

Next to the battles of Saratoga on the Hudson River, the battle of Yorktown in Virginia was the most decisive of the American Revolution. No one knew it at the time, but the surrender by Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis of his army of over 8,000 men there on October 19, 1781, would end the last major engagement of the war; for the next two years the fate of the two nations would be back in the hands of the diplomats and politicians.

General George Washington and French Generals Jean Bapiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, Claude-Anne, Marquis de Saint-Simon, and Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, had successfully concentrated 20,000 allied forces and entrapped Cornwallis by land on the York peninsula by September 29<sup>th</sup>. The French Admirals François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, and Jacques-Melchoir Saint-Laurent, Comte de Barras, had sealed the sea routes of escape. On September 30, Cornwallis, outnumbered by almost 3 to 1, abandoned his outer works allowing the Allies to draw the noose even tighter. For the next nineteen days of October, the Allies would conduct a classic siege against Cornwallis's defenses: ten redoubts anchoring the lines protecting Yorktown and four redoubts with associated works at Gloucester Point. After a skirmish on October 3, Colonel Armand-Louis Gontaut, duc de Lauzun, and his Legion of some 300 cavalrymen and 300 infantrymen joined forces with Brigadier General George Weedon's brigade of Virginia militia and Brigadier General Claude Gabriel, Marquis de Choisy's French Marines to bottle up Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton's Legion and other light forces at the latter. In accordance with doctrine, the Allies moved their troops and batteries of siege artillery progressively closer to the British lines. On October 7, Lafayette's division occupied the first parallel some 600-800 yards from the British works, allowing French and American cannons to open fire on October 9. Major Generals Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus, Baron von Steuben's and Charles-Joseph-Hyacinth du Houx, Chevalier de Viomenil's divisions moved the second parallel forward to within 350 yards of Yorktown by the 14<sup>th</sup>. To gain control of the last section near the York, that night a French force from the regiments Deux Pont and Gatenois captured Redoubt No. 9 while an American force of Light Infantrymen under New Yorker Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton captured Redoubt No. 10, losing nine killed and thirty-one wounded. Among the commanders of the Second New York in that attack was Captain John F. Hamtramck, formerly a company commander in the 5<sup>th</sup> New York, who, with victory, avenged the losses his regiment had suffered at Fort Montgomery four years earlier.

After one last failed sortie and the fire from over 100 Allied cannons continued, Cornwallis knew that Yorktown was doomed, leading him to report to General Sir Henry Clinton: "The safety of the place is, therefore, so precarious that I cannot recommend that the fleet and army should run any great risk in endeavoring to save us." As it turned out, Clinton's ill-fated efforts at rescue by leading reinforcements from New York came too late as they arrived off the Capes with 7,000 men only on October 24, five days after 7,247 of Cornwallis's troops grounded their muskets allegedly to the tune, "The World Turned Upside Down." For the British, the words were prophetic as the Prime Minister Sir Frederick North realized on November 25<sup>th</sup>, when, upon learning of Cornwallis's surrender, remarked: "Oh, God! It is all over." On the other hand, General Washington

wrote the President of Congress, Thomas McKean, that “The Singular Spirit of Emulation, which animated the whole Army from the first Commencement of our Operations, has filled my Mind with the highest pleasure and Satisfaction, and had given me the happiest presages of Success.” For information about the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Yorktown and the schedule of events, see <http://www.brigade.org/barcal/2006/Yorktown.html>.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission will dedicate the new Visitor Center at Fort Montgomery State Historic Site and the Redoubt trail under Route 9W connecting the east side of the fort to the two redoubts on the west. Enjoy a day of 18<sup>th</sup> century camp life, drill, cannon firing, including, “George,” the 32-pounder, and a re-enactment of the 229<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of the Twin Forts. To see the schedule of events and 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 fall 2006 issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review* dedicated to Edith Wharton, see <http://www.hudsonrivervalley.net/hrvr/subscribe/index.php>. Huzza from the Hudson Highlands.