

In July 1781, the French army of General Jean Bapiste Donatien de Vimeur, Viscount de Rochambeau, linked up with the Continental Army of General George Washington in Philipsburg, New York, now the town of Greenburg. Their objective was to lay siege to the British garrison in Manhattan; re-taking the city had been Washington's dream since he had lost it in 1776. Rochambeau's 4,000 troops combined with Washington's 4,000 Continentals seemingly provided the combat power needed to breach the forts, garrisoned by some 10,500 British, German, and provincial soldiers, protecting the island. The battles fought and won at Saratoga in October 1777 had finally brought direct results to New York: a French army was about to help challenge the political and military center of British power in America, Sir Henry Clinton's headquarters in New York.

Since leaving Newport, Rhode Island, on June 18th, General Rochambeau had led his four regiments across Rhode Island and Connecticut. As he neared New York, he reorganized them into two brigades: Bourbonnais and Royal Deux-Ponts in the First Brigade and the Soissonnais and Saintonge in the Second. On July 1, his 56th birthday, Rochambeau set out with the First Brigade for Ridgebury via Danbury, a village of maybe 80 houses. Here he received a letter from Washington dated June 30, 1781, asking him "to put your First Brigade under march tomorrow Morning, the remaining Troops to follow as quick as possible, and endeavor to reach Bedford by the evening of the 2d. of July." The French army re-oriented its march from King's Ferry, which crossed between Verplanck and Stony Point, to Philipsburg (Greenburg). The new assembly area dictated that the objective of the campaign was New York. The French, New Yorkers' foes in the French and Indian War, were poised to enter Westchester County.

From Connecticut Rochambeau directed his troops to Bedford and North Castle, present-day Mount Kisco. The French soldiers' first view of populated New York in Bedford was of the devastation of the civil war that had been raging there over the course of the conflict. Few houses had survived the fire that British Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Birch's dragoons had set during a raid at Bedford on July 11, 1779. Lieutenant Jean-François-Louis, comte de Clermont-Crèvecoeur, wrote in his journal on July 2, 1781, that Bedford "had already suffered much damage and, in fact, hardly any houses left standing. This settlement is very small and denuded of every resource." The First Brigade made its first camp in New York and its twelfth since Newport, in the early afternoon of July 1, 1781, on the grounds of the present-day Bedford Village Elementary School. The Second Brigade marched for eight hours from Ridgebury, Connecticut, to North Castle and camped on July 3rd near the grounds of the present-day Northern Westchester Hospital.

According to Captain Louis-François-Bertrand du Pont d'Aubevoye, comte de Lauberdière, North Castle was a village of "no more than four or five houses situated close to a very extensive pond. It is not [a] natural [pond] and the water does not flow into it but via dykes." Captain Louis-Alexandre Berthier, Napoleon's future chief of staff, recorded that the village "has few houses, and they are widely separated. The headquarters was very poorly housed -- just how poorly you will understand when I tell you that the assistant quarter-masters general were obliged to sleep in the open on piles of

straw, which was, to boot, rather too green." Colonel Armand-Louis Gontaut, duc de Lauzun, and his Legion of some 300 cavalymen and 300 infantrymen would pass through the thirteenth camp en route to link up with American Major General Benjamin Lincoln at Morrisania. On July 6th Rochambeau's army would march from North Castle to its new camp at Philipsburg, where it would spend the next six weeks.

In the meantime, General Washington moved his Main Army from its camps at Peekskill, where it had been since June 24th, to join the French at Philipsburg. He gave General Lincoln the task of leading an advance guard of 800 men to take the northern British works protecting Kings Bridge, the entry into Manhattan. On July 2nd, a British foraging party spoiled the surprise allowing the forward outposts to withdraw to the strong defenses across the Harlem River. Washington and the remainder of his army advanced as far as Valentine's Hill to support Lincoln's subsequent operation against Delancey's Refugees at Morrisania and Williams Bridge. Because of the delay brought on by the extreme heat the forced march of Lauzun's Legion to join Lincoln in his attack was for naught. Both armies now settled into their camps at Philipsburg, described by the Baron Ludwig von Clozen-Haydenburg as "a certain district containing only some hills and wasteland, almost uninhabited and full of heather and thorns."

From July 21-23, some 5,000 American and French troops accompanied Generals Washington and Rochambeau as they surveyed the British defenses for a possible siege. On the 22nd as the combined forces probed down the Morrisania Road, the British opened fire upon them from their forts at Randall's Island, Harlem, and Snake Hill and from frigates in the Hudson. In a skirmish with a band of some twenty Loyalists, Rochambeau's aide-de-camp had his horse shot out from under him while Berthier and his entourage captured ten of the enemy. Upon the conclusion of the Grand Reconnaissance, the American and French forces returned to Philipsburg to monitor the actions of General Clinton's army and to await news from French Admiral François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse.

Patriots' Weekend, 2006 will commemorate the operations of the French and American Armies in New York in the summer of 1781. The first event will be a re-enactment of the Grand Reconnaissance at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation in Cross River on July 21-23, 2006. In partnership with Westchester Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation and the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the Brigade of the American Revolution will host the encampment for all three umbrella organizations: the Brigade, the Continental Line, and the British Brigade; this last major battle re-enactment of the 225th Anniversary in the North promises to draw hundreds of re-enactors and public. (A group of re-enactors will be marching the entire route from Providence to Yorktown, Virginia, following the dates and original route of march as closely as possible; the venture is called "America's March To Yorktown." They will march through New York from July 2-6 and August 17-25.) The second event will re-enact the crossing by both American and French armies at King's Ferry from Verplanck to Stony Point on August 25-27.

To learn more about the Hudson River Valley and the French marches through New York in this the 225th anniversary of the War for Independence, log onto www.hudsonrivervalley.net and 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.