edu/cds/catalog/catalog.php?verb=render&id=1107184662850977&colid=> Neither the library nor the professorship seem to have been established; as late as 7 January 1784 Samuel Stillman and Benjamin Waterhouse were working on a petition to Louis XVI regarding the professorship which Benjamin Franklin was supposed to deliver to the king.

Providence December 12th 1782

Sir,

Since your Departure from this Town, I have received Information, stamped with the strongest Marks of Authenticity, that our magnanimous Ally, the King of France, from the Representations of M^r Silas Deane, ^{who was} ~~resident at the Court of France~~ ^{late American Minister}, conceived such a favourable Idea of Yale College, in the State of Connecticut, as to make the following generous Offer to the Governors of ^{S^t} College, viz,

"To present them a Library of two Thousand Volumes of the best Authors in his Kingdom, and to establish a ^{at his own Expence} Professorship, ~~at his own Expence~~ in the French Language; to, to obviate, doubtless, every Ground of Suspicion of any religious Influence, proposed to send them a Protestant, ^{Professor} from Geneva to fill the Chair!" Which Proposition, for Reasons best known to themselves, they did not think proper to accept; and, ordered their President, The Rev^d Doct^r Slater, in a Letter to M^r Deane, to announce their Refusal.

On 1 December 1782, Rochambeau, accompanied by his son, by the *comte de Vauban* and the *comte de Lauberdière*, said farewell to his troops in Providence and in a heavy snowfall set out for Newburgh to say his farewell to Washington. Traveling this time via Angel's Tavern the group spent the first night at Dorrance' Tavern just across the state line in Connecticut.⁷⁰² Canterbury, Windham, Bolton, Hartford, Farmington, Litchfield, a community of 70 or 80 homes, were the next stops along the route until Moorhouse Tavern in Dutchess County in New York was reached on 6 December. From there it was but a day's journey to Newburgh and Washington' headquarters. Rochambeau was pleased to renew his acquaintance

⁷⁰² The site of Jeremiah Angell's tavern and parts of the old Plainfield Pike (RISR 14) taken by Rochambeau were inundated when the Scituate Reservoir was built in the 1920s; see the photograph in Appendix 3.

with Mrs. Washington, while some of his officers had the honor to meet her for the first time.⁷⁰³ After a seven-day stay, Rochambeau pressed on to Philadelphia on the 14th, where he received the thanks of Congress. On 8 January 1783, the frigate *Emeraude*, with Rochambeau on board and British frigates in hot pursuit, sailed out of Annapolis harbor for France.⁷⁰⁴



Angell's Tavern in Scituate (Route 14).

Courtesy of Donald Carpenter

The service the Marquis De Chastelux received here in 1780 made him suggest to Rochambeau to take this road (Route 12) to Waterman's Tavern in Coventry but Rochambeau chose a route through Knightsville/Crnaston instead. It is now under the Scituate Reservoir.

By that time his infantry had left the American continent as well. Verger had left Providence with his regiment on 4 December and marched into Boston two days later. They left behind the need to settle claims, which in Providence too like wherever else the French had been, resulted in exorbitant demands of over 4,600 silver dollars, "which Sum the Intendant of the said Army and the Commissary of

⁷⁰³ This brief description of the journey is based on Lauberdière's *Journal*, fols. 209-214. Lauberdière is not clear where the group stayed the first night. For more details, and rather unflattering description of Mrs. Washington by the young *comte*, see my "America the Ungrateful." *American Heritage* vol. 48, no. 1, (February/March 1997), pp. 101-106.

⁷⁰⁴ The vessel arrived at Saint-Nazaire on 10 February 1783.

War conceived to be enormous and extravagant." The General Assembly found it therefore necessary to appoint a special committee to look into these claims. The committee returned with justified claims totaling 3,627 1/2 dollars for damages, mostly for wood. The claimants, particularly Jeremiah Dexter, Joseph Dexter and Thomas Arnold were furious when they were forced to return the overpay.⁷⁰⁵ In its February 1783 session, the General Assembly found it necessary to offer legal protection to Jabez Bowen, who had been in charge of the re-estimate. Bowen was "threatened with a prosecution at law, for the part he hath taken in procuring a reconsideration of the damages allowed to the proprietors of the woodland in North Providence, for the wood cut by the army of His Most Christian Majesty." In case such a prosecution was to take place, the "Assembly will, at the expense of the state, defend in such action, and will indemnify him from all costs and damages that shall accrue thereon."⁷⁰⁶

By then Rochambeau's infantry was thousands of miles away in the Caribbean. In the morning of the 25th, Christmas Day, the French fleet had raised anchor in Boston harbor to sail to the West Indies.⁷⁰⁷ Though neither Rochambeau nor his troops knew it, Preliminaries of Peace had been signed in Paris on 30 November 1782, in which "His Britannic Majesty acknowledges the said United States ... to be free Sovereign and independent States." News of the signing of the Preliminaries of Peace reached the troops in mid-February 1783. In mid-April the troops sailed back to France, where they arrived in late June. At just about the same time, Providence witnessed the greatest celebration in years. On 23 April, 1783, the entire town turned out to hear "the Proclamation of Congress for a Cessation of Arms." The firing of cannon, the tolling of bells, church services, a fireworks display, a procession, and a state dinner marked the occasion

Lauzun's Legion had turned south again in October 1782 to Delaware, where it spent the winter of 1782/83. After six months in Wilmington, Lauzun, the 528 men left of his *légion*, and most of the remnants of the *expédition particulière* sailed from Philadelphia for Europe on 11 May 1783. The five frigates that took the remnants of Rochambeau's forces to Europe -- *la Gloire*, *la Danaë*, *l'Astrée*, *l'Active*, *Le St. James* --

⁷⁰⁵ The proceedings can be followed in Preston, "Rochambeau and the French troops," pp. 20-23.

⁷⁰⁶ *Colonial Records* vol. 9, p. 656.

⁷⁰⁷ An appendix in Noailles, *Marins et Soldats*, p. 408, gives the composition of the troops that depart from Boston as

763 NCOs and rank and file from the Bourbonnois

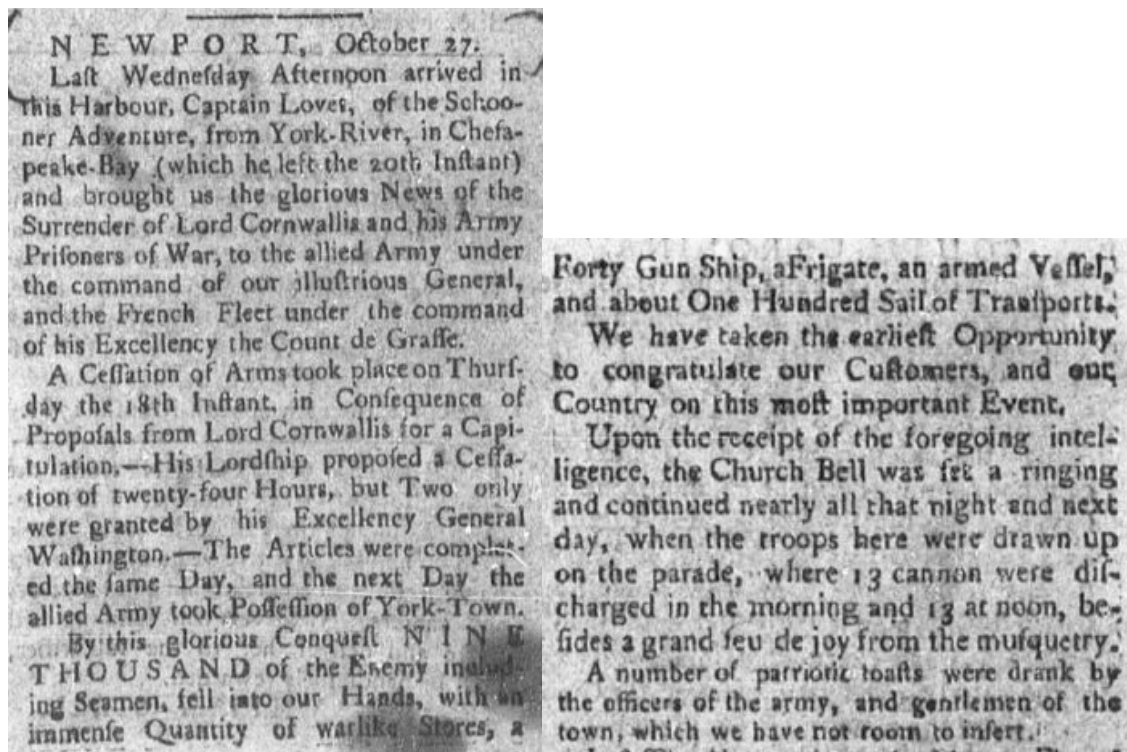
798 from the Soissonnois

772 from the Saintonge

755 from the Royal Deux-Ponts

carried 62 officers, 636 enlisted men, five "femmes de soldats" and 51 domestics to Brest, where they docked around 11 June 1783.⁷⁰⁸

The *expédition particulière* had achieved its goal: with the crucial assistance of French land forces under the *comte* de Rochambeau and a French fleet under the *comte* de Grasse, the capture of Lord Cornwallis on 19 October 1781 had ensured that the United States of America would become a free and independent nation.



The 27 October 1781 issue of the *Newport Mercury* announced the victory at Yorktown

⁷⁰⁸ The embarkation list is in Archives Nationales, Paris, Marine B/4/185. A final transport of 85 soldiers under Captain François Xavier Christophe *baron* de Hell of Lauzun's Legion sailed from Baltimore on the *Pintade* 5 October 1783, and entered Brest on 10 November 1783.

CONCLUSION

In an interview with *American Heritage* historian David McCullough declared: "We wouldn't have a country if it weren't for [the French]," And though historians should not speculate about "what if's," the facts show that French support was indeed vital to the success of the Revolutionary War.

The shots fired at Lexington and Concord had hardly been heard in Paris when French financial and military aid began flowing to the rebellious colonies. Almost 100 volunteers provided crucial expertise for American artillery, engineering, and map-making. In February 1778, France became the first foreign country to recognize the United States as an independent nation. In July 1780, Rochambeau arrived in Newport with over 5,000 officers and men. He and his forces entered into an unknown environment, steeped, for all they knew, in decades of anti-French, anti-Catholic history. Yet as the two cultures got to know each other over the next weeks and months, initial apprehension and fear turned to friendship on all levels, friendship that in some cases survived to be renewed decades later.

Fifteen months after their arrival, Rochambeau's men in cooperation with Continental Army forces and a French navy under Admiral de Grasse decided the outcome of the war at Yorktown. During the 30 months that the 492 officers and 6,038 men of the *expédition particulière* had been in, or on their way to and from America, about 600 men (including 70 in the six months following the return in 1783) died, though only about 75 of them from battle or battle-related wounds. Seven were executed, 316 men, of whom only 26 were native, French-speaking, soldiers, deserted. So did 80 men recruited in America. 140, including 30 "American" recruits, were discharged. Thirty-one officers and 14 enlisted men retired with military pensions in the New World. To put these figures into perspective: within six months of returning to France, Rochambeau's units discharged 832 men whose enlistment had expired!

Rochambeau's troops were not the only French forces to fight in America before, or after, Yorktown. In fact, they represent only a fraction of the total number of Frenchmen fighting for American Independence, which historians have estimated at 18,000 soldiers and 31,000 sailors. In 1776, France had stationed 19 battalions of infantry in her Caribbean possessions; in the course of the war she sent another 29 battalions there for a total of 48 battalions. Rochambeau brought all of 8 infantry battalions with him in 1780. At Yorktown, Rochambeau suffered not even 200 casualties in dead and wounded. Between March and December 1781, the French navy operating in the Caribbean suffered over 5,000 casualties, the equivalent of

almost the entire force under Rochambeau's command. In the defeat in the Battle of the Saints in April 1782, de Grasse suffered over 3,000 casualties, more than fifteen times those of Yorktown.

The French contribution to American victory becomes even more obvious when we look at the role of the French navy. It was Admiral de Grasse' fleet which kept the Royal Navy from making contact with Cornwallis when it sailed out to meet the challenge in the Battle of the Capes in early September 1781. Without the French fleet, British Admiral Graves might just have succeeded in rescuing Cornwallis from Yorktown. The Continental Navy would have been unable to stop him: in 1781, the Royal Navy had about 140 ships of the line of 74 guns or more, the French had 67 capital ships, Spain had 58, the Dutch 19, and the United States had none.

French expenditures for the war were enormous: Robert D. Harris sets the cost of the war for the years 1776-1782 at 928.9 million livres (as opposed to 2,270.5 million livres for the British), with another 125.2 million to be added for the year 1783. At the same time, the total ordinary income of the French crown stood at 377.5 million livres for the year 1776. 91 per cent of the cost of the war was funded by loans, and by the end of 1782, the total constituted debt of the French monarchy had reached 4,538 million livres. Even if the outlays for the war were not the primary cause of the French Revolution, there can be no doubt that an extra billion livres in debt and annual expenditures of some 207 million livres just to service the debt, did nothing to enhance the financial situation of the monarchy between 1783 and the outbreak of the revolution in 1789.⁷⁰⁹

But within the overall French war effort expenditures on the American war were minimal. According to Claude C. Sturgill, "all of the monies directly appropriated for the entire cost" of Rochambeau's forces amounted to exactly 12,730,760 livres or a little over 1 per cent of the total cost of the war.⁷¹⁰ In addition the American rebels received 18 million in loans, to be repaid after the war, as well as outright subsidies of about 9 million from the foreign affairs department and other aid for a total of about 48 million livres spent in support of the American Revolution.

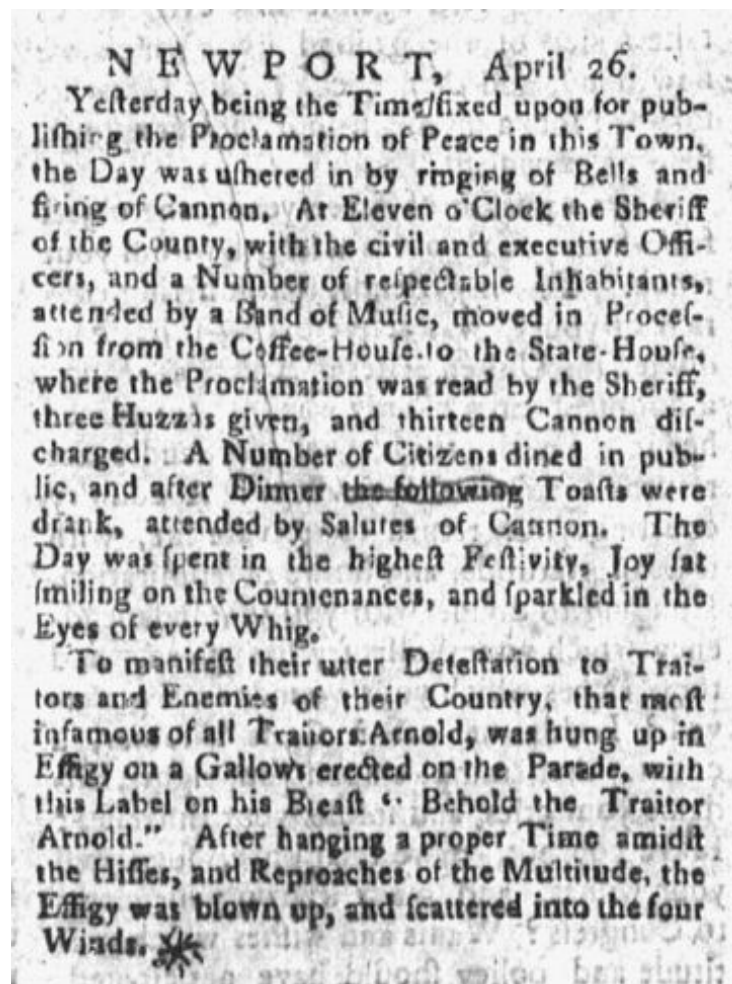
But whatever Royalist France did to support the America's struggle for Independence, nothing can alter the fact that it was American colonists who first challenged British authority. It was American colonists who first proclaimed that "All men are created equal." It was American colonists who risked their lives and

⁷⁰⁹ All figures from Harris, "French Finances," pp. 233-258.

⁷¹⁰ Sturgill, "Observations," p. 183.

their properties to fight for the "truths" which they, and after them the whole world, considered "to be self-evident." It was on their soil that the war was waged. It was they who suffered the devastation and hardships of the war. That no matter where their ancestors had come from in their search for freedom, they would stand together under the leadership of General George Washington and in the crucible of war create their own nation.

Every colony, large or small, from Massachusetts to Virginia, contributed to the success of this struggle. Rhode Island was the first to renounce allegiance to the King and to call for independence, and paid a heavy price for it. The smallest among the colonies embracing the cause of independence, it suffered through long months of deprivation while the town of Newport felt the consequence of British occupation and the war well into the twentieth century. All of that was forgotten, however, when Ephraim Bowen, Sheriff of Newport County, proclaimed peace from the State House shortly before noon on 25 April 1783.



Newport Mercury, 26 April 1783