

The victory at the battles in Saratoga in October 1777 bore new fruit on July 10, 1780, when French Gen. Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Viscount de Rochambeau, sailed into Newport, Rhode Island, with his expedition particulière of almost 6,000 soldiers. The arrival of the French set in motion a series of events that led to the decisive victory of the American Revolution at Yorktown, Virginia, 16 months later. British Gen. Sir Henry Clinton did everything in his power to confront the French at Newport over the course of the summer. In this chess match, Gen. George Washington scrambled to move his forces from Morristown, New Jersey, into the Hudson Valley to confront Clinton should he move an army north. A key player in Washington's plan was Maj. Gen. Benedict Arnold, designated to be the left wing commander of the army in the campaign that never was.

Following Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates' capture of Lt. Gen. John Burgoyne's Convention Army on October 17, 1777, the French government moved to recognize the United States. On February 6, 1778, Conrad Alexander Gerard, representing King Louis XVI, signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce in Paris with three American envoys, Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee. Not only did this document recognize the independence from Great Britain of the "United States of North America," it also pledged that the French would be America's principal ally should war develop between her and the British, "their common Enemy." The Continental Congress ratified the agreement on May 4, and war effectively commenced between France and England on June 17, when British ships fired on two French frigates off Portsmouth, England. A French fleet under Adm. Charles Hector Théodat d'Estaing first appeared off New York on July 11. Now, in the summer of 1780, Rochambeau had come to Rhode Island to help the Americans gain victory after the failures of a predecessor at Newport in 1778 and Savannah in 1779. The French spent the winter of 1780-81 in Newport and then marched south to New York in June 1781. The presence of Rochambeau's army and the promise of a cooperating French fleet brought new life to the flagging American cause.

Clinton understood the significance of Rochambeau's expedition. He had been alerted to the arrival of "a French fleet and army" at Newport by Arnold, whom he noted "had some time before made me an offer of his service." He conceived "the idea of attacking their troops immediately upon their landing there" and prepared "a select corps" of 6,000 men for the operation. Because of a misunderstanding between Clinton and Vice Adm. Marriot Arbuthnot, the attack never took place. Clinton lost the initiative in the north to Washington and Rochambeau; he would never regain it. Instead, he staked British fortunes on a southern campaign, which, despite some intermediate victories, led to Yorktown.

As Clinton anticipated, Washington ventured into the Hudson Valley, arriving at the Beverly Robinson house (headquarters of the Highland Department's commander, Maj. Gen. Robert Howe) on July 30, 1780. From there, he wrote Rochambeau that the only way he could be "useful" would be to "menace New York, and even to attack it, if the force remaining there does not exceed what I have reason to believe." By the end of

July, Washington assembled most of his army near Peekskill, to which he moved his own headquarters on July 31. By early August the immediate crisis had passed, and Washington sent the army back to New Jersey to await Clinton's next move. In the meantime, Arnold turned down his appointment to command the Main Army's left wing and accepted instead command of "West point and its dependencies." His slide toward treason was gaining momentum.

The 225th anniversary of the arrival of the French in Newport will be celebrated July 8-10. Details are posted at www.hudsonrivervalley.net. To learn more about the heritage of the Hudson River Valley, subscribe to The Hudson River Valley Review by visiting <http://www.hudsonrivervalley.net/hrvr>; issue 20.1 is devoted to the American Revolution.

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