



Detail from Trumbull's "Surrender of Cornwallis;" from left to right: Deux Ponts, Laval, Custine, Lauzun, Choisy, Viscount Vioménil, St. Simon, Fersen, Damascus, Chastellux, Baron Vioménil, Barras, de Grasse, Rochambeau.

## AMERICA'S FRENCH ALLIES

"All persons coming from London, bring the most dismal accounts of the distresses of that town, occasioned by the War. In Paris, they speak of the War, as if it were between Tartary & China -- We now & then hear some complaints, but they come from those who cannot obtain permission to go to fight, & especially in America -- Eight grenadiers who were on furlough, seeing by the papers that their Regiment was agoing with M. de Rochambeau, & fearing of being left behind if they did not go very quick, they made a purse between them, & went post -- When they arrived at Brest, they had no more than 12 Sous left in all, & they were as happy as Kings, since they were in time to embark with their Companions. Count de Custine, having a Regiment of Dragoons 1780 of his own name, which is esteemed a great honour in this country, exchanged it for a regiment of infantry to go with M. de Rochambeau -- The King having observed it to him, when he went to ask leave, he answered, 'I know not a Service more honorable than that where one can fight the Enemies of your Majesty' -- Another Colonel, the *chevalier de Choisy*, a person of high rank, has given up his regiment, to go with M. de Rochambeau as Volunteer -- But as it would be an endless work to tell you all the anecdotes of this kind, I will conclude by informing you that this expedition is made up of the best troops in the world."

~ Philip Mazzei, from Paris on 12 May 1780, to Gov. Jefferson.<sup>1</sup>

"We began to entertain doubts respecting the destination of the expedition. Most of the naval officers thought that we were going to St. Domingo, and that the pretext of armaments for North America had served to conceal the object of an expedition, consisting both of land and naval forces, intended to attack Jamaica. The perseverance of the admiral in steering to the south, though we had passed, several days before, the zone of the general winds, rendered this conjecture very probable. I for my part was much alarmed at it, for I perceived that so numerous an expedition would cause many difficulties, and I dreaded the intense heat of the climate: but above all, I had heartily espoused the cause of the independence of the Americans, and I should have felt extreme regret at losing the honor of combating for their liberty."

~ Guillaume-Mathieu Dumas, an aide of Rochambeau, *Memoirs*.<sup>2</sup>

If we speak about what were the most *tangible* and *authentic* boons of the Enlightenment, that doubtless must include how its influence on and education of popular opinion, both among the middle class and nobility, helped to bring about direct French intervention in the American cause. True, there were other incentives for Louis XVI to take the part of the trans-Atlantic insurgents; such as settling an old military rivalry with Britain; expanding French trade (the British kept the markets of their empire tightly regulated and or closed both to foreigners and the colonials themselves); and adjusting the balance of power in Europe. Yet even if any and all of these were of concern to him, it was widespread public support in France for the Americans that ultimately compelled his taking action. Far from seeing themselves as bitter enemies of the British, the French -- again under the illumination of the more propitious aspects of the Enlightenment -- desired rather to emulate their more free government and institutions, particularly the institutions of trade and industry. As one author puts it, the French were pro-American instead of anti-British. And even when they declared war, the French tended, sometimes (and in retrospect) somewhat amusingly, to treat the British as erring brothers, rather than bitter foes. At the same time, they wished further to spread and encourage hopes of liberty and equality in France and for all humanity, and America seemed an opportune and ideal place to start. This is not to say the majority of the French, least of all the

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of Virginia State Papers* (1875), vol. 1, edited by Wm. P. Palmer, pp. 349-350.

<sup>2</sup> Guillaume-Mathieu Dumas memoirs, English translation (printed in Philadelphia) of 1839, p. 22.

king and nobles, were quite ready then to openly encourage Revolution in France; only they were certainly more than willing to move for change and social progress *incrementally*, both locally *and* internationally.

Fortunate it was for the Americans that they had such a leader as Washington; because he was the closest thing the Americans had that appeared similar to a king. So that though the French monarchy and aristocrats might doubt and have skepticism about the trustworthiness and effectiveness of Congress, *there* was Washington to remind them that Americans needed and had someone at least *like* a king to give them credibility and earn French confidence. And time and time again, probably the one thing French officers in America most agreed upon was a high esteem for America's commander in chief. The majority of Americans themselves and otherwise they typically thought of, albeit with Christian sympathy, as peasants.

After two earlier unsuccessful and poorly coordinated attempts at assisting the Americans militarily, at Newport, Rhode Island in 1778 and Savannah in 1779, the French tried again in early in early 1780. On April 15<sup>th</sup> of that year, a secret expeditionary force, or as the French themselves referred to it an "auxiliary" force, left Brest in transports with some 5,000 soldiers under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau and three major generals, Baron Vioménil, Count Vioménil (brothers) and the Marquis de Chastellux; escorted by seven ships of the line, three frigates,<sup>3</sup> and several smaller naval vessels under Admiral Chevalier de Ternay. No one knew their destination except for the highest in command; so that it came as somewhat of a surprise to many of them when they made preliminary land fall at Newport, Rhode Island on July 11<sup>th</sup>. En route they had suffered terribly from scurvy, lost a number of men at sea in consequence, and came very near to being intercepted and fighting a British squadron under Commodore Sir William Cornwallis (brother of Charles.)

Of those amidst the ranks of Rochambeau's army, there was Axel von Fersen, Marie Antoinette's gallant champion and an aide to Rochambeau, and a number of future Napoleonic field officers, including marshal Berthier and Peninsula war general Guillaume-Mathieu Dumas. The French army at this time, reformed under St. Germain, was at an all time high in quality of expertise, discipline, and training, and candidates for promotion were subject to extremely strict examination, and at a time when the army was extremely popular and competition fierce. Many French officers that went with Rochambeau were far more concerned with matters and preferment at home than the fate of America; since for them, as well as France itself, the war was frequently seen as a means of personal, as well as national, advancement. French officers and NCOs could be extremely sensitive to matters of pride, and while in America there was at least one murder and one suicide among them arising out of personal disputes with superiors. Not a few were free masons, and there are several accounts of French officers attending lodges during their sojourn in the United States. Both officers and men complained regularly of being made to pay exorbitant prices for food and shelter by not a few avaricious Americans all too ready to dip into their purse strings. Yet despite this, the French performed brilliantly and were highly admired in America for their self-restraint and professionalism. At Yorktown, although more Americans soldiers (if we include militia) were present than French, the latter incurred twice as many losses.

I have collected here a desultory sampling of extracts, arranged more or less in chronological order of events recounted, from some of the memoirs and journals of Rochambeau and his officers, as well as the memoirs of military adviser, diplomat, and Versailles courtier the Count de Ségur. These are, as usual, selected excerpts and only provided cursory glimpses of what is contained in each volume as a whole. As always and when it comes to memoirs and journals especially, one should not always too readily take a writer as his words, and some points claimed or raised might be taken reasonable and historical exception to. A more detailed citation of each work is contained in a small bibliography appearing at the end of this article.

~~~~~\*\*\*\*\*~~~~~

---

<sup>3</sup> Including the rebuilt in our own time *L'Hermione*.

*Comte de Ségur:*

I recollect that the Americans were then styled insurgents, and Bostonians; their daring courage electrified every mind, and excited universal admiration, more particularly amongst young people, who always feel an inclination for novelties, and an eagerness for battles. In the small town of Spa, in which were collected together so many travellers, or casual and voluntary deputies, as it were, from every European monarchy, I was very much struck on observing the unanimous burst of so lively and general an interest in the rebellion of a people against a sovereign.

The American insurrection was every where applauded, and became, as it were, a fashion; the scientific English game of whist, made way, on a sudden, in every circle, for a game, equally serious, which received the name of *Boston*. This impulse of feeling, however trifling it may appear, was a remarkable forerunner of the mighty convulsions that were about to shake the whole world; and I was very far from being the only one whose heart then beat at the sound of liberty just waking from its slumbers, and struggling to throw off the yoke of arbitrary power.

Those who blamed us afterwards, ought to recollect that they then shared our enthusiasm, and felt a pleasure in bringing back the old recollections of the *ligue* and of the *fronde*; the times and the cause were widely different; but their censuring disposition was then unable to draw a distinction between them.

Besides, how could the monarchical governments of Europe wonder at the enthusiasm for liberty which was manifested by young men of ardent minds, who were every where instructed to admire the heroes of Greece and of Rome, before whom the most enthusiastic praises were bestowed upon the release of Switzerland and Holland from thralldom, and who were taught to read and to reflect by constantly studying the works of the most celebrated republicans of antiquity?

Such was, however, the blindness of princes and of the great: they had favored the progress of knowledge, and required a passive obedience, that can only exist in a state of ignorance. They wished to enjoy all the luxuries provided for them by civilization and arts, and would not suffer learned men, artists, or enlightened plebeians, to emerge from a condition bordering upon slavery. They imagined, in short, what was quite impossible, that the light of reason could spread its brilliancy without dispelling the clouds of prejudices originating in ages of barbarism.

Every doctrine in education, or progress in philosophy, every literary success or theatrical applause, ought to have served as a warning to the ruling powers that a great epoch had arrived, that it required a different art to govern mankind, that the enjoyment of their long lost rights, which such men as the immortal Montesquieu had brought to their knowledge, could not any further be withheld from them.

On my return to Paris, I found the same agitation prevailing also there in the public mind. Nobody seemed favorable to the cause of England; all openly expressed their wishes for the success of the Bostonians.

Notwithstanding this manifestation of the love of liberty in France, inequality was still maintained by all the influence of right, of privileges and the laws; though, in reality, it was daily diminishing: the institutions were monarchical, but the manners were republican. Public situations and offices continued to be the portion of certain classes; but, beyond the exercise of these functions, equality began to prevail in every circle. It often happened, indeed, that literary titles took precedence of titles of nobility, and homages, which removed every trace of inferiority, were not alone reserved for men of genius, but literary men of the second and third order, were often greeted in the world, and received with those attentions which were not shewn to the provincial nobility.

The court alone preserved its habitual superiority; but, as courtiers in France are even much more the slaves of fashion than of the prince, they thought it becoming to descend from their rank, and came to pay their court to Marmontel, to D'Alembert, to Raynal, hoping, by this intimacy, to rise in public opinion.

This spirit of equality formed, at this time, the charm of the circles of Paris, and drew crowds of foreigners to it from every country. The enjoyments of private life, of a society free from pride or restraint, of a conversation without disguise or restriction, were unknown every where else, except in England. Elsewhere there existed an insurmountable and perpetual separation between the classes; each lived with his equals; there was no reciprocal interchange between the minds and the interests of the unconnected portions of the enlightened population.

With us, on the contrary, these frequent communications between the various divisions of society, these mutual intercourses and reciprocal attentions, this interchange of ideas augmented the rich stores of our civilization; and, by these newly established relations, the nobility acquired information and knowledge of every kind, of which they were formerly deprived, whilst enlightened men of the inferior classes, culled, from the intercourse, the light but charming flowers of a refined taste, a delicate perception of propriety and an elegant gracefulness, which are only to be found in the midst of a polished court.

It must also be confessed, that this spirit of equality, had taken deep root in the French nobility long before it extended itself to the third class of the state. The feudal hierarchy was forgotten. Henry IV had been heard to say: "That he considered as his noblest title of honor to be the first amongst French gentlemen." The peers alone, it is true, possessed the right of admission into parliament, and the honors of the Louvre. The Duchesses enjoyed the prerogative of sitting upon a *tabouret* [a seat without a back] in the Queen's apartments. But, beyond these circumstances of rare occurrence, all the nobility considered themselves on a footing of perfect equality with each other.<sup>4</sup>

~~~~\*~~~~

*Comte de Ségur:*

In England, the national institutions have been more favorable to the growth of this species of talent than those of other governments. Public affairs are there really public, they belong to all; and every one knows them and takes an interest in them. The theory is not kept distinct from the practice; cemented by liberty, the social bonds it has there established embrace all classes and all ranks; insomuch, that a solid reputation is attached to the names of the writers, statesmen and orators of that country, such as Hume, Clarendon, Littleton, Robertson, Chesterfield, and others.

When we, like them, have released ourselves from the thralldom in which we have been held by the feudal power, by arbitrary authority, by scholastic prejudices, by superstition, by the compulsory exclusion of almost all classes of society from the conduct of public affairs, and by the long established and ridiculous contempt for literature professed by our privileged classes, then will the pursuit of history and politics assume that elevated rank amongst us, which is justly their due.

It is a most singular and remarkable circumstance, that, at the court, as well as in the city, amongst the nobles and the military, as well as amongst the citizens and the financiers, in the very heart of a vast monarchy, the ancient sanctuary of privileges reserved to the nobility, the parliaments and the priesthood, and, notwithstanding our habits of long obedience to arbitrary power, the cause of the insurgent Americans should thus have attracted undivided attention, and excited universal interest.

On all sides public opinion urged a regal government to declare itself in favor of republican liberty, and even murmured at its irresolution and delay. The ministers, gradually yielding to the torrent, were, at the same time, alarmed at the prospect of a ruinous war, in case of a rupture with England, and were, moreover, restrained by the rigid probity of Louis XVI, the most moral character of his time.

That monarch considered neutrality as a duty, inasmuch as no instance of aggression had occurred on the side of the English, to justify, in his eyes, a hostile measure against the crown of Great Britain. It was no apprehension of expenditure, or even the chances of war, that deterred him, but his conscience led

---

<sup>4</sup> *Memoirs and Recollections of Count Ségur*, pp. 75-79.

him to regard a violation of the treaties of peace as actual perfidy, when undertaken with the sole motive of humbling a powerful adversary.

Accordingly, the government, wavering between the will of the Prince and the general opinion, was compelled, by its weakness, to commit one of the greatest political errors; it secretly encouraged the people to assist the Americans, through commercial channels, with arms and ammunition; it gave a favorable, though mysterious reception to the American envoys; soothed with flattering hopes the warlike spirit of our young soldiers, and permitted the circulation of tracts favorable to American liberty; while, at the same time, it charged our ambassador at London to calm the alarms of the English ministry with renewed assurances, that peace would be preserved by the observation of the strictest neutrality.

By persisting in this insincere conduct, our government sacrificed alike the advantages of a pacific system, and of an avowed hostility, exposing itself to all the inconveniences of both measures, because it ventured to decide upon neither.

In the meanwhile the storm increased: the Americans had hitherto experienced reverses, but fortune was, at length, beginning to declare in their favor. Enthusiasm for liberty and the love of their native land, finally triumphed over every difficulty. The tactics and discipline of an English army no longer surprised the irregular courage of the new republicans. The Congress, strongly resembling the ancient senate of Rome, deliberated with coolness, and enacted wholesome laws in the midst of the tumult of arms.

It was in vain that an Elector of the German empire supplied the English army with auxiliaries, and entered into a disgraceful treaty, by which he established an exact tarif[f], specifying the several sums to be paid in cases of death, mutilation or wounds, either slight or severe, that might be suffered by or inflicted upon his subjects whom he sold.

The American armies daily made a rapid progress; and, at length, we heard, that a whole English army, commanded by General Burgoyne, had been surrounded by the rebel militia, deprived of all communication, all provisions, and, that, unable either to fight or to retreat, it had been compelled to lay down its arms at Saratoga, at the feet of a poor but haughty race of agriculturists, as inexperienced as they were valiant, and whose simplicity, want of discipline, wretched appointments, and ignorance of military affairs, it had so long affected to despise.

This victory gave an inclination to the political balance; and its fame was quickly circulated throughout Europe. Good fortune is every where sure of attracting friends, and America, in a short time, boasted of her allies.

Tidings of this success, of course, redoubled our ardor and impatience. Our ministers, warmly pressed and somewhat encouraged by fortune, took less pains to conceal their object, and persuaded the King that it was practicable to consult the interest of France by forming a commercial treaty with the Americans, without breaking with the court of England.

Our ministers, in consequence, received the American commissioners more openly, entered into negotiations with them, and, in December, 1777, both parties signed the preliminary articles of a treaty of amity and commerce.

The result of this measure had not been anticipated by them, although it was one that ensued as a necessary consequence. The English ministry broke out into the most violent complaints against us, considering our new treaty with their rebellious colonists as an open declaration of war.

It was in vain that our ambassador alleged the necessity of consulting our commercial interest, and protested our earnest desire for peace. The English were resolved to go to war; and, at the same time, conceiving themselves authorized by our conduct, which they regarded as an aggression, to break through the law of nations, had dispatched secret orders to their admirals. Thus, we soon received intelligence, without any declaration of war on their part, or any act of hostility on ours, that they had seized upon several of our merchant vessels, and had commenced their attacks upon our possessions in India.

The definitive treaty with America was speedily ratified; our ambassador left London; both nations appealed to arms; and the wishes of our warlike youth were gratified, as war immediately burst forth in the two hemispheres.

This event put an end to all designs of making individual efforts, and sailing as volunteers to America; the war called each of us to his proper standard, and promised us approaching occasions of reaping honors, while we fought in the service of our country.<sup>5</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Rochambeau:*

I will mention here a beginning of *tracasserie* [importunity] on the part of Washington, and of which I remarked the first symptoms originated in my correspondence with that general, but disappeared almost immediately. He replied in the most flattering terms to my first letter, but, in subsequent letters, I perceived that, on the plea of being but little familiar with our language, he alluded but distantly to our affairs; he sent Lafayette to me with full powers from him. The latter soon had an opportunity, as I have already stated, of witnessing our active preparations against the expected attack of the enemy, and of judging to what extent our troops on shore could afford protection to our flotilla against the superiority of that of our enemy. With respect to our offensive tactics, the [Admiral] Chevalier de Ternay and myself judged it prudent to defer them for one of the three following chances, on which we founded our most sanguine hopes: -- 1st, the arrival of the second division; 2d, the sailing from France of an additional fleet to our assistance, which the Chevalier had required of M. de Guichen, in virtue of his powers; 3rd, or lastly, that the enemy, by directing their forces to the south, would so impoverish the efficiency of the garrison of New York, that our ships would have no molestation to guard against from that quarter, and that we should then be able, with the assistance of our ships, to attack vigorously the island of New York.

As soon as Lafayette returned to General Washington's headquarters, he wrote me the most pressing dispatches, reminding me of the substance of our former conversations, and concluding, by urging me, in the name of that general, to join him immediately, to attempt forthwith an attack on the island of New York; his letter finished with a species of summons, founded on the policy of the country, and implying that the campaign was the last effort of his patriotism. We were the more displeased at these dispatches, as, by the same courier, I received letters from General Washington himself, and not a single sentence of those letters alluded to the proposed plans of Lafayette; neither did they contain any reply to my request of an interview, when, in one single hour's conversation, we could have decided on more matters than could be contained in whole volumes of writing. I took an early opportunity to write on the subject to Lafayette. I reminded him that, as he himself had stated to us, it had been ascertained to be a fact, that there were fourteen thousand regular troops in the islands of New York, besides the militia force; that the French fleet was blockaded in Newport by a squadron much superior in number; I added that, if I were to leave our ships in their present predicament, the English admiral would immediately bear down upon and destroy them, and prove himself the most pusillanimous man in existence, if he did not immediately afterwards attack us in our communications, on the arm of sea which divides the continent from the New York and Long Island, allowing that we should have succeeded in taking up a position there.

I wrote at the same time to General Washington in English; I expressed myself grateful for the letters I had received from him, and begged that he would in future allow my correspondence with him, on all matters, to be direct, without the interference of a third person, and I concluded by renewing my request of an interview.

I must, however, do General Lafayette the justice to say, that he always showed himself the faithful interpreter of General Washington's sentiments, and that the latter had repeated recourse to the youthful ardour of his friend to express these sentiments with greater energy. The latter really believed at that period, and he was not perhaps altogether mistaken, that, on account of the late great decline in the

---

<sup>5</sup> *Memoirs and Recollections of Count Ségur*, pp. 147-152.

finances of Congress, this campaign was the last struggle of expiring patriotism; under these circumstances, he was anxious to strike a decisive blow, by attacking the very centre of the enemy's position, whilst he could still count on the assistance of the French troops. He was fully aware, however, of the consequences, and he concurred with the principles of my letter; since I have corresponded directly with him, I had many proofs of his sound judgment; his style is peculiarly amiable, and the death of either of us, I feel confident, can alone break elf our correspondence; at least, at present I can foresee no circumstances which can possibly lead to a rupture of our friendly intercourse.<sup>6</sup>

~\*\*~

*Rochambeau's chief commissary Claude Blanchard:*

On the 29<sup>th</sup> [of August 1780], a score of savages arrived at Newport; part of them were Iroquois. Some others came from a village called the Fall of St. Louis (situated in the environs of Albany), which is Catholic, as they asked to hear mass, on arriving. Among them was a mulatto, who had served with the Americans; he spoke French and they called him Captain Louis. There was also a German who had lived among them since he was twelve years old. The only clothing which these savages had was a blanket in which they wrapped themselves; they had no breeches. Their complexion is olive, they have their ears gashed and their faces daubed with red. There were some handsome men among them and some tall old men of respectable appearance. We also remarked two young persons at least five feet ten inches high, and one of them with a very agreeable physiognomy; some of them, nevertheless, were small. These savages, for a long time friendly to the French and who, in speaking of the king of France, called him *our father*, complimented M. de Rochambeau, who received them very kindly and gave them some presents, among other things some red blankets which had been greatly recommended to us at our departure from Brest. He told them that many of their neighbors, deceived by the English, had made war upon the Americans, who, they had told them, were our enemies, that, on the contrary, they were our friends and that we came to defend them, and that they would pursue a course of conduct agreeable to their father if they would act in the same way and make war upon the English; he urged them to remember this discourse well and to repeat it to their neighbors. They dined that day with him at his quarters. I saw them at table for an instant, they behaved themselves well there and ate cleanly enough. In the afternoon the troops were shown to them, who manoeuvred and went through the firing exercise; they showed no surprise, but seemed to be pleased with this exhibition. On the next day they dined on board of the *Due de Bourgogne*. In the evening they were persuaded to dance; their singing is monotonous, they interrupted it with sharp and disagreeable cries. In singing, they beat time with two little bits of wood. In dancing, they content themselves with bending the hams without taking any steps; there is no jumping, no springing; they reminded me of those peasants in my province when they tread the grapes in the winepress; the movement which they then make resembles the dance of these savages. They went away on the second of September. Some other tribes of Catholic savages had asked us for a priest; we sent them a Capuchin who was chaplain of one of the vessels.<sup>7</sup>

~\*\*~

*Rochambeau:*

I should here speak of the discipline of the army; and I can safely state, and on this point I am sure the Americans will not contradict me, that it far exceeded the idea they had formed of it, and that, moreover, it contributed, in no small degree, to correct the unfavourable impression with which they had been prepossessed against the French. The different deputations of savages who came to the camp, evinced no surprise at the sight of our cannon, our troops, and their evolutions; but they could not contain their astonishment when they beheld apple trees loaded with fruit hanging over the tents which our soldiers had occupied for three months past. The discipline of the French army was always rigorously adhered to throughout the whole of its campaigns. It was due to the zealous efforts of the generals, the superior officers, and subalterns, but more particularly to the good disposition of the soldiers, which on no occasion failed them, and contributed in a great measure to the acquiescence on the part of the State of Rhode Island

---

<sup>6</sup> *Memoirs of Rochambeau*, Part 1, pp. 793-794.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 61-63.

to the proposition which I made them, to repair at our expense the houses which had been damaged by the English, but on condition that we should be allowed to use them for winter-quarters for our soldiers, and that the inhabitants should provide separate accommodation for the officers. Twenty thousand livres were expended in the repairs of these houses, and ample tokens of the generosity of France to her allies were left in this town when we quitted it. A barrack-camp would have cost us upwards of a hundred thousand livres, on account of the immense expense in bringing the necessary timber from the continent, for our own boats were hardly sufficient to convey the fuel we required.

One of the chiefs of the above-mentioned savages made a remark to me at a public audience, which much surprised me. "My father," he said, "I wonder that the King of France, our father, should send his troops to protect the Americans in an insurrection against the King of England, their father." "Your father, the King of France," I replied, "protects the natural liberty which God has given to man. The Americans were no longer able to bear the burdens with which they were loaded, and he listened to their just complaints; we shall always be the friends of their friends and the enemies of their enemies: but I must urge you to preserve the strictest neutrality in all these quarrels." This is how I contrived to solve this question as well as I could, and which had placed me in rather an awkward predicament. Good treatment and plenty of presents went more way towards the contemplated negotiation with these savages, which was afterwards concluded and maintained to our entire satisfaction, during the three years' campaign of the French army in America.<sup>8</sup>

~~~~\*~~~~

*Rochambeau:*

We were informed by them that they had seen sail from Brest a numerous fleet, commanded by M. de Grasse; that this fleet had orders divide as soon as it should reach the coast of Spain off Madrid, as proceed with the Bailli de Suffren to the assistance of the Cape Good Hope, and to reinforce our fleet in the East Indies; that the Count de Grasse, as soon as he had passed south of the Azores, was detach a small convoy of six hundred recruits under escort of the *Sagittaire*, as the only assistance which could be then afforded North America; and, lastly, that the money intended for the naval and land forces was conveyed partly by the *Sagittaire*, and partly by the frigate which had M. de Barras on board. My dispatches state, which was at the same time declared to Congress by his Majesty minister, that different circumstances, among others that of an English fleet, superior in number, cruising off the port of Brest, had prevented the sailing of the second division in the preceding year; but that, in order that America should not be deprived of the assistance which had been provided for her, and which France had no desire to profit by, government had come to the determination to send money in lieu of troops, and that for that purpose a sum of six millions had been voted, with which General Washington might provide for the wants of the American army. The same dispatches contained a confidential message to me alone, stating that the Comte de Grasse had received orders to proceed with his division, in July or August, relieve the squadron under M. de Barras; and that the latter, in the event of my marching into the interior of the continent to join General Washington, was to proceed back immediately to Boston. Rhode Island was considered unsafe without land forces to protect the anchorage of our ships. The government proposed that I should undertake an expedition to the Northern States, either to Penobscot, Terre Neuve [Newfoundland], or Halifax; leaving me, however, to concert with General Washington some other operation better proportioned to our force and which might be protected by the very short station which the Comte de Grasse would have to make in our seas. Of the dispatch: conveyed to me, those of the oldest date were from M. de Montbarrey and those more recent, from M. de Ségur, who had succeeded him Minister of War; the latest were from M. de Castries, who was Brest when the fleet had sailed. My private letters informed me, that if I had been in France the King would have appointed me Minister of War. My ambition had never aspired to such an important function; but I must confess, when I reflect on these scanty resources and the distressing predicament to which I was reduced, this was the only moment of my life that I regretted it. It became urgent, however that I should get out of my present embarrassing situation, and do my best for the service of the two nations. As soon, therefore, as had fully deciphered my dispatches, my first step was to request at interview of General Washington; and he accordingly appointed to meet me at Wethersfield, near Hartford, on the 20th of May

---

<sup>8</sup> *Memoirs of Rochambeau*, Part 1, p. 797.



[1781]. Count de Barras was prevented joining the conference, by the English fleet making its appearance near his ships on the eve of his departure. General Washington came in company of General Knox and Brigadier-General Duportail, and I with the Chevalier de Chatelus [Chastellux]. General Washington, during this conference, had scarcely another object in view but an expedition against the island of New York, and which he persisted in considering the most capable of striking a death-blow to British domination in America. He was aware of the enemy's forces having been thinned at this place by the detachments which had been drafted from its garrison, and sent to the south, and thought, on the assurance of several pilots, that our ships might easily pass the bar of the harbour without being lightened. He considered an expedition against Lord Cornwallis, in Chesapeak[e] Bay, as quite a, secondary object, to which there was no necessity of diverting our attention until we were quite certain of our inability to accomplish the former. After some slight discussion, it was settled, however, that as soon as the recruits, with the small convoy of the *Sagittaire*, should join, the French corps should proceed to unite itself to the American army opposite the island of New York, to which the combined army should then approach as near as possible, and there wait until we should hear from M. de Grasse, to whom a frigate was to be immediately dispatched.

General Washington wrote immediately wrote the result of this conference to General [John] Sullivan, a member of Congress. His letters were intercepted; it is believed, and all the papers repeated the report, that he spoke in those letters of the projected attack on the New York islands, with a view only to mislead the enemy's general and that consequently, he was very glad that the letters had fallen into the hands of the latter. There is no need of such fictions to convey the glory of this great man to posterity. His wish was really then to attack New York, and we should have carried the plan into execution if the enemy had continued to draft troops from its garrison, and if the French navy could have been brought to our assistance. But what completely deceived the English general, was a confidential letter written by the Chevalier de Chatelus to the French representative at Congress, wherein he boasted of having artfully succeeded in bringing round my opinion to concur with that of General Washington; stating, at the same time, that the siege of the island of New York had been at length determined upon, and that our two armies were on the march for that city, and that orders had been sent off to M. de Grasse to come with his fleet and force his way over the bar of Sandyhook to the mouth of the harbour of New York. He also complained bitterly and in rather uncouth language, of the little resource left to a man of parts over the imperative disposition of a general, who was eager of command. The English office who had charge of every branch of the spying department sent me a copy of the intercepted missive, and, by so doing, his intention had been most assuredly to set my wits at ease. I sent for the Chevalier Chatelus; showed him the letter, and then threw it in the fire, left him a prey to his own remorse. Of course, I did not endeavor to undeceive him, and, in the sequel, we shall see to what extent this general officer had been made the confidant of the real project which I proposed to the Count de Grasse.

When I returned to Newport, I was much grieved to see our navy preparing to retire to Boston, as soon as the French corps should quit the island for the continent. The port of Boston, although within thirty leagues of Newport by land, is more than a hundred leagues distant by sea, on account of the immense turn that must be made to clear the Nantucket Sands. Boston lies below wind, and might have delayed for a whole month the junction of our fleet to that of M. de Grasse. I felt the inconvenience of the distance the more, as I was obliged to leave him the care of the whole of our heavy artillery, which we could not possibly encumber ourselves with on the tedious march we were about to enter upon; our field-batteries were already nearly as much as we could contrive to drag with us. I proposed to Admiral Barras to hold a council of war, composed of both naval and military general and superior officers, as our instructions implied whenever circumstances should require. M. de Barras having consented, the council assembled, and discussed whether, considering the weakness of the garrison, from the large detachments sent to the south, the French squadron would be in safety at Rhode Island, when left, after the departure of the principal body of the French troops, with a detachment of five hundred men, in command of M. Choisy, and a thousand strong of American militia, to occupy the forts erected to protect its anchorage.

I take much pleasure in relating here of Admiral Barras a noble and generous repartee, which fully characterises the patriotic sentiments of that respectable officer. M. de la Villebrune called upon me to state whether or not I thought that M. de Grasse would bring his fleet into the North American seas: "Because," said he, "if he is really to come, I am of opinion that it would be proper that we should stay here, so as, on

his arrival, to be prepared to act in conjunction with him as expeditiously as possible ; but, in the contrary case, I think we are now acting in direct opposition to the instructions we have received from the council of France, and that, by so doing, we shall hereafter be obliged to abide by any fatal consequences which may arise, however unlikely this may be.” Admiral Barras rose, and exclaimed, “No one, more than I, feels interested in the arrival of M. de Grasse. He was my junior in the service, he had lately been raised to the rank of lieutenant-general, but as soon as I be apprized of his arrival, I will hasten to join him, and place myself under his orders. I will serve through this campaign. but not through a second one.” This sentiment, replete with such noble feelings, carried the question, which was voted unanimously in the affirmative, without the opinion of the generals on the secret of the operations being further consulted.

I immediately commenced the composition of my dispatched to M. de Grasse, which were to be conveyed to him by the *Concorde*, as soon as the latter vessel’s preparations for sea should be completed. I pointed out to him the state of distress of the Southern States, and that of Virginia in particular; which, in the event of an attack on the part of Lord Cornwallis, would have but the small body of troops in command of General de Lafayette to oppose to him, and then even the defense would depend solely on able manoeuvres and the nature of the country, intercepted by wide rivers. I included the articles of the conference at Wethersfield, observed to him that he was better able than I to judge of the practicability of an attack upon New York, as, under nearly similar circumstances, M. d’Estaing, under whose orders he (M. de Grasse) had served, that officer had made the most advantageous offers of money to induce, but in vain, his pilots to guide his ships over the bar of its harbour. I then suggested, as my own opinion, the propriety of attempting an expedition to Chesapeake against the army of Lord Cornwallis, and which I considered more practicable, and less expected by the enemy, on account of the distance of our positions.

I begged of him to intercede with the governors of San Domingo to let us have the French brigade, under the orders of M. Saint-Simon, intended for an expedition against the Spaniards, but which I intimated would probably not be wanted during the campaign. I begged him also to raise a loan of twelve hundred thousand francs in our colonies, to insure the success of the expedition, and I concluded by entreating him to send the frigate back immediately, so that, on the receipt of his reply, I might take the earliest opportunity to combined our march with that of General Washington, so as to proceed by land as expeditiously as possible, and join him at any stipulated part of Chesapeake.

A packet was sent to General Washington during the conference at Wethersfield, containing dispatches from Lord George Germaine to General Clinton, and dated 7th February and 7th March, which had not been figured, and had been intercepted by an American corsair. They tended to throw much light on the plans of the English in this campaign; of which the object seemed, from their contents, to have been nothing less than the conquest of the whole of the southern states, and the reduction of General Washington to the north of the River Hudson. In these dispatched, the English minister spoke in the most opprobrious terms of the American forces, and upbraided General Clinton, stating that, if, as he had said, there were in the King’s service more American royalists than there were rebels in Washington’s army, it was very extraordinary that he should let that rebellion last so long. He mentioned the French corps, but only to assure the English general that no preparation were being made in France to send out the second division, and that the first would have quite enough to do to uphold and protect its little squadron at Newport. He did not forget to observe the precarious state of the finances of Congress; and in this his calculations were so near the truth, that, at Wethersfield, the paper currency, after having been reduced to as low as a thousand to one, was at length completely annulled by a resolution of Congress.<sup>9</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Blanchard:*

I set out again on the 28th [of June 1781] for the American army. I passed by General Washington’s quarters, but as he had changed them I did not see him, and I proceeded directly to the inn at which I had previously dismounted at Peekskill. I met M. Du Portail, a French engineer in the service of America, with whom I conversed. He was greatly esteemed by the Americans. I spent the remainder of the

---

<sup>9</sup> *Memoirs of Rochambeau*, Part 2 pp. 980-984.

day in the camp and saw two regiments go through their exercise. The soldiers marched pretty well, but they handled their arms badly. There were some fine-looking men; also many who were small and thin, and even some children twelve or thirteen years old. They have no uniforms and in general are badly clad.<sup>10</sup>

~~~~~\*~~~~~

*Blanchard:*

On the 15<sup>th</sup> [of July 1781], I returned to the camp. In the evening M. de Rochambeau reproached me respecting the supply of bread which had failed. It was in vain for me to justify myself by telling him that I was not especially entrusted with this service; he was unwilling to listen to me. Nevertheless I had foretold that the bread would fail owing to the remoteness of the ovens. Next day the following remarks of M. de Rochambeau were related to me, that I was well pleased to see the supply fail, because I wished to have the intendant sent away and to fill his place; that as to the rest, the provisions ought to have been entrusted to me. Never were reproach and suspicion more unjust, and I felt it much. But such is M. de Rochambeau. He mistrusts every one and always believes that he sees himself surrounded by rogues and idiots. This character, combined with manners far from courteous, makes him disagreeable to everybody.\*

\* [*Footnote in original*] I wrote what precedes in a moment of ill-humor; and although M. de Rochambeau was unjust to me, on this occasion, and there is some truth in the portrait, which is here drawn of him, I ought to say that he also has good qualities, that he is wise, that he desires what is good, and that, if he is not an able administrator, he is generally very active, having an excellent glance, readily becoming acquainted with a country, and understanding war perfectly. He has served well in America and has given a favorable idea of the nation. People expected to see a French fop, and they saw a thoughtful man. "Your general is abstemious," an American alongside of whom I was dining, once said to me, and who remarked his moderation at table. This moderation and this wisdom were generally observable in the most important points.

On the 17th, I had occasion to see him again and he charged me to go and reconnoitre a site where he proposed to establish new storehouses of provisions, which I performed the same day. On the next day I wasted a whole day in running over, tediously and uselessly, the environs of the camp in a barren and desert region with which I was unacquainted, to find some employees whom I needed. Nevertheless, I succeeded in having a service of provisions established in a village called Rick's mill. On returning to camp I learnt that a captain of Lauzun's legion had been killed whilst going the rounds with the patrol. On the 21st, I saw M. de Rochambeau, to whom I gave an account of what I had done. His reception of me is usually cold. Nevertheless, I knew that he had spoken of my performances with praise. In the evening, at 9 o'clock, Lauzun's legion and the grenadiers and chasseurs of the Bourbonnois brigade started under the command of M. de Chastellux for an expedition, of the cause and object of which we are ignorant. An American corps also marched. M. de Rochambeau and Washington followed these divisions.

We learnt, on the 22d, that these troops had not accomplished anything, and they returned on this same day after having pillaged extensively and committed disorders, of which hitherto there had been no example. On the contrary, the army had behaved with a prudence which had merited the greatest praises from the Americans themselves. The latter marched in a very orderly manner to-day. I believe that they had no other object than to make a reconnoissance, the result of which was to satisfy them that they could not attack New York without very superior forces.<sup>11</sup>

~~~~~\*~~~~~

*Blanchard:*

*August, 1781.* Nothing interesting occurred during the first days of the month. I went and came, from the camp to Northcastle and from Northcastle to the camp. Pretty often we had storms and heavy

---

<sup>10</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 121-123.

rains, which cooled the air only for a moment. We had few sick men and less in proportion than in France. The retirement of M. Necker was much spoken of at this time, which seemed to concern everyone. We learnt this news through the English, who often sent trumpets and forwarded gazettes to us. We learnt from the same papers that M. de la Mothe-Piquet had captured a rich convoy. The parleys between us and the English were displeasing to the Americans, and even to General Washington; they were unaccustomed to this way of making war.

We were very quiet in our camp, foraging without being disturbed. The English contented themselves with guarding their cities and the outposts without making the least attempt against us; this made us sometimes believe in peace. On the other hand we were in daily expectation of M. de Grasse's squadrons.<sup>12</sup>

\*\*\*

*Rochambeau:*

On our return, we received intelligence of the continuation of the retreat of Lord Cornwallis; La Fayette was following him up with precautions, and had given the command of his guard to General Vain [Anthony Wayne], a brave but very ardent officer. The latter had succeeded in a first attack on Cornwallis' rear, but was repulsed in a second attempt with the loss of his cannon. Lord Cornwallis proceeded down River James as far as Portsmouth, from whence, after having reconnoitred this position, which he found unsuitable to his purpose, he proceeded up the River York, to York and Gloucester, where he established himself on the right and left banks of the river, which he made serve as a port for his ships to ride in safety.

The convoy of three hundred English recruits, announced at New York, arrived there on the 11th of August, and together with the garrison of Pensacola, carried the effective of the enemy, in that island, to more than twelve thousand men, notwithstanding the numerous detachments that had been drafted to the south.

It was under these circumstances that the Count de Grasse, after having completed a cruising expedition of little import off the Antilles, and in which he had only taken the island of Tabago [Tobago], arrived at Saint Domingo: he there found the frigate with my dispatches; he immediately communicated the latter to the Commandant of San Domingo and to M. de Solano, the Spanish Admiral, who both concurred with my plan of expedition against the army of Lord Cornwallis. They contributed towards it as much as they could; the former by lending us, for three months, the corps of three thousand men, under Saint-Simon; and the latter by forwarding the twelve hundred thousand francs, which we needed for the expedition, to be taken up by the Count de Grasse, as he should pass off the Havana. M. de Grasse sent the frigate off immediately, and, on the 5th of August, I received his reply, whereby he informed me that he would be in Chesapeake Bay at the end of August, with all the means that I had requested of him. He concluded by stating that the period of his station would be up on the 15th of October; but he prolonged his stay the necessary time to complete this important expedition.

As soon as I had communicated this reply to General Washington, I concerted, with M. de Barras, the most expeditious means of effecting his junction with M. de Grasse, and of bringing to my assistance the heavy ordnance and the detachment in command of M. de Choisy. In the mean time, General Washington prevailed on two thousand troops of the Northern States to accompany him to the South, and unite with the troops of La Fayette. One hundred thousand livres, which remained in the coffers of the French corps, were divided among the two armies.

They commenced moving on the 19th of August, and we retrograded three days' march to ascend the Hudson, which we crossed at Kingsferry, and under protection of the American forts. General Washington left three thousand men on the left shore, in command of General Heats [William Heath], to cover Westpoint and the Northern States. We then proceeded down the right shore in sight of States Island in advance of Chatham, where we established ovens and commenced victualling so as to feign an attack on

---

<sup>12</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 125-126.

New York by States Island, which doubly excited the anxiety of the enemy's General. M. de Villemansy, Commissary of War, executed this operation with remarkable dexterity. But turning off on a sudden to the right, towards the reverse of the mountain which divide the interior of Jersey States from its districts on the sea shore, we led our armies to the Delaware: we were fortunate enough to find its water low, and we were able to ford it near Trenton. It was not until then that the English general could have seen clearly into our intended plans; but it was then too late to impede them, provided M. de Grasse had proceeded to Chesapeak Bay at the period he promised he would. The two armies continued their march through Philadelphia, where they filed off in presence of the Congress assembled to review them. It was at the latter place that we were informed of the arrival of Admiral Hood at New York, where he had joined Admiral Graves, and sailed with due expedition for Chesapeak Bay. This disconcerting intelligence was counterbalanced by the report, which reached us at the same time from Baltimore, a town situated at its further extremity, of the arrival off the mouth of Chesapeak of M. de Grasse with 26 sail of the line. We hastened our march at the head of our respective van-guards; and, on arrival at the mouth of the Elk [Head of Elk, in Maryland], we found an officer bearer of dispatched from M. de Grasse, and who had reached thither about an hour before.

There were yet, however, other difficulties to surmount: the English, in their different incursions, had destroyed nearly all the American boats, so that we were scarcely able to muster a sufficient number to embark more than two thousand men, and the latter number would hardly include the two van-guards, consisting of the Grenadiers and Chasseurs of the two armies. The two Vioménils proceeded onward with the army by land, following the shore of the bay as far as Baltimore and Annapolis; General Washington and myself took the advance with a small escort, and by forced marches of sixty miles a day, we reached Williamsburg on the 14th of September, and found there the La Fayette and St-Simon divisions, who had taken up a good position together to await our arrival. Lord Cornwallis was intrenching his troops at Gloucester and York, he had barred the river with his ships, born up under the protection of his out-work, and had sunken several to bar the passage of the canal.

The people at Williamsburg were much alarmed at the sight of the enemy's fleet at a naval action, which had been fought on the 5th of September, and of which the firing had been distinctly heard, and though, last not least, at the sight again of two English frigates, which had put into the bay. At length, in the night of the 14th to the 15th, we received a letter from M. de Grasse, informing us that an English fleet of twenty sail had appeared on the 15th off Cape Charles; that although fifteen hundred of his sailors were employed in disembarking the troops of M. de Saint-Simon in River James, he had not hesitated a moment in cutting his cables and bearing down upon the enemy with twenty-four ships for action; that Graves, having got to windward, the van-guard of M. de Bougainville had come up with the English fleet, which he treated rather roughly; that M. de Grasse had chased it for a short time, and then had made for the bay, where he found M. de Barras with his fleet; that the latter, having sailed from Newport with our heavy artillery, which he had convoyed with safety, had put into the bay on the 10th; that he had there encountered and captured the two British frigates; that he had immediately sent off M. de Barras' ten transports, with the two latter frigates, together with the other prizes made by his army, to take in at Annapolis the troops in command of M. de La Villebrune. The latter officer had joined Vioménil, and with combined activity, they reached James's town [Jamestown] on the 25th, and our armies landed on the next and following day.

We left Williamsburg on the 28th of September at day-break, and proceeded direct to York. I commenced investing with the French troops, from the upper part of the river down marshes near the residence of Colonel Nelson, taking the woods, the curtains, and the marshy creeks, to confine the enemy within pistol-shot of their out-works...<sup>13</sup>

\*\*\*

---

<sup>13</sup> *Memoirs of Rochambeau*, Part 2, pp. 986-989.

*Blanchard:*

...At last, after having wandered for a long time in an unknown river, we landed two leagues from Williamsburg, where M. de la Fayette was posted; at least that is what a woman told us whom we met. There was no house or place where we landed, and we were compelled to go a long way on foot. At length we arrived at a deserted house where were two persons who let us in, but neither furniture nor provisions. We lay upon the floor. The next day, having hired horses, we proceeded to Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia. It consists of only a single street, but very broad and very handsome. Two or three public buildings, pretty large, are also to be seen there. We got in at the quarters of M. de la Fayette, where I found M. de Chastellux, who had arrived the evening before, with M. de Rochambeau and M. de Washington. They had got in advance by making forced marches across Maryland and Virginia. This latter province is General Washington's birthplace; he has there a very handsome dwelling-house, where he received our two generals: he had not been in his own country since the beginning of the war. A body of Americans under the command of M. de la Fayette were encamped near Williamsburg. Three French regiments, which M. de Grasse had brought, were joined to them, forming a body of 3000 men. They were the regiments of Gatinois, d'Agenois and Touraine. I found among my acquaintances the Count d' Autichamp, who commanded one of the regiments; he spoke much to me of my uncle, settled in St. Domingo, with whom he was connected. From this day, I set to work, although without a piece of paper or an employee or a bag of flour at my disposal: I was completely overwhelmed, which I still remember now that I am copying this thirteen years afterwards. The Baron de Steuben, a German general officer in the service of America, gave a great dinner to our generals, and I went to it. The next day the French and American generals, went on board of the *Ville de Paris* to see M. de Grasse. I sent a note to M. de Rochambeau to obtain some supplies from the navy in wines, flour, &c. On the 17th and the following days I worked much with M. de la Fayette, who was pleased to assist me in providing for our troops. It is difficult to employ more order, patience and integrity in the discussion of business matters; he reminded me of Scipio Africanus in Spain; as young and as modest as he, he already had the reputation of a skilful warrior; for the last campaign which he had just made, whilst sustaining himself against Cornwallis with inferior forces, had procured him much glory, and justly so.<sup>14</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Duc de Lauzun:*

I found M. de Custine there, and as I was giving him an account of what had taken place in his absence, General Washington and M. de Rochambeau, who were not far off on a corvette, sent me word to come on board their vessel. General Washington told me that Lord Cornwallis having sent all his cavalry and a rather large corps of troops to Gloucester, opposite York, he feared that he was trying to retreat that way, and that consequently he had sent to watch him a corps of three thousand militiamen under the continental brigadier-general Wiedon [George Weedon], a rather good commander, but hating war which he had always refused to wage, and being specially in mortal fear of gun shots. Having become a brigadier-general by chance, the respectable officer was my senior in command; General Washington regretted this more than I, for he intended to give me that command. He told me that he would write to General Wiedon that he could continue to hold the honours of his rank, but that he would forbid him to meddle with anything. I explained to him that we did not understand this manner of serving, that if General Wiedon were under my orders, I should certainly make him obey, but that being under his I should obey his every order, that I had no objection to serve under him, if he wished it, and that he might count on me to get along very well with him.

I went with my regiment to join the corps of General Wiedon. The manner in which he blockaded Gloucester was queer; he was at more than fifteen miles from the enemy's posts, was dying of fear, and dared not send a patrol a half mile from his camp. He was the best man on earth, and all that he wished was to meddle with nothing. I proposed to him to advance towards Gloucester, and to go the next day and reconnoitre along the English posts; he consented, and we started with fifty hussars. When we were within six or seven miles of the enemy, he told me that he considered it useless and very dangerous to go any

---

<sup>14</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 141-142.

further, and that we could learn no more; I pressed him so, that he did not dare refuse to follow. I forced back the enemy's posts, and approached sufficiently to get an exact idea of their position. My general was in despair; he told me he would go no further with me; that he did not wish to get killed.

I rendered an account to M. de Rochambeau of what I had seen; I informed him that the American militia was not to be counted on, and that it was indispensable to send me at least two more battalions of French infantry. I had neither artillery, supplies, nor powder. I asked for some: he sent me at once some artillery and eight hundred men drawn from the garrisons of the vessels under the orders of M. de Choisy, who, owing to his seniority, commanded General Wiedon and me.

M. de Choisy is a good and brave man, ridiculously violent, constantly in a passion, making scenes with everybody, and always without reason. He began by sending General Wiedon and all the militia packing, told them that they were poltroons, and in five minutes frightened them almost as much as the English and assuredly that was saying a great deal. The very next day he wanted to go and occupy the camp I had reconnoitred. General Wiedon preferred to come a day later and remained behind with about six hundred men of his division. A moment before entering the plain of Gloucester, the dragoons of the state of Virginia came very much frightened to tell us that they had seen English dragoons outside, and that, in fear of some accident, they had come as fast as their legs could carry them, without further investigation. I went forward to try and learn more. I perceived a very pretty woman at the door of a small house, on the main road, I questioned her, she told me that, at the very moment, Colonel Tarleton had left her house; that she did not know if many troops had come out of Gloucester; that Colonel Tarleton was very anxious "to shake hands with the French Duke." I assured her that I came expressly to give him that pleasure. She was very sorry for me, thinking, I believe, by experience, that it was impossible to resist Tarleton; the American troops were of the same opinion.

I had not gone a hundred paces, when I heard my advance guards firing pistols. I advanced at full gallop to look for ground on which I could arrange my troops for battle. On arriving I perceived the English cavalry three times more numerous than mine; I charged it without stopping, and we came together. Tarleton picked me out, came to me with his pistol raised. We were going to fight between our respective troops when his horse was thrown down by one of his dragoons who was being pursued by one of my lancers. I ran on him to take him prisoner, a company of English dragoons threw itself between us and protected his retreat, his horse was left to me. He charged me a second time, without breaking my ranks; I charged him a third time, upset a portion of his cavalry, and pursued him to the intrenchments of Gloucester. He lost one officer, some fifty men, and I made a rather large number of prisoners.

M. de Choisy established his camp at a mile and a half from Gloucester; our patrols continually exchanged shots with those of the English, and we did not sleep a single instant during the siege. As M. le baron de Vioménil was to attack two redoubts of the York works, M. de Choisy received the order to make a false attack on Gloucester; he thought he could make a real one, and carry the intrenchments sword in hand. He consequently had axes distributed to the American militia, to cut the stockades. At the first shot, half of the militia threw away their axes and guns to run faster. Thus abandoned, he withdrew on me with a few companies of French infantry, and lost a dozen men.

Two days after, Lord Cornwallis asked to capitulate. M. de Rochambeau intended to have me bear this great news to France, and sent for me. I did not care to go to Europe; I advised him to send M. de Charlus, which would reconcile him with M. de Castries, and would perhaps cause his army to be better treated. I was unable to induce him; he told him that I had had the first engagement, that I must carry the news; that as M. le comte Guillaume des Deux-Ponts had had the second, he should carry the details; comte de Charlus never forgave him nor me. I embarked on the King's frigate la Surveillante, and after a voyage of twenty-two days, I reached Brest, and went to Versailles without loss of time.<sup>15</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

---

<sup>15</sup> *Memoirs of the Duc de Lauzun*, pp. 323-329.

*Blanchard:*

I learnt these details on the 4th [of the skirmish between Lauzun and Tarleton at Gloucester], on going to the camp; but I was obliged to return the same evening. It was already cold and I made a fire on the 5th. I learnt that the English admiral Digby, who was expected from Europe with a strong squadron, had arrived with only three vessels, two of which were in a bad condition. We also learnt that the English had a vessel so much damaged in the last engagement with M. de Grasse, that they had been compelled to abandon it and burn it at sea. M. de Grasse, nevertheless, spoke with much modesty of this engagement, and I heard him say that it was only an encounter between two advanced guards.<sup>16</sup>

~\*\*\*~

*Comte de Deux-ponts:*

On the 14th of October, the regiments of Gatinois and of Royal Deuxponts relieved the trenches; at the assembly of the regiment of Royal Deuxponts for duty in the trenches, the Baron de Viomesnil ordered me to come to him on our arrival at the beginning of the trenches. I carried out his orders; he separated the grenadiers and chasseurs of the two regiments of the trenches, and gave me the command of the battalion that he had just formed, telling me that he thought he gave me by that a proof of his esteem and confidence. His words were not enigmatical to me; I was not mistaken as to the object for which he intended me. A moment afterwards he confirmed my opinion, telling me that I should make the attack on one of the redoubts which obstructed the continuation of our second parallel. He gave me orders to place my battalion under cover, and to wait until he should send for me to make with him a reconnoissance of the redoubt. In the course of the afternoon, he took me, with the Baron de L'Estrade, lieutenant-colonel of the regiment of Gatinois, whom he had given to me as second in command, and two sergeants from the grenadiers and chasseurs of this regiment, men as brave as they were intelligent, and who were charged particularly to reconnoitre with the strictest exactitude the road which we should have to follow during the night. We examined with the greatest care the object of the attack, and all the details. The General explained very clearly to us his plans. M. de L'Estrade, on account of his experience, and the perfect knowledge which he has of the course to take under like circumstances, would, moreover, make up for the blunders which I might commit. The General ordered me at once to form my battalion, and to lead it to that part of the trenches nearest to which we ought to come out. I called together the captains of my battalion, and told them the duty with which we were honored. I had no occasion to excite their courage, nor that of the troops whom I commanded; but it was my duty to let them know the wishes of the General, and the exact order in which we were to attack the enemy.

We then started to go into the trenches; we passed by many troops, either of the trenches, of workmen, or of the auxiliary grenadiers and chasseurs. Everybody wished me success and glory, and expressed regrets at not being able to go with me. That moment seemed to me very sweet, and was very elevating to the soul and animating to the courage. My brother, -- especially, my brother, and I never shall forget it, -- gave me marks of a tenderness which penetrated to the bottom of my heart. I reached the place that the Baron de Viomésnil [sic] had indicated to me; I there awaited nightfall; and shortly after dark, the General ordered me to leave the trenches, and to draw up my column in the order of attack. He informed me of the signal of six consecutive shells, fired from one of our batteries, at which I was to advance; and in this position I awaited the signal agreed upon.

The chasseurs of the regiment of Gatinois had the head of my column. They were in column by platoons; the first fifty carried fascines; of the other fifty there were only eight who carried ladders; after them came the grenadiers of Gatinois, ranged by files, then the grenadiers and chasseurs of the regiment of Royal Deuxponts, in column by sections. The whole was preceded by the two sergeants of the regiment of Gatinois, of whom I have already spoken, and by eight carpenters [engineers], four from the regiment of Gatinois, and four from the regiment of Royal Deuxponts. The chasseurs of the regiments of Bourbonnois and of Agenois, were a hundred paces to the rear of my battalion, and were intended to support me; and the second battalion of the regiment of Gatinois, commanded by the Count de Rostaing, completed my reserve.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, p. 146.



Before starting, I had ordered that no one should fire before reaching the crest of the parapet of the redoubt; and when established upon the parapet, that no one should jump into the works before receiving the orders to do so.

The attack of the French troops was combined with that which the American troops were making on my right, upon a redoubt which rested on the York River. This redoubt was of equal importance on account of the obstacle which it interposed to the continuation of the second parallel. The Marquis de Lafayette commanded this attack, which was to be made at the same time, and was to begin at the same signal as our attack.

The six shells were fired at last; and I advanced in the greatest silence; at a hundred and twenty or thirty paces, we were discovered; and the Hessian soldier who was stationed as a sentinel on the parapet, cried out “Werda”? [Who comes there?] to which we did not reply, but hastened our steps. The enemy opened fire the instant after the “Werda.” We lost not a moment in reaching the abatis, which being strong and well preserved, at about twenty-five paces from the redoubt, cost us many men, and stopped us for some minutes, but was cleared away with brave determination; we threw ourselves into the ditch at once, and each one sought to break through the fraises, and to mount the parapet. We reached there at first in small numbers, and I gave the order to fire; the enemy kept up a sharp fire, and charged us at the point of the bayonet; but no one was driven back. The carpenters, who had worked hard on their part, had made some breaches in the palisades, which helped the main body of the troops in mounting. The parapet was becoming manned visibly. Our fire was increasing, and making terrible havoc among the enemy, who had placed themselves behind a kind of intrenchment of barrels, where they were well massed, and where all our shots told. We succeeded at the moment when I wished to give the order to leap into the redoubt and charge upon the enemy with the bayonet; then they laid down their arms, and we leaped in with more tranquillity and less risk. I shouted immediately the cry of *Vive le Roi*, which was repeated by all the grenadiers and chasseurs who were in good condition, by all the troops in the trenches, and to which the enemy replied by a general discharge of artillery and musketry. I never saw a sight more beautiful or more majestic. I did not stop to look at it; I had to give attention to the wounded, and directions to be observed towards the prisoners. At the same time, the Baron de Viomesnil came to give me orders to be prepared for a vigorous defence, as it would be important for the enemy to attempt to retake this work. An active enemy would not have failed, and the Baron de Viomesnil judged the English general by himself. I made my dispositions to the best of my ability; the enemy showered bullets upon us. I did not doubt that the idea of the Baron de Viomesnil would be fulfilled. Finally, when all was over, a sentinel, charged with observing the movements without, called me, and said that some of the enemy were appearing. I raised my head above the parapet, and at the same time a ball, which ricocheted in the parapet, and passed very near my head, covered my face with sand and gravel. I suffered much, and was obliged to leave the place, and to be conducted to the ambulance.

Fifty-six grenadiers and chasseurs of the regiment of Gatinois, twenty-one grenadiers and chasseurs of the Royal Deuxponts,<sup>74</sup> six chasseurs of the Agenois, and nine soldiers of the second battalion of the Gatinois, have been killed or wounded, in this attack, which lasted only seven minutes. Moreover, M. de Barthelot, captain of the regiment of Gatinois, was killed; M. de Sireuil, captain of the chasseurs of this regiment, had his leg broken, and M. de Sillegue, second lieutenant of chasseurs, was shot through his thigh. The Chevalier de La Meth received two musket balls, one of which broke his knee-pan, and the other pierced his thigh. He volunteered for this attack, as also did the Count de Damas [also “Damascus”]; I endeavored to prevent their doing so; but neither of them listened to the representations that would have kept them from glory. The Count de Vauban was also at my attack, and was charged by the Count de Rochambeau to be present in order to give him an account of the affair.

With troops so good, so brave, and so disciplined as those that I have the honor to lead against the enemy, one can undertake anything, and be sure of succeeding, if the impossibility of it has not been proved. I owe them the happiest day of my life, and certainly the recollection of it will never be effaced from my mind. Would that I were able to find myself, under like circumstances, again with them; and

would that I were able, especially after having again been happy through their means, to give them proofs, more real and more fit, of my zeal and my ardor to serve them.<sup>17</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Rochambeau:*

On the 30th [of September 1781] we had dispatched M. de Choisy to M. de Grasse to ask for a detachment of the garrison of the ships, to reinforce M. de Lauzun in the county of Gloucester; M. de Grasse gave him eight hundred men, with which he marched on the 3d of October to invest Gloucester more closely, and take up a position nearer. Tarleton happened to be thereabouts with four hundred horse and two hundred infantry on a foraging expedition. De Lauzun's legion, backed by a corps of American militia, attacked him so vigorously that he was put to flight with his detachment and was obliged to put back with a severe loss. After this skirmish, M. de Choisy carried his advanced posts as far as within a mile of Gloucester. The trenches were opened in the two attacks, above and below York River, in the night of the 6th to the 7th of October. That on the right was cut to a length of six or seven hundred toises [sic], and was flanked with four redoutes [redoubts]. It was executed without any loss being sustained, because we commenced our works in the left trench, which, although the false attack, diverted nevertheless the whole attention of the enemy. The forces which the place contained, and the disposition of the men who commanded it, required us to conduct these attacks with much science and precaution. I cannot proceed further without passing the greatest eulogium on MM. Duportail and de Querenet, who commanded the engineers at the breach, and on M. D'Aboville and General Knox, who commanded the artillery of the two nations. The American army took charge of the trenches on the right, and the French of those in the centre and on the left.

I must render the Americans the justice to say, that they conducted themselves with that zeal, courage, and emulation, with which they were never backward, in the important part of the attack entrusted to them, and the more so as they were totally ignorant of the operations of a siege.

We set fire with our batteries to one of the enemy's men-of-war, and to three transports which had anchored with the design of attacking us in the rear.

During the night of the 14th to the 15th, the trenches were relieved by the regiments of Gatinois and Royal Deux-Ponts, in command of Baron de Vioménil; and we next resolved to attack the redoutes on the left of the enemy. General Washington entrusted to La Fayette that of the right, and I entrusted that of the left to M. de Vioménil with the French. Four hundred grenadiers came out at the head of this attack, commanded by M. Guillaume of the regiment of Deux-Ponts, and by M. de l'Estrapade, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Regiment of Gatinois. M. de Vioménil and La Fayette made such a vigorous attack, that the redoutes were carried sword in hand at the same moment. The greatest part of the troops who defended them were killed, wounded, or taken prisoners. The lodgement was effected by the junction of these redoutes by communication practised to the right of our second parallel.

The nature of the position of these redoutes allowed of the erection of two extra batteries, by the addition of which Lord Cornwallis's army was now completely hemmed in, and from which also we were able to pour in ricochet projectiles to the body of the place, which was within such a limited range that the effect must have been most tremendous. Count Guillaume, of the regiment of Deux-Ponts, was wounded, as were also Charles de Lameth, Adjutant-General, and M. de Gimet [Gimat], aide-de-camp to La Fayette.

I will relate here a circumstance which does much honour to the bravery of the French grenadiers. The grenadier regiment of Gatinois, which had been formed of that of Auvergne, had been chosen to open the attack; as soon as it was decided upon, I said to them: "My brave fellows, if I should want you to-night, I trust you will not have forgotten that we serve together in the regiment of *Auvergne sans tache* [Auvergne without stain], an honourable appellation which it has since its creation." They replied that, if I would give

---

<sup>17</sup> *Deux-ponts Journal*, pp. 142-149.

its former name to their regiment, they would die to the last man of them. They kept their word, rushed to the attack like lions, and nearly one third of them died the death of the brave. M. de Sireuil, a captain in the regiment, was mortally wounded to the universal regret of his comrades. The King, on my request, immediately put his sign-manual to the royal ordinance by which the former title of Royal Auvergne was restored to this distinguished body of men.<sup>18</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Blanchard:*

On the 16th, I intended to go to the camp and to dine with General Washington, who had invited me, but many wounded men reached me, which compelled me to remain at Williamsburg. They had been in a sortie which the English had made on the night of the 15th-16th, and in which at first they had been successful. They spiked four cannons and took a captain of the regiment of Agenois prisoner, but our troops soon rallied and the English were repulsed. Our works were nevertheless continued vigorously; we fired upon the English by ricochet, which greatly annoyed them, and they might have feared being captured sword in hand. Therefore, on the 17th, at noon, they asked to capitulate and the firing ceased. M. de la Chèze had the kindness to send me word of it immediately; I greatly rejoiced at it as a citizen, and also for this especial reason, that I perceived in this capitulation the end of our uneasiness respecting the service of the hospitals. There were still some difficulties respecting the articles of the capitulation; they even recommenced firing. At last, on the next day, the 18th, at noon, everything was concluded. Cornwallis surrendered as prisoner of war with all his troops, amounting to a body of 8000 men. It was not until the next day, the 19th, that they denied in front of our troops and the Americans. Cornwallis said that he was sick and did not appear. The general who commanded in his stead wished to give up his sword to M. de Rochambeau, but he made a sign to him that he ought to address himself to General Washington. The English displayed much arrogance and ill humour during this melancholy ceremony; they particularly affected great contempt for the Americans. Being detained elsewhere by our service, I was unable to be present at this spectacle, which would have greatly interested me.

On the 21st, I went to see the city of York. I visited our works and those of the English; I perceived the effect of our bombs and balls...

The English and Hessian troops, prisoners of war, also left the camp; they were very fine-looking men. There was also a battalion of English grenadiers of great height and good appearance. The remainder of the English were small; there were some Scotch troops, strong and good soldiers. They proceeded towards Williamsburg. I went to visit their camp; I saw them make their soup, go for wood, etc. The Germans preserved order and a certain discipline; on the contrary, there was very little order among the English, who were proud and arrogant. There was no call for this; they had not even made a handsome defense, and, at this very moment, were beaten and disarmed by peasants who were almost naked, whom they pretended to despise and who, nevertheless, were their conquerors.<sup>19</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Blanchard:*

On the 20th [of July 1782] we stopped at Alexandria, a city situated upon the Potomac, where ships of fifty guns can approach. This city is perfectly well situated for becoming commercial. Therefore they have built much there; it may become considerable, still it is not much. General Washington's residence, that in which he was born, is situated between Colchester and Alexandria. Mrs. Washington had arrived there the evening before. She invited M. de Custine, who commanded the division to which I was attached, to go and dine at her house with some officers. He proposed to me to go thither and we proceeded thither, to the number of ten persons. Mrs. Washington is a woman of about fifty years of age; she is small and fat, her appearance is respectable. She was dressed very plainly and her manners were simple in all

---

<sup>18</sup> *Memoirs of Rochambeau*, Part 2, pp. 989-991.

<sup>19</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 151-153.

respects; she had with her three other ladies, her relations. As to the house it is a country residence, the handsomest that I have yet seen in America, it is symmetrically built and has two stories, counting the false roofs, wherein some pretty chambers have been constructed. All the rooms are furnished with taste.

There are in the places around, many huts for the negroes, of whom the general owns a large number, who are necessary to him for his large possessions, which are supposed to amount to ten thousand acres of land. (The acre is very nearly of the same extent as our arpent.) Among these some of good quality is found, and I have observed some of it of this sort. A large part is woodland, where Mr. Washington, before the war, enjoyed the pleasure of the chase, which had inclined him to the military life which he has since led. The environs of his house are not fertile and the trees that we see there do not appear to be large. Even the garden is barren. What decided the general's parents to choose this dwelling place is the situation which is very handsome. The Potomac flows at the foot of the garden and the largest ships of war can anchor there. It has different branches of a kind of bays and in this place is about half a league broad. The whole make a very agreeable prospect. The opposite shore needs rather more houses and villages. Taken all together, it is a handsome residence and worthy of General Washington. In the evening, we left her respectable company after having spent a very agreeable and truly interesting day.

On the 21st, we crossed the Potomac; the camp was placed at Georgetown, a small town, wherein many German families are found. We then leave Virginia and enter Maryland.<sup>20</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Comte de Deux Ponts:*

On the 1st of November, as the enemy had not appeared for two days, the Count de Grasse sent an ensign on board of the *Andromaque*, to wish us a pleasant voyage, and to permit our captain, M. de Kavanel, to set sail. We got under way at eleven o'clock, passed Cape Henry at two o'clock, and afterwards brought it to bear east. The *Hermione* escorted us until night...

From the 2d to the 20th of November, the day of our arrival in France, we made a good run. The fresh and strong winds drove us along better than we could expect from the speed of our frigate. The passage was rough; we experienced some gales, but they favored our wishes, and accomplished our object. After a passage of nineteen days, we made the coast of France; and on the 24th of November, I enjoyed the inexpressible pleasure of embracing, at Versailles, those persons who are to me the dearest.

The life of man is mingled with pain; but one ought not to complain when he has enjoyed those delicious moments which are its compensations. A single instant makes him forget them; and that instant deeply felt makes him even desire new pains, in order to enjoy again their recompense.<sup>21</sup>

~~~~\*\*\*\*\*~~~~

***List of works quoted from and others of related interest.***

Blanchard, Claude. (trans. by Wm. Duane, and edited by Thomas Balch). *The Journal of Claude Blanchard, Commissary of the French Auxiliary Army Sent to the United States During the American Revolution: 1780-1783*. J. Munsell, Albany, 1876.

Balch, Edwin Swift (trans. by Thomas Balch.). *The French in America During the War of Independence of the United States 1777-1783*. (vol. 1) Porter and Coates, Philadelphia, 1891.

Balch, Edwin Swift and Balch, Elise Willing. *The French in America During the War of Independence of the United States 1777-1783*. (vol. 2) Porter and Coates, Philadelphia, 1895.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Journal of Claude Blanchard*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>21</sup> *Deux-ponts Journal*, p. 155.

Chastellux, Marquis de. (Anonymous, ed.) *Travels in North America in the years 1780, 1781, and 1782*, first American edition, New York, 1828.

Conkling, Howard, *Le Chevalier de la Luzerne: A Short Biography*. Howard Conkling (pub.), New York, 1908.

Deux-ponts, Comte de. (trans. by Samuel Abbott Green). *My Campaigns in America: A Journal Kept by Count William De Deux-ponts, 1780-81*. J.K. Wiggin and Wm. Parsons Lunt, Boston, 1868.

Dumas, Count Guillaume-Mathieu. *Memoirs of His Own Time by Lieut.-Gen. Count Mathieu Dumas*, Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1839.

Humphreys, Francis Landon. *What We Owe France*. Edwin S. Gorham Publisher, New York, 1915.

Jusserand, Jean Jules. *With Americans of Past and Present Days*. Charles Scribner and Sons, New York, 1916.

Lauzun, Duc de. (trans. by E. Jules Méras). *Memoirs of the Duc de Lauzun, 1747-1783*, Sturgis & Walton, New York, 1912.

Preston, Howard W. "Rochambeau and the French Troops in Providence in 1780-81-82." *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections*, vol. XVII, no. 1, Jan 1924.

Rochambeau, Comte de. (trans. by M.W.E. Wright). "Excerpts from Rochambeau's Memoirs (1808) as they pertain to his Campaign in America," (Part I). *The North American Review*, vol. 205, no. 738, May 1917, pp. 785-802, and (Part 2) *The North American Review*, vol. 205, no. 739, June 1917, pp. 978-992. *Note*. Rochambeau's memoirs were also put out in an edition by Arno Press, New York, in 1971.

Ségur, Comte de. *Memoirs and Recollections of Count Ségur, written by himself*. Henry Colburn, London, 1825.

Selig, Robert. "Eyewitness to Yorktown," (letters home from Sous-lieutenant Wilhelm Graf von Schwerin), *Military History* (magazine), February 2003.

---

*Wm. Thomas Sherman*  
1604 NW 70th St.  
Seattle, Washington 98117  
206-784-1132  
[wts@gunjones.com](mailto:wts@gunjones.com)  
<http://www.gunjones.com> and [http://www.scribd.com/w Sherman\\_1](http://www.scribd.com/w Sherman_1)

*For Lee's Legion on Face Book:*  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/LeesLegion/>