



AMERICANS *Becoming* TODAY

NO. 1 IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG



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1781

Newsline

April 29

The Marquis de Lafayette and his Continentals reach Richmond**

May 21

Reinforcements from Gen. Henry Clinton in New York arrive, bringing the British forces under Gen. Charles Cornwallis in Virginia to 7,000**

May 27

Cornwallis forces American evacuation of Richmond**

June 4

Capt. John Jouett Jr. sees Col. Banastre Tarleton's troops in Louisa County and races at night to Monticello to warn Thomas Jefferson and to Charlottesville to warn the General Assembly. Jefferson and all but seven legislators escape**

June 12

Thomas Nelson Jr. of Yorktown is elected governor**

June 19

Maj. Gen. Friedrich Von Steuben's men join Lafayette and Gen. Anthony Wayne, making 1,900 Continentals and about 3,000 militia under command*

June 25

Cornwallis reaches Williamsburg*

June 26

The main American army reaches Bird's Tavern, about 10 miles from Williamsburg*

July 4

Cornwallis' troops leave Williamsburg and cross the James River on July 6.

July 9-24

From his base in Suffolk, Cornwallis conducts raids along the south side of the James River**

August 2

Cornwallis occupies Yorktown after Clinton orders him to fortify Old Point Comfort where the land would not support heavy fortifications*

August 19

Gen. George Washington begins to move his own and the Comte de Rochambeau's armies from the North toward Virginia upon the intelligence that the Comte de Grasse, the French admiral, is sailing with 3,000 men from the West Indies for the Chesapeake*

August 26

De Grasse arrives in Chesapeake Bay and, on September 2, 3,000 troops land at Jamestown under the Marquis de St. Simon*

September 5

Outside the Virginia Capes, de Grasse damages a part of the British fleet under Adm. Thomas Graves that is forced to return to New York, closing an escape route for Cornwallis' forces*

September 14

Washington and Rochambeau arrive in Williamsburg before their troops marching from the North. After conferring with de Grasse on board his flagship, they return to Williamsburg on September 22*

September 28

The combined American and French armies of 16,000 men march from Williamsburg to Yorktown*

*September 29-October 17

The Siege of Yorktown**

September 30

The British surrender their outermost earthworks at Yorktown*

October 14

British redoubts 9 and 10 fall, allowing the allies to complete a second parallel of breastworks closer to Yorktown*

October 16

A violent storm and a steady bombardment prevent Cornwallis from escaping across the York River to Gloucester*

*October 19

Cornwallis surrenders the British army of 7,247 men at Yorktown. General Washington, with the assistance of the French, has won independence for the colonies*

*John E. Selby, *A Chronology of Virginia and the War of Independence 1763-1783* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1973).

***Becoming Americans: Choosing Revolution Chronology* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1996).

WAR COMES TO WILLIAMSBURG

News reached Williamsburg on August 2 that ended days of speculation about where the British army had gone. Cornwallis' soldiers had landed at Yorktown. That news also reached General Lafayette who was encamped west of Williamsburg. A detachment of his army marched through town to take up a position east of Williamsburg where it could keep an eye on the British. The enemy had occupied Williamsburg twice this year. Soon a large allied American army would occupy it. War had returned to Williamsburg.

During the summer, a French army commanded by the Comte de Rochambeau linked up with George Washington's Continental army north of New York City. Washington had planned to besiege the city, but success hinged on the arrival of a promised French fleet from the West Indies. However, when news that Cornwallis had gone to ground in Virginia reached the French admiral the Comte de Grasse, de Grasse decided to sail his fleet to the Chesapeake Bay instead. When word of the admiral's decision reached Washington on August 14, Washington knew that the planned siege was doomed. He quickly moved to seize this new opportunity to capture Cornwallis. He ordered a combined French and American army south on August 19.

Meanwhile, speculation about the British intentions had been a topic of conversation among many Williamsburg residents. Spies from Yorktown supplied a steady flow of information about Cornwallis' actions. It was no secret that the British were constructing strong earthworks around Yorktown and across the York River at Tindalls Point. Amidst these conversations, a rumor that a large fleet, presumably French, had anchored in Lynnhaven Bay was confirmed when several thousand French soldiers landed at Jamestown Island on September 5 and joined with Lafayette's forces in and around Williamsburg.

Their arrival brought good news. They had real money. Virginia's cash-strapped planters had reluctantly supplied the cash-strapped Lafayette with provisions. Livestock and foodstuffs that had once seemed in short supply quickly materialized. Wagons and herded animals were driven up and down Williamsburg's main street to feed this growing army. The pace of military activity picked up with the arrival of General Washington and General Rochambeau on September 14. Six days later, advance elements of the allied army arrived and began to set up camps around Williamsburg. Several thousand Virginia militiamen under Gen. Thomas Nelson soon joined them.

By late September, some 15,000 to 20,000 soldiers were encamped in the Greater Williamsburg area. While the generals and their staffs planned the siege of Yorktown, these soldiers engaged in the routine chores of army life. They drilled. They posted guards. They carried messages from unit to unit. They laundered clothes. They cooked meals. Some even took time off to go sightseeing in the old capital city. Their presence also placed heavy demand on the resources of the region. Supplying food and fuel would have been especially difficult.

By the evening of September 27, the battle plan was ready. The next morning the army set off for Yorktown. With its departure, the center of military activity shifted away from Williamsburg, but the city remained an important rear area. Hospitals, for example, were established in Williamsburg for sick and wounded French and American soldiers. Sutlers (a follower of an army camp who peddled provisions to the soldiers) supplying the troops in the field purchased their goods, especially liquor, from the city's merchants.

On the afternoon of October 9, the distant rumble of artillery fire alerted perceptive townspeople that the siege had entered a new stage. The arrival of French soldiers who were wounded taking British redoubt 9 on October 14 signaled that the siege was almost over. When the distant thunder of shelling stopped on the morning of October 17, Williamsburg residents knew that the British surrender was imminent. Some may have set out for Yorktown on the morning of October 19 arriving in time to witness the surrender that afternoon. Those who remained at home knew the victory was real when the defeated British soldiers were escorted westward through town. In early November, as victorious Americans marched along Duke of Gloucester Street on their way back to New York and the French army took up winter quarters near Williamsburg and in the lower tidewater area, the war in Williamsburg came to an end.

[Submitted by Kevin Kelly]

THE DOWN SIDE OF REVOLUTION

A celebratory mood pervaded Williamsburg on May 1, 1783. Peace between Great Britain and the United States sparked an elaborate parade, public proclamations of peace and repeated toasts to independence.

Events of the day masked the realities of war: families rent asunder by opposing political views; suspicions about loyalties among old friends and associates; bad news from the front about the war and the fate of fathers, sons, brothers, husbands; the consequences for Williamsburg in the wake of occupying forces, friend and foe; rampant inflation; the perilous flight of slaves to join the British ranks in a bid for freedom; the sometimes shocking conditions these escapees endured; Williamsburg's own diminished role in the post-Revolutionary period.

Although the differences between loyalist John Randolph who left Virginia for England and his patriot son Edmund are usually portrayed almost as a polite disagreement, a poisonous atmosphere in Williamsburg marked the departure of several loyalist residents. Rumors of intimidation against people who did not conform to the Continental Association circulated widely. In late November 1774, a liberty pole was erected opposite the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg "upon which was hung a large map & a bag of feathers, under it a bbl [barrel] of tarr." In 1775 and 1776, Tories fled Williamsburg in the prevailing climate of fear during which persons judged to be "inimical to the liberties of America" could find their names and an account of their transgressions published in the *Virginia Gazette*.

As the Revolution approached, the promise as well as the pitfalls of the changing times



George Washington (Peale)

SUMMER 1781

THE BRITISH ARE COMING!

Friday-Sunday, June 25-27, 2004

This special weekend, titled "Under the Redcoat," represents that period of British occupation of the city of Williamsburg. The event begins with the 17th Light Dragoons and some light infantry entering the city and replacing the American Grand Union flag at the Capitol with the flag of Great Britain. Guests are encouraged to experience the occupation by visiting the British encampment and observing the soldiers and their commanding officers, as Cornwallis makes plans to engage advancing Continental Army units led by the Marquis de Lafayette. While Cornwallis prepares his battle plan, his troops pursue various activities in camp throughout the weekend.

The re-enactment draws to a close late Sunday afternoon as Cornwallis marches his troops out of the city to prepare to meet the Continentals on the field, in what we now refer to as the Battle of Greenspring near the James River.

Washington Prepares for Yorktown!

Friday-Sunday, September 3-5, 2004

Our second big re-enactment event of the summer is titled "Prelude to Victory." It represents September 26-28, 1781, the last three days of the period when General Washington and Le Comte de Rochambeau, commander of French forces, were headquartered in Williamsburg prior to the siege at Yorktown. Over the course of this event, troops drill and engage in camp life, while Washington and his staff prepare for what will be the last major campaign of the War for Independence.

To help re-create these events, Colonial Williamsburg invites selected re-enactment units that have demonstrated knowledge of the period and events and accuracy and authenticity in their equipment and costuming. These units display a wide variety of interpretive skills and experience. Activities for both weekends include musket drills, artillery batteries, dragoon (cavalry) maneuvers, a military field hospital and many elements of camp life.

WARTIME ROMANCE

Rachel Warrington

In the summer and fall of 1781, the French soldiers in Williamsburg and Yorktown caused some excitement among the area's young ladies, who had many opportunities to meet and socialize with the handsome foreigners. Rachel Warrington with her older sister, Camilla, and other young ladies of the town attended social events with the foreigners and flirted in broken schoolgirl French. Rachel was particularly taken with the attentions of the Viscount de Rochambeau, the son of the Comte de Rochambeau, the leader of the French troops in America. A brief affair between the two resulted in the birth of a baby boy.

Rachel and her son lived with her rich aunt, Mrs. Riddle, in the house that had belonged to Thomas Everard. The illegitimate child was public knowledge in Williamsburg, and Rachel's disgrace was widely discussed. Friends of the family attempted to contact the viscount in France to persuade him to acknowledge the child, but he refused to do so until many years later. She married Mr. Brown in 1786 and lived out the rest of her life in York County.

[Submitted by Jennifer Jones]

NEWS

THE DOWN SIDE OF
REVOLUTION

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pushed and pulled families such as the Geddys in a different way. Solid and prosperous tradesmen of long standing in the community, James Geddy Jr. favored the patriot cause and was a member of the local Committee of Safety. Geddy's 1777 decision to suspend commercial activities in Williamsburg, put his house on the market and move his family to his Dinwiddie County farm affected not only his wife and children but also his brothers, his slaves and other workers on the site. Brother William remained in the Williamsburg area and drove livestock and provided goods for Virginia and Continental forces.

Gentry leaders struck upon property ownership as a surefire way of establishing common economic ground with Virginia yeomanry in the effort to enlist lesser landowners and farmers in the Revolution. Promoted as an almost sacred right, property ownership protected the institution of slavery, even as the unsettled times and Dunmore's emancipation proclamation provided slaves of rebel sympathizers a real chance for freedom, many choosing to run to British lines in Norfolk in 1775, others joining the British as they marched through Virginia in 1781. Cornwallis used the former slaves to construct massive earthworks at Yorktown. Later, however, they became a drain on his limited resources and were abandoned to their fate, ill clad, poorly nourished and vulnerable to smallpox and other diseases.

The war weariness that settled on Virginia by 1780 was exacerbated by rampant inflation that caused real hardship and unrest in Williamsburg and rivaled the war as a major concern. Ordinary citizens of Wil-



Yorktown Surrender of Cornwallis

YORKTOWN IS PROOF POSITIVE—THESE ARE THE TIMES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS

The town of York—20th October 1781

Silence has now descended on this port town with the signing yesterday of the Articles of Capitulation betwixt his Excellency General Washington, Commander and Chief of the combined forces of America and France, and the Rt. Honorable Earl Cornwallis, Lt. General of his Britannic Majesty's Forces.

Thus is ended a 20-day siege of York and Gloucester, pitting some 17,000 allied American and French soldiers and seamen against a reported 8,500 British troops, including German auxiliaries and loyalist Americans.

The campaign began the 28th of September as Washington's forces marched on York. As his army approached the town, the British withdrew from their forward posts and dug in to await reinforcements. To his complete dismay, Cornwallis would learn that the reinforcements would never arrive.

On the evening of October 14, 400 Americans under Alexander Hamilton, stormed and captured Redoubt 10, while a like number of French, commanded by Col. Deux-Ponts, seized control of Redoubt 9. These military endeavors prepared the way for the launch of troops in a direct assault on the British.

Some at York suppose that 12 or 1,500 rounds of siege artillery have been fired on the town in a nine-day period. The bombardment has taken a horrendous toll on the inhabitants, as well as the town itself. Maj. Ebenezer Denny of Pennsylvania has said, "glad to be relieved of this disagreeable station. Negroes lie about, sick and dying, in every stage of the small pox. Never was in so filthy a place—some handsome house, but prodigiously shattered."

Article II of the Capitulation directs the "garrison of York to march out to a place—at two o'clock precisely with drums beating a British or German march.

After more than six long years of war, perhaps finally there might be a full and lasting peace. It will be a peace hard fought and dearly won.

GOD SAVE GENERAL WASHINGTON AND THE ALLIED ARMY.

[Submitted by Phil Shultz]

liamsburg called a town meeting of all free inhabitants at which it was decided to fix the prices of foodstuffs and appoint an oversight committee to force compliance. Further difficulties followed first the British forces then the American as they made their way through Williamsburg on course for

Yorktown. Property damage, smallpox and a plague of stinging flies increased the general discomfort and unease of local residents.

Williamsburg's own fate was sealed before war's end. On April 7, 1780, the government packed up and left town.

[Submitted by Linda Rowe]

PEOPLE

TWO PERSPECTIVES War and the Slaves *Slaves as Soldiers*

May 1777—Act II. *An act for the more speedily completing the Quota of Troops.*

And whereas several negro slaves have deserted from their masters, and under pretence of being free men have enlisted as soldiers: For prevention whereof, Be it enacted, that it shall not be lawful for any recruiting officer within this commonwealth to enlist any negro or mulatto into the service of this or either of the United States, until such negro or mulatto shall produce a certificate from some justice of the peace for the county wherein he resides that he is a free man.

Black Women

For the bulk of slave women located on southern plantations, the war entailed both physical suffering and greater latitude for personal action. Forced to make do with less in the way of food, clothing, and other basic supplies, white southerners considered the daily needs of their slaves to be a low priority (especially after 1778, when fighting engulfed the region). At least some whites fulfilled the prediction of the patriot who railed against runaway slave men seeking protection from the British: "The aged, the infirm, the women and children, are still to remain the property of their masters, masters who will be provoked to severity, should part of their slaves desert them." Untold numbers of slave women felt the wrath of "an enraged and injured people" desperate to keep the upper hand at home as well as on the battlefield.

Slaves as Laborers

During the Revolution, Virginia authorities sought to employ slaves as military laborers in the campaign against the British. The officials faced several obstacles, including the escape of able-bodied male slaves to Lord Dunmore and the unwillingness of slave owners to sell or hire out their slaves to assist in the war effort. (State and Confederate authorities would face similar difficulties almost a century later.) Virginia slaves who did contribute to the patriot cause as military laborers found themselves performing dangerous and dirty work, from toiling in lead mines to erecting fortifications.

War and the Masters

Williamsburg, July 11, 1781

My ever dear Fanny:

Here [the British] remained for some days, and with them pestilence and famine took root, and poverty brought up the rear. . . . Our friend Madison and his lady (they have lost their son) were turned out of their house to make room for Lord Cornwallis. Happily the College afforded them an asylum. Mr. McClurg has one small servant left, and but two girls. He feeds and saddles his own horse . . . Poor Mr. Cocke was deserted by his favorite man Clem: and Mrs. Cocke by the loss of her cook was obliged to have recourse to her neighbours to dress her dinner for her. They have but one little boy left to wait on them within doors. But this is not all. The small-pox, which the hellish polling of these infamous wretches has spread in every place through which they have passed has now obtained a crisis throughout the place so that there is scarcely a person to be found to nurse those who are most afflicted by it. Your old friend Aunt Betty is in that situation. A child of Sir Peyton Skipwith's who is with her, was deserted by its nurse, and the good lady was left without a human being to assist her in any respect for some days. As the British plundered all that they could, you will conceive how great an appearance of wretchedness this place must exhibit. After tyrannizing ten days here, they went to James Town where they were attached by our advanced parties. . . . Our army is in motion. Among the plagues the British left in Williamsburg, that of flies is inconceivable.

—St. George Tucker

THE YORKTOWN CAMPAIGN: PRINCIPAL PLAYERS

Charles, Second Earl Cornwallis

The leader of the British troops in the South was a 41-year-old English aristocrat. Charles, the second Earl Cornwallis, chose a military career like many men of his station in England. In 1781, Cornwallis was charged with securing the southern colonies, and in the spring of that year he marched his troops into Virginia. Ordered by Clinton in June to make a defensive stand at Williamsburg or Yorktown, Cornwallis instead took his troops south of the James River to Portsmouth. By mid-July, however, Cornwallis had made up his mind to take Yorktown and to fortify both the small port town and the point of land opposite it in Gloucester. Cornwallis used the fine house of Thomas Nelson, the former secretary of the colony, as his headquarters. The bombardment of Yorktown began on October 9, the forward attack on the British positions commenced on the 14th. Cornwallis agreed to discuss terms on October 17. The formalities of the surrender were to take

place two days later. Cornwallis, however, claimed to be too ill to attend and sent his second in command, Brig. Gen. Charles O'Hara, to surrender the British army.

The Marquis de Lafayette

Lafayette was born to an aristocratic family in France in 1757, and joined a long line of military heroes in his family. His family arranged his marriage into another aristocratic French family when he was 16. By the time he was in his late teens, Lafayette was a well-connected, wealthy man and already a husband and a father. He sympathized with the plight of the Americans, and, traveled across the Atlantic to offer his military services to George Washington.

In March 1781, Lafayette arrived in Virginia on the orders of Washington and in command of his own troops. The 23-year-old major general followed Cornwallis through Virginia during the following months. A dispatch from Washington at the beginning of August suggesting that Lafayette should build up his troop strength convinced the young general to stay put. Washington knew that the French fleet would soon arrive at the mouth of the York River and that the opportunity for an assault on Cornwallis in Virginia was close at hand.

On September 14, 1781, Washington arrived in Williamsburg, and Lafayette rushed out to greet him. Two weeks later, the Continental army arrived from the North, and the force set out from Williamsburg to lay siege to Cornwallis' troops in Yorktown. On October 12, after several days of intense bombing, Lafayette led a force of men against the British positions and successfully achieved his objective. Cornwallis surrendered soon after, and the Marquis de Lafayette returned to France a decorated hero of the American Revolution.

Benjamin Lincoln

In 1778, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln surrendered Charleston to the British. The defeat and humiliation of that surrender weighed heavily on him. In 1781, however,

he rejoined Washington's army as plans were being laid to take New York City. When word reached Washington that the French fleet under the French admiral the Comte de Grasse was sailing for the Chesapeake, Washington decided to mount a southern offensive. He placed the 48-year-old Lincoln in command of the Continental army on the grounds that Lincoln had the most seniority, and the army began to move rapidly towards Williamsburg.

Between September 22 and 24, the Continental army disembarked at College Landing on College Creek and gathered in Williamsburg to await the march on Yorktown. When Cornwallis surrendered on October 17, he sent his second in command, Brig. Gen. Charles O'Hara, to carry out the formalities of surrender. Washington refused to accept the surrender from O'Hara and instead ordered his own second in command to step forward. The man who had suffered defeat at the hands of the British army three years before now accepted its surrender.

[Submitted by Jennifer Jones]

James Armistead Lafayette

James Armistead was a slave owned by William Armistead of New Kent County. In 1781, James asked permission of his owner to volunteer to assist General Lafayette as a spy for the American and French armies. While in Yorktown gathering military information useful to the allied forces, Armistead was recruited by Lord Cornwallis to act as a spy for the British! Armistead played that role and pretended to deliver information damaging to the American cause while continuing to carry out important commissions so effectively that General Lafayette recommended him as worthy of "every reward his situation could admit of."

After the war, the Virginia General Assembly rewarded Armistead (by then calling himself James Armistead Lafayette) for his Revolutionary services by emancipating him. In 1818 he petitioned Virginia for and was granted a veteran's pension.

[Submitted by Phil Shultz]

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