

Remembering the Revolution  
September 2006

In September 1781 the attention of both General George Washington and finally even British General Sir Henry Clinton turned to the southern army of Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis now at Yorktown, Virginia. General Washington and French General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, with their combined force of about 7,000 troops had given Sir Henry the slip as they first threatened Staten Island and then moved rapidly through New Jersey, paraded down the streets of Philadelphia on September 2, and arrived at Head of Elk, Maryland, on September 6. Only on September 7 did Clinton report what had transpired to Lord George Germain, the Secretary of State for the American Department. In his last dispatch of August 20, he had shown concern about the threat posed by French Admiral François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse's fleet to New York. With a reinforcement of 2,400 Germans and recruits, he had considered a foray to disrupt any foraging his adversaries might attempt. Such a move proved unnecessary as the two allied armies had stolen a march on him as they moved south. After Washington and Rochambeau stopped for a visit at Mount Vernon, Virginia, they arrived at Williamsburg on September 15<sup>th</sup>. On September 30, both armies were camped near Cornwallis's works on the York River. Washington's deception plan, escape from the British in New York, and march and voyage to Virginia had surely worked beyond even his wildest expectation.

The allied armies, alongside the 5,200 Continentals and militiamen of Major General Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, were poised to lay siege to Cornwallis's trapped army of some 6,000 men. And trapped they were because on September 5, Admiral de Grasse had damaged the British fleet under Admiral Thomas Graves so badly in the Battle off the Virginia Capes that he was forced to withdraw allowing de Grasse and Admiral Jacques-Melchoir Saint-Laurent, Comte de Barras, to move into the York River. DeGrasse put Major General Claude-Anne, Marquis de Saint-Simon's 3,300 men ashore to join Rochambeau's 4,000 soldiers, and Barras delivered the critical siege artillery from Newport, Rhode Island. By the end of September the Allied investment of Cornwallis's position would be complete. Among Washington's own 4,731 Continentals in the encircling force was Brigadier General James Clinton's New York brigade comprising the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> New York regiments and two light companies. Yorkers would heed their Commander in Chief's call to "distinguish themselves on every Occasion that offers; the Justice of the cause in which we are engaged and the Honor of the two Nations must inspire every breast with sentiments that are the presage of Victory."

In the Hudson River Valley Washington had left Major General William Heath in charge. Because of the importance that the Commander in Chief placed on Fortress West Point and the Hudson River, he assigned a sizeable force of 6,715 men to protect them: two regiments of Continentals from New Hampshire, ten from Massachusetts, and five from Connecticut and the Corps of Invalids, Sheldon's Legion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Continental Artillery, as well as local militia. He reminded Heath that "The Security of West Point and the Posts in the Highlands is to be considered as the first Object of your attention." Of note,

in the same order, as a way to consolidate his forces, Washington directed Heath to dismantle the redoubt on the east side of Dobbs Ferry and to consider what to do with the block house on the other side of the ferry. Heath as it turned out would be able to rest easy: while Clinton had considered attacking the allied forces in August, now he was scrambling to help Cornwallis. He had promised Germain on the 7<sup>th</sup> that he would “exert himself to the utmost to relieve Lord Cornwallis.” He would not be able to keep his promise.

To learn more about the American Revolution in the Hudson River Valley and the French and American march to Yorktown, Virginia, in this the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War for Independence, log onto [www.hudsonrivervalley.net](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.net) and [www.hudsonrivervalley.com](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.com). For the Spring 2006 issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review* see <http://www.hudsonrivervalley.net/hrvr/subscribe/index.php>. Huzza from the Hudson Highlands.

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