

Testimony of Colonel (Retired) James M. Johnson, Ph.D.,  
National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association,  
about the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route  
National Historic Trail Designation Act  
before the House Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
October 30, 2007

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands, I am Colonel (Retired) Jim Johnson, the Co-Vice Chair (New York) of the National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association, W3R-USA. As the Military Historian of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the Executive Director of the Hudson River Valley Institute, I have dedicated the last eight years after my retirement from the United States Army to increasing public awareness of the American Revolution. As a doctoral student at Duke University, I studied the American Revolution and wrote my dissertation (later to be a book, *Militiamen, Redcoats, and Rangers*) about its onset in Georgia. As a faculty member and head of the military history program at the United States Military Academy at West Point for fifteen years and now for the last seven years as a professor at Marist College, I have emphasized the crucial significance of the War for American Independence to our heritage and the United States of today. As a re-enactor in the 5<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment, I live the Revolution day in and day out in battles and in public presentations.

As I was retiring from a thirty-year career in the Army in 1999, I was asked by Dr. Jacques Bossière to find a way to educate Americans about the critical role that the French Alliance played in our struggle for independence; the quest for a National Historic Trail was born. I am honored to be here today to testify on behalf the National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association, W3R-USA, an organization that is dedicated to the designation of the route as a National Historic Trail and the education of the public on its significance. I am particularly excited about Congressman Hinchey's legislation, co-sponsored by twenty-one of his colleagues, to create the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail following his successful efforts with Congressman John Larson of Connecticut to guide the successful passage of PL 106-473, the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Heritage Act of 2000. In 2004 Congressman Hinchey was also the architect in the House of the companion 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act.

W3R-USA strongly supports H.R. 1286 and its Senate counterpart, S.B. 686, ensuring the creation of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail and codifying the National Park Service's finding that the National Historic Trail is the preferred alternative. The bills would "amend the National Trails System Act to designate the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route as a National Historic Trail." Meeting the three criteria for designation as a national historic trail, it is the alternative that would best preserve and interpret the resources of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route, and it offers the best value for the American public. The W3R, as we refer to this route, was established by historic use and is historically significant as a result of that use. Soldiers of the Continental

Army and the French *expédition particulière* with their very shoes marked a route along roads and trails that predate the War for American Independence. The United States of America was the ultimate result of their journey. The route satisfies five of the six National Historic Landmark criteria for national significance. Finally, the W3R has significant potential for public recreational use and for historic interest. The route contains numerous historic resources associated with the march of the French and Continental armies serving under Generals Rochambeau and Washington.

The current grassroots' initiative to have Congress designate the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route (W3R) a National Historic Trail started at Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, New York, on December 16, 1999. It has since matured into the National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association (W3R-USA). W3R has national and international significance, linking nine states and the District of Columbia from Massachusetts to Virginia to commemorate the considerable contribution that General George Washington and the Continental Army and General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau and his French Expeditionary Corps made for American liberty and independence. The route commemorates a French-American campaign in 1781 first to lay siege to General Sir Henry Clinton's army in New York City and later to surround the main Southern British army under General Charles Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, and the return marches in 1782. Without this historic alliance and the victories at Saratoga, New York, and Yorktown, there might not have been an American republic and maybe not even a French republic.

The Franco-American journey was an amazing feat of endurance and military achievement with British armies at points along the route. Elements of the French Army marched and then sailed to their destiny at Yorktown from June until September 1781. The Continental Army also made the march and then voyage from Philipsburg, New York, to the York River in Virginia. It was at Philipsburg, on August 14, that Generals Washington and Rochambeau learned that the fleet of French Admiral François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, was sailing to the Chesapeake Bay. In 1782 the French Army retraced its steps back to Boston, Massachusetts, to board ships for the Caribbean, and the Continental Army returned for its final encampment at Newburgh and New Windsor, New York. The French Expeditionary Corps used thirty-eight camps in its march to Virginia and fifty-four camps for the return.

Designating a National Historic Trail will allow the National Park Service (NPS) with its partners to find, to interpret, and to preserve the individual sites along the route and to link them together as a string of pearls. This initiative has received local, county and state government assistance and international support. Many of the historic vistas associated with the American Revolution will be lost to urban sprawl if action is not taken now. The W3R is an opportunity to combine historical and environmental preservation because, in addition to allowing the historical interpretation of a nationally significant route, the protection by local partners of the individual sites that comprise it will have environmental benefits with linkages to already existing and planned greenways and trails that will save the available open space along the route should it become available from willing sellers. The trail itself will need no extra land since it generally follows existing highways and roads. As explained in the National Park Service's *Resource Study & Environmental Assessment*, individual property rights will be preserved. "The establishment of most national historic trails has not required federal acquisition of any land.

Any action resulting from this study must respect private property rights while protecting the rights of the public to access and enjoy public lands. . . . No acquisition of lands or interests in lands is proposed or anticipated in order to implement the trail. However, while the federal government would not acquire lands or other resources, the various states, local governments, and other organizations would not be precluded from acquiring lands and resources they deem to be of significant historical interest for preservation and public use.” The bottom line on the property issue is specifically addressed in H.R. 1286: “The United States shall not acquire for the trail any land or interest in land outside the exterior boundary of any federally-managed area without the consent of the owner of the land or interest in land.”

We of the W3R-USA have returned after seven years to finish the work that Congress started in 2000; in fact the original Congressional actions were started in 1975 as a part of the U.S. Bicentennial. Under the leadership of Congressman Maurice Hinchey and sponsor Congressman John Larson of Connecticut, Congress passed H.R.4794, which was signed by President Bill Clinton on November 9, 2000, and became Public Law No: 106-473: The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Heritage Act of 2000. Then First Lady, now Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, designated the W3R a Millennium Trail in November as well. Nine states have followed suit to designate and to mark the portions of the W3R within their borders thus laying a solid foundation for the National Historic Trail to follow. For example, New York State’s agency, Heritage New York, designated the Washington-Rochambeau Trail through Westchester and Rockland counties as a part of the New York State Revolutionary War Heritage Trail and included it in its map/brochure. It is also marked in the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area’s (HRVNHA) American Revolutionary map guides, "The American Revolution in the Hudson River Valley" and “Revolutionary War Routes in the Hudson River Valley.”

The Florence Gould Foundation contributed funding for a historical study of the W3R in New York completed by Dr. Robert Selig in 2001, an archeological survey from Public Archeology Survey Team completed in 2005, and the preservation of the Odell House, the headquarters of General Rochambeau, in Hartsdale, New York. Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland/D.C., and New Jersey have also completed historical studies. Virginia’s study is being completed as we speak, and Virginia, following in Connecticut’s footsteps, is actively installing interpretive panels along their portion of this 685-mile-long route. On July 4, 2006 as a pilot project, a touch-screen kiosk devoted to information about the W3R was installed at the Amtrak Station in Wilmington, Delaware. This August, the W3R-USA launched a website, an information commons, which highlights activities, events, scholarly research, and educational opportunities and heritage tourism efforts related to the American Revolution and the continued rebuilding of French and American relations. W3R-USA partnered with the U.S. Army’s Center for Military History and Dr. Selig to publish *March to Victory -- Washington, Rochambeau, and the Yorktown Campaign of 1781*. The New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) has allocated funding to the HRVNHA to mark and to interpret W3R-NY through Westchester and Rockland counties. DOTs in Delaware, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Virginia have funded similar projects.

W3R-USA would like to have the W3R designated as a National Historic Trail by Congress as a legacy of the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution. In June 2002 W3R-NY and the NPS held a symposium on the W3R at West Point, New York. An international panel of scholars

discussed the significance of the presence and passage of the French Expeditionary Force along the route before and after the siege and victory at Yorktown. In July 2005 an encampment at Fort Adams, Newport, Rhode Island, kicked off the commemoration of the French involvement in the War for American Independence. The public celebration featured historian David McCullough as a keynote speaker, along with former French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte and the President of the Naval War College. The event was attended by W3R members and supporters from all nine of the states plus D.C. and France. The W3R states then held appropriate celebrations and re-enactments in 2006 to spotlight the 225th anniversary of the march of the French army to New York and the Continental and French armies to Yorktown. Four re-enactors marched the full 685 miles from Rhode Island to Virginia from June-October 2006. The climax of their own journey was the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Yorktown, Virginia, which recreated the battle with over 2,000 re-enactors, for the enjoyment and education of thousands of visitors. Pennsylvania remembered the march to Yorktown with a grand parade through Philadelphia, and New York commemorated that journey and the return of Rochambeau's army to New York with re-enactments on August 26-27, 2006, and September 22-23, 2007, of its crossing of the Hudson River on those dates in 1781 and 1782.

While these reenactments of the march in 2006 drew attention to the final military campaign of the American Revolution, the identification and preservation of the route and its associated sites and official recognition of the W3R will allow citizens and heritage tourists from around the world to retrace the steps of the French and American soldiers by following maps, signs, and electronic commentary along the National Historic Trail. Unlike the celebration of the march in 1981 during the Bicentennial, concrete results will come from this 225th anniversary initiative. Thanks to the efforts of W3R-NY, and the ten other W3R chapters, W3R-USA, and the HRVNHA, once Congress designates the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route a National Historic Trail, it will become an instrument of education about the War for Independence, the social and cultural activities of the period, the environment, and French-American relations. For more information see the W3R-USA's website and Information Commons, <http://www.w3r-us.org/> and [www.w3r-commons.org/blog](http://www.w3r-commons.org/blog).

General George Washington himself remembered with wonder as a "standing miracle" what the Continental Army had accomplished in eight long years of war as he issued his farewell orders to the Continental Army on November 2, 1783, in Newburgh, New York. He and the Continental Army could not have pulled off that standing miracle without General Rochambeau and his French Expeditionary Corps. French and American soldiers marched and died along the route from Rhode Island to Virginia and back. On the eve of the state visit to the United States of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, we should remember the magnificence of that joint American-French "standing miracle" today and pass that remembrance into the future with the designation of the Washington-Rochambeau Route National Historic Trail. I strongly urge that you support passage of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail Designation Act.

Thank you.