

W3R[®]-US Auto Tour through Virginia

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Brief Overview of the French Military Presence

On August 14, 1781, Washington and Rochambeau accepted Admiral de Grasse's proposal for the French fleet to sail from the Caribbean and trap Cornwallis in Yorktown VA. The allied armies immediately marched south from New York. The French fleet arrived first, drove off a British fleet trying to relieve Cornwallis, and on September 12 established a blockade line across the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay with 36 ships-of-the-line.

From Georgetown (then part of MD) the officers travelled to Mount Vernon. During September 10 and 11 Generals Washington and Rochambeau and their senior staff members enjoyed the amenities of Mount Vernon and consulted about very serious military matters. Continuing toward Williamsburg the officers spent the night in Fredericksburg. The next day they travelled 56 miles to the Hanover Court House Inn. The next day (September 14) they went 47 miles to reach Williamsburg, designated as the staging area for the siege on Yorktown.

The allies began digging siege trenches around Yorktown on October 6. The British asked to discuss surrender terms on October 17, and on October 19 the British troops marched out to surrender their arms. This event set the stage for a general armistice in 1782 and agreement on a peace treaty in 1783. Yorktown was the last major engagement of the Revolutionary War on U.S. soil.

Immediately after the victory at Yorktown the Continental forces returned north to block any possible move up the Hudson River by British Gen. Howe's forces in New York City. After spending the winter guarding captured troops and materials in Virginia the French regiments marched north in two divisions spaced a day's march apart. The first group left on July 1, 1782.

For more details on the 1781 history and march route click the History link in w3r-archive.org and choose the link to this state. The link to Historical Maps leads to ten NPS maps with a shaded path where the roads taken in 1781 are overlaid on a modern roadmap.

Auto Tour of the W3R[®]

In Virginia much of the historic route has been marked with small green highway markers with white lettering. Their locations were noted in a 1981 brochure by Durf McJoynt, P.O. Box 137, Mount Vernon, VA. In what follows, SR is the abbreviation for State Route and SnR for Secondary Route.

1. From Frances Scott Key Bridge in Georgetown (US 66, Rt 50) cross into Virginia (stay right) and take a left onto Wilson Road (Rt 110, Jefferson Davis Parkway) and follow it until it merges with US 1 south to Rt 235 south to George Washington's home at Mount Vernon*. This skips Alexandria*, but takes us quickly to Mount Vernon.
2. After your visit take SR 235 west back to US 1, left on SnR 611 to US 1 again, through Woodbridge, Dumfries, Stafford Court House, and Falmouth.
3. Take SR 2 to New Post, Wideawake, Villboro to SnR 626 to SnR 609 to SR 2 again. Then SnR 631 to SR 2 north of Bowling Green to SnR 695 south of Bowling Green to SR 2 again to SnD 627 to SnR 654 west to SnR 656, then SnR 648 south to Lorne where they moved onto SnR 649 to SnR 600 to SnR602 to SnR 651 and back and forth across SR 2 several times to stay at the Hanover Court House Inn.
4. Take SnR 605 to SnR 604 to SnR 606 east of Studley to Old Church and Tunstall then SnR 609 to SR 249 to SR 30 to US 60 past Toana, Norge, and Lightfoot to arrive at Williamsburg*. This was the staging area from which the allied regiments marched to their siege positions in Yorktown. Use Williamsburg as a center for exploration -- more hotels here than at Yorktown).

SIDE TRIP TO JAMESTOWN: Take Colonial National Historic Parkway 10.0 miles south to Jamestown*.

SIDE TRIP TO LYNNHAVEN BAY:

Go NW on Visitor Center Drive (becomes VA-132 N) for 1.6 miles
 Turn left on VA143 W for 0.4 miles and turn right onto I-64 east for 43.4 miles
 (through the tunnel under the James River)
 Take Exit 282 to US-13 north (Northampton Blvd) for 4.6 miles
 Turn right on US-60 (East Shore Drive) for 2.0 miles
 Turn right into E. Stratford Road, then left into Piedmont Circle and Lynnhaven Promenade.

SIDE TRIP TO YORKTOWN: Take Colonial National Historic Parkway east 13.9 miles to the NPS Yorktown Visitor's Center in Yorktown.

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Pearls along the Necklace -- Nearby Revolutionary-Era Sites

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON: This site and its associated museums would take many days to explore. The allied march and siege are described in detail, and manikins of many of the allied generals (U.S. and French) are on display here.

JAMESTOWN: This port was the main disembarkation point for the U.S. and French troop transports and for unloading the siege cannon brought from Newport RI. The main French fleet remained in a blockade line across the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.

LYNNHAVEN BAY: From the viewing platform on the bridge you have a good view of where the blockade line was established across the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. There is or should be soon a marker about this W3R[®] activity in 1781.

WILLIAMSBURG: This was the capital of Virginia until the Revolutionary War and that area has been restored to its late 1770s splendor. The College of William and Mary served as a hospital for sick and injured soldiers, many of whom are buried there. General Washington's stepson, Jack, died of "camp fever" here. Colonial Williamsburg recreates the look and spirit of the town as it was around 1781. Go to their website to decide what to see when you visit. Other sites related to the W3R[®] :
=> National headquarters for the Sons of the Revolution.

YORKTOWN: There are many historic homes and museums here. Many of the monuments, exhibits, and interpretive signs tell the story of French troops and leaders here.

=> National Park Service's Yorktown Visitors Center

=> American Revolution Museum at Yorktown, 200 Water St (Route 1020), Yorktown VA

More sites could be added here.