

= Yorktown campaign =

The Yorktown or Virginia campaign was a series of military maneuvers and battles during the American Revolutionary War that culminated in the decisive Siege of Yorktown in October 1781 . The result of the campaign was the surrender of the British Army force of General Charles , Earl Cornwallis , an event that led directly to the beginning of serious peace negotiations and the eventual end of the war . The campaign was marked by disagreements , indecision , and miscommunication on the part of British leaders , and by a remarkable set of cooperative decisions , at times in violation of orders , by the French and Americans .

The campaign involved land and naval forces of Great Britain and France , and land forces of the United States . British forces sent to Virginia between January and April 1781 joined with Cornwallis 's army in May , which came north from an extended campaign through the southern states . These forces were first opposed weakly by Virginia militia , but General George Washington sent first the Marquis de Lafayette and then Anthony Wayne with Continental Army troops to oppose the raiding and economic havoc the British were wreaking . The combined American forces , however , were insufficient in number to oppose the combined British forces , and it was only after a series of controversially confusing orders by General Sir Henry Clinton , the British commander @-@ in @-@ chief , that Cornwallis moved to Yorktown in July and built a defensive position that was strong against the land forces he then faced , but was vulnerable to naval blockade and siege .

British naval forces in North America and the West Indies were weaker than the combined fleets of France and Spain , and , after some critical decisions and tactical missteps by British naval commanders , the French fleet of Paul de Grasse gained control over Chesapeake Bay , blockading Cornwallis from naval support and delivering additional land forces to blockade him on land . The Royal Navy attempted to dispute this control , but Admiral Thomas Graves was defeated in the key Battle of the Chesapeake on September 5 . American and French armies that had massed outside New York City began moving south late in August , and arrived near Yorktown in mid @-@ September ; deceptions about their movement successfully delayed attempts by Clinton to send more troops to Cornwallis .

The Siege of Yorktown began on September 28 . In a step that probably shortened the siege , Cornwallis decided to abandon parts of his outer defenses , and the besiegers successfully stormed two of his redoubts . When it became clear that his position was untenable , Cornwallis opened negotiations on October 17 and surrendered two days later . When the news reached London , the government of Lord North fell , and the following Rockingham ministry entered into peace negotiations . These culminated in the Treaty of Paris in 1783 , in which King George III recognized the independent United States of America . Clinton and Cornwallis engaged in a public war of words defending their roles in the campaign , and British naval command also discussed the navy 's shortcomings that led to the defeat .

= = Background = =

By December 1780 , the American Revolutionary War 's North American theaters had reached a critical point . The Continental Army had suffered major defeats earlier in the year , with its southern armies either captured or dispersed in the loss of Charleston and the Battle of Camden in the south , while the armies of George Washington and the British commander @-@ in @-@ chief for North America , Sir Henry Clinton watched each other around New York City in the north . The national currency was virtually worthless , public support for the war , about to enter its sixth year , was waning , and army troops were becoming mutinous over pay and conditions . In the Americans ' favor , Loyalist recruiting in the south had been checked with a severe blow at Kings Mountain in October .

= = = French and American planning for 1781 = = =

Virginia had largely escaped military notice before 1779 , when a raid destroyed much of the state

's shipbuilding capacity and seized or destroyed large amounts of tobacco , which was a significant trade item for the Americans . Virginia 's only defenses consisted of locally raised militia companies , and a naval force that had been virtually wiped out in the 1779 raid . The militia were under the overall direction of Continental Army General Baron von Steuben , a prickly Prussian taskmaster who , although he was an excellent drillmaster , alienated not only his subordinates , but also had a difficult relationship with the state 's governor , Thomas Jefferson . Steuben had established a training center in Chesterfield for new Continental Army recruits , and a " factory " in Westham for the manufacture and repair of weapons and ammunition .

French military planners had to balance competing demands for the 1781 campaign . After a series of unsuccessful attempts at cooperation with the Americans (leading to failed assaults on Newport , Rhode Island and Savannah , Georgia) , they realized more active participation in North America was needed . However , they also needed to coordinate their actions with Spain , where there was potential interest in making an assault on the British stronghold of Jamaica . It turned out that the Spanish were not interested in operations against Jamaica until after they had dealt with an expected British attempt to reinforce besieged Gibraltar , and merely wanted to be informed of the movements of the West Indies fleet .

As the French fleet was preparing to depart Brest in March 1781 , several important decisions were made . The West Indies fleet , led by the Comte de Grasse , after operations in the Windward Islands , was directed to go to Cap @-@ Français (present @-@ day Cap @-@ Haïtien) to determine what resources would be required to assist Spanish operations . Due to a lack of transports , France also promised six million livres to support the American war effort instead of providing additional troops . The French fleet at Newport was given a new commander , the Comte de Barras . De Barras was ordered to take the Newport fleet to harass British shipping off Nova Scotia and Newfoundland , and the French army at Newport was ordered to combine with Washington 's army outside New York . In orders that were deliberately not fully shared with General Washington , De Grasse was instructed to assist in North American operations after his stop at Cap @-@ Français . The French general , the Comte de Rochambeau was instructed to tell Washington that de Grasse might be able to assist , without making any commitment . (Washington learned from John Laurens , stationed in Paris , that de Grasse had discretion to come north .)

The French fleet sailed from Brest on March 22 . The British fleet was busy with preparations to resupply Gibraltar , and did not attempt to oppose the departure . After the French fleet sailed , the packet ship Concorde sailed for Newport , carrying the Comte de Barras , Rochambeau 's orders , and credits for the six million livres . In a separate dispatch sent later , de Grasse also made two important requests . The first was that he be notified at Cap @-@ Français of the situation in North America so that he could decide how he might be able to assist in operations there , and the second was that he be supplied with 30 pilots familiar with North American waters .

= = = British planning for 1781 = = =

General Clinton never articulated a coherent vision for what the goals for British operations of the coming campaign season should be in the early months of 1781 . Part of his problem lay in a difficult relationship with his naval counterpart in New York , the aging Vice Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot . Both men were stubborn , prone to temper , and had prickly personalities ; due to repeated clashes , their working relationship had completely broken down . In the fall of 1780 Clinton had requested that either he or Arbuthnot be recalled ; however , orders recalling Arbuthnot did not arrive until June 1781 . Until then , according to historian George Billias , " The two men could not act alone , and would not act together " . Arbuthnot was replaced by Sir Thomas Graves , with whom Clinton had a somewhat better working relationship .

The British presence in the south consisted of the strongly fortified ports of Savannah , Georgia and Charleston , South Carolina , and a string of outposts in the interior of those two states . Although the strongest outposts were relatively immune to attack from the Patriot militia that were their only formal opposition in those states , the smaller outposts , as well as supply convoys and messengers , were often the target of militia commanders like Thomas Sumter and Francis Marion . Portsmouth

had most recently been occupied in October 1780 by a force under the command of Major General Alexander Leslie , but Lieutenant General Charles , Earl Cornwallis , commanding the British southern army , had ordered them to South Carolina in November . To replace General Leslie at Portsmouth , General Clinton sent 1 @, @ 600 troops under General Arnold (recently commissioned into the British Army as a brigadier) to Virginia in late December .

= = British raiding in Virginia = =

Part of the fleet carrying General Arnold and his troops arrived in Chesapeake Bay on December 30 , 1780 . Without waiting for the rest of the transports to arrive , Arnold sailed up the James River and disembarked 900 troops at Westover , Virginia , on January 4 . After an overnight forced march , he raided Richmond , the state capital , the next day , encountering only minimal militia resistance . After two more days of raiding in the area , they returned to their boats , and made sail for Portsmouth . Arnold established fortifications there , and sent his men out on raiding and foraging expeditions . The local militia were called out , but they were in such small numbers that the British presence could not be disputed . This did not prevent raiding expeditions from running into opposition , as some did in skirmishing at Waters Creek in March .

When news of Arnold 's activities reached George Washington , he decided that a response was necessary . He wanted the French to send a naval expedition from their base in Newport , but the commanding admiral , the Chevalier Destouches , refused any assistance until he received reports of serious storm damage to part of the British fleet on January 22 . On February 9 , Captain Arnaud de Gardeur de Tilley sailed from Newport with three ships (ship of the line Eveille and frigates Surveillante and Gentile) . When he arrived off Portsmouth four days later , Arnold withdrew his ships , which had shallower drafts than those of the French , up the Elizabeth River , where de Tilley could not follow . De Tilley , after determining that the local militia were " completely insufficient " to attack Arnold 's position , returned to Newport . On the way he captured the HMS Romulus , a frigate sent by the British from New York to investigate his movements .

Congress authorized a detachment of Continental forces to Virginia on February 20 . Washington assigned command of the expedition to the Marquis de Lafayette , who left Peekskill , New York the same day . His troops , numbering about 1 @, @ 200 , were three light regiments drawn from troops assigned to Continental regiments from New Jersey and New England ; these regiments were led by Joseph Vose , Francis Barber , and Jean @-@ Joseph Sourbader de Gimat . Lafayette 's force reached Head of Elk (present @-@ day Elkton , Maryland , the northern navigable limit of Chesapeake Bay) on March 3 . While awaiting transportation for his troops at Annapolis , Lafayette traveled south , reaching Yorktown on March 14 , to assess the situation .

= = = American attempts at defense = = =

De Tilley 's expedition , and the strong encouragement of General Washington , who traveled to Newport to press the case , convinced Destouches to make a larger commitment . On March 8 he sailed with his entire fleet (7 ships of the line and several frigates , including the recently captured Romulus) , carrying French troops to join with Lafayette 's in Virginia . Admiral Arbuthnot , alerted to his departure , sailed on March 10 after sending Arnold a dispatch warning of the French movement . Arbuthnot , whose copper @-@ clad ships could sail faster than those of Destouches , reached Cape Henry on March 16 , just ahead of the French fleet . The ensuing battle was largely indecisive , but left Arbuthnot free to enter Lynnhaven Bay and control access to Chesapeake Bay ; Destouches returned to Newport . Lafayette saw the British fleet , and pursuant to orders , made preparations to return his troops to the New York area . By early April he had returned to Head of Elk , where he received orders from Washington to stay in Virginia .

The departure of Destouches ' fleet from Newport had prompted General Clinton to send Arnold reinforcements . In the wake of Arbuthnot 's sailing he sent transports carrying about 2 @, @ 000 men under the command of General William Phillips to the Chesapeake . These joined Arnold at Portsmouth on March 27 . Phillips , as senior commander , took over the force and resumed raiding

, targeting Petersburg and Richmond . By this time , Baron von Steuben and Peter Muhlenberg , the militia commanders in Virginia , felt they had to make a stand to maintain morale despite the inferior strength of their troops . They established a defensive line in Blandford , near Petersburg (Blandford is now a part of the city of Petersburg) , and fought a disciplined but losing action on April 25 . Von Steuben and Muhlenberg retreated before the advance of Phillips , who hoped to again raid Richmond . However , Lafayette made a series of forced marches , and reached Richmond on April 29 , just hours before Phillips .

= = Cornwallis and Lafayette = =

To counter the British threat in the Carolinas , Washington had sent Major General Nathanael Greene , one of his best strategists , to rebuild the American army in North Carolina after the defeat at Camden . General Cornwallis , leading the British troops in the south , wanted to deal with him and gain control over the state . Greene divided his inferior force , sending part of his army under Daniel Morgan to threaten the British post at Ninety Six , South Carolina . Cornwallis sent Banastre Tarleton after Morgan , who almost wiped out Tarleton 's command in the January 1781 Battle of Cowpens , and almost captured Tarleton in the process . This action was followed by what has been called the " race to the Dan " , in which Cornwallis gave chase to Morgan and Greene in an attempt to catch them before they reunited their forces . When Greene successfully crossed the Dan River and entered Virginia , Cornwallis , who had stripped his army of most of its baggage , gave up the pursuit . However , Greene received reinforcements and supplies , recrossed the Dan , and returned to Greensboro , North Carolina to do battle with Cornwallis . The earl won the battle , but Greene was able to withdraw with his army intact , and the British suffered enough casualties that Cornwallis was forced to retreat to Wilmington for reinforcement and resupply . Greene then went on to regain control over most of South Carolina and Georgia . Cornwallis , in violation of orders but also in the absence of significant strategic direction by General Clinton , decided to take his army , now numbering just 1 @, @ 400 men , into Virginia on April 25 ; it was the same day that Phillips and von Steuben fought at Blandford .

Phillips , after Lafayette beat him to Richmond , turned back east , continuing to destroy military and economic targets in the area . On May 7 , Phillips received a dispatch from Cornwallis , ordering him to Petersburg to effect a junction of their forces ; three days later , Phillips arrived in Petersburg . Lafayette briefly cannonaded the British position there , but did not feel strong enough to actually make an attack . On May 13 , Phillips died of a fever , and Arnold retook control of the force . This caused some grumbling amongst the men , since Arnold was not particularly well respected . While waiting for Cornwallis , the forces of Arnold and Lafayette watched each other . Arnold attempted to open communications with the marquis (who had orders from Washington to summarily hang Arnold) , but the marquis returned his letters unopened . Cornwallis arrived in Petersburg on May 19 , prompting Lafayette , who commanded under 1 @, @ 000 Continentals and about 2 @, @ 000 militia , to retreat to Richmond . Further British reinforcements led by the Ansbacher Colonel von Voigt arrived from New York shortly after , raising the size of Cornwallis 's army to more than 7 @, @ 000 .

Cornwallis , after dispatching General Arnold back to New York , then set out to follow General Clinton 's most recent orders to Phillips . These instructions were to establish a fortified base and raid rebel military and economic targets in Virginia . Cornwallis decided that he had to first deal with the threat posed by Lafayette , so he set out in pursuit of the marquis . Lafayette , clearly outnumbered , retreated rapidly toward Fredericksburg to protect an important supply depot there , while von Steuben retreated to Point of Fork (present @-@ day Columbia , Virginia) , where militia and Continental Army trainees had gathered with supplies pulled back before the raiding British . Cornwallis reached the Hanover County courthouse on June 1 , and , rather than send his whole army after Lafayette , detached Banastre Tarleton and John Graves Simcoe on separate raiding expeditions .

Tarleton , his British Legion reduced by the debacle at Cowpens , rode rapidly with a small force to Charlottesville , where he captured several members of the Virginia legislature . He almost captured

Governor Jefferson as well , but had to content himself with several bottles of wine from Jefferson 's estate at Monticello . Simcoe went to Point of Fork to deal with von Steuben and the supply depot . In a brief skirmish on June 5 , von Steuben 's forces , numbering about 1 @, @ 000 , suffered 30 casualties , but they had withdrawn most of the supplies across the river . Simcoe , who only had about 300 men , then exaggerated the size of his force by lighting a large number of campfires ; this prompted von Steuben to withdraw from Point of Fork , leaving the supplies to be destroyed by Simcoe the next day .

Lafayette , in the meantime , was expecting the imminent arrival of long @-@ delayed reinforcements . Several battalions of Pennsylvania Continentals under Brigadier General Anthony Wayne had also been authorized by Congress for service in Virginia in February . However , Wayne had to deal with the aftereffects of a mutiny in January that nearly wiped out the Pennsylvania Line as a fighting force , and it was May before he had rebuilt the line and begun the march to Virginia . Even then , there was a great deal of mistrust between Wayne and his men ; Wayne had to keep his ammunition and bayonets under lock and key except when they were needed . Although Wayne was ready to march on May 19 , the force 's departure was delayed by a day because of a renewed threat of mutiny after the units were paid with devalued Continental dollars . Lafayette and Wayne 's 800 men joined forces at Raccoon Ford on the Rappahannock River on June 10 . A few days later , Lafayette was further reinforced by 1 @, @ 000 militia under the command of William Campbell .

After the successful raids of Simcoe and Tarleton , Cornwallis began to make his way east toward Richmond and Williamsburg , almost contemptuously ignoring Lafayette in his movements . Lafayette , his force grown to about 4 @, @ 500 , was buoyed in confidence , and began to edge closer to the earl 's army . By the time Cornwallis reached Williamsburg on June 25 , Lafayette was 10 miles (16 km) away , at Bird 's Tavern . That day , Lafayette learned that Simcoe 's Queen 's Rangers were at some remove from the main British force , so Lafayette sent some cavalry and light infantry to intercept them . This precipitated a skirmish at Spencer 's Ordinary where each side believed the other to be within range of its main army .

= = Allied decisions = =

While Lafayette , Arnold , and Phillips maneuvered in Virginia , the allied leaders , Washington and Rochambeau , considered their options . On May 6 the Concorde arrived in Boston , and two days later Washington and Rochambeau were informed of the arrival of de Barras as well as the vital dispatches and funding . On May 23 and 24 , Washington and Rochambeau held a conference at Wethersfield , Connecticut where they discussed what steps to take next . They agreed that , pursuant to his orders , Rochambeau would move his army from Newport to the Continental Army camp at White Plains , New York . They also decided to send dispatches to de Grasse outlining two possible courses of action . Washington favored the idea of attacking New York , while Rochambeau favored action in Virginia , where the British were less well established . Washington 's letter to de Grasse outlined these two options ; Rochambeau , in a private note , informed de Grasse of his preference . Lastly , Rochambeau convinced de Barras to hold his fleet in readiness to assist in either operation , rather than taking it out on expeditions to the north as he had been ordered . The Concorde sailed from Newport on June 20 , carrying dispatches from Washington , Rochambeau , and de Barras , as well as the pilots de Grasse had requested . The French army left Newport in June , and joined Washington 's army at Dobb 's Ferry , New York on July 7 . From there , Washington and Rochambeau embarked on an inspection tour of the British defenses around New York while they awaited word from de Grasse .

De Grasse had a somewhat successful campaign in the West Indies . His forces successfully captured Tobago in June after a minor engagement with the British fleet . Beyond that , he and British Admiral George Brydges Rodney avoided significant engagement . De Grasse arrived at Cap @-@ Français on July 16 , where the Concorde awaited him . He immediately engaged in negotiations with the Spanish . He informed them of his intent to sail north , but promised to return by November to assist in Spanish operations in exchange for critical Spanish cover while he sailed north . From them he secured the promise to protect French commerce and territories so that he

could bring north his entire fleet , 28 ships of the line . In addition to his fleet , he took on 3 @, @ 500 troops under the command of the Marquis de St. Simon , and appealed to the Spanish in Havana for funds needed to pay Rochambeau 's troops . On July 28 , he sent the Concorde back to Newport , informing Washington , Rochambeau , and de Barras that he expected to arrive in the Chesapeake at the end of August , and would need to leave by mid @-@ October . He sailed from Cap @-@ Français on August 5 , beginning a deliberately slow route north through a little @-@ used channel in the Bahamas .

= = British decisions = =

The movement of the French army to the New York area caused General Clinton a great deal of concern ; letters written by Washington that Clinton had intercepted suggested that the allies were planning an attack on New York . Beginning in June he wrote a series of letters to Cornwallis containing a confusing and controversial set of ruminations , suggestions , and recommendations , that only sometimes contained concrete and direct orders . Some of these letters were significantly delayed in reaching Cornwallis , complicating the exchange between the two . On June 11 and 15 , apparently in reaction to the threat to New York , Clinton requested Cornwallis to fortify either Yorktown or Williamsburg , and send any troops he could spare back to New York . Cornwallis received these letters at Williamsburg on June 26 . He and an engineer inspected Yorktown , which he found to be defensively inadequate . He wrote a letter to Clinton indicating that he would move to Portsmouth in order to send troops north with transports available there .

On July 4 Cornwallis began moving his army toward the Jamestown ferry , to cross the broad James River and march to Portsmouth . Lafayette 's scouts observed the motion , and he realized the British force would be vulnerable during the crossing . He advanced his army to the Green Spring Plantation , and , based on intelligence that only the British rear guard was left at the crossing , sent General Wayne forward to attack them on July 6 . In reality , the earl had laid a clever trap . Crossing only his baggage and some troops to guard them , he sent " deserters " to falsely inform Lafayette of the situation . In the Battle of Green Spring , General Wayne managed to escape the trap , but with significant casualties and the loss of two field pieces . Cornwallis then crossed the river , and marched his army to Suffolk .

Cornwallis again detached Tarleton on a raid into central Virginia . Tarleton 's raid was based on intelligence that supplies might be intercepted that were en route to General Greene . The raid , in which Tarleton 's force rode 120 miles (190 km) in four days , was a failure , since supplies had already been moved . (During this raid , some of Tarleton 's men were supposedly in a minor skirmish with Peter Francisco , one of the American heroes of Guilford Court House .) Cornwallis received another letter from General Clinton while at Suffolk , dated June 20 , stating that the forces to be embarked were to be used for an attack against Philadelphia .

When Cornwallis reached Portsmouth , he began embarking troops pursuant to Clinton 's orders . On July 20 , with some transports almost ready to sail , new orders arrived that countermanded the previous ones . In the most direct terms , Clinton ordered him to establish a fortified deep @-@ water port , using as much of his army as he thought necessary . Clinton took this decision because the navy had long been dissatisfied with New York as a naval base , firstly because sand bars obstructed the entrance to the Hudson River , damaging the hulls of the larger ships ; and secondly because the river often froze in winter , imprisoning vessels inside the harbour . Arbuthnot had recently been replaced and to show his satisfaction at this development , Clinton now acceded to the Navy 's request , despite Cornwallis 's warning that the Chesapeake 's open bays and navigable rivers meant that any base there " will always be exposed to sudden French attack . " It was to prove a fatal error of judgement by Clinton , since the need to defend the new facility denied Cornwallis any freedom of movement . Nevertheless , having inspected Portsmouth and found it less favourable than Yorktown , Cornwallis wrote to Clinton informing him that he would fortify Yorktown .

Lafayette was alerted on July 26 that Cornwallis was embarking his troops , but lacked intelligence about their eventual destination , and began maneuvering his troops to cover some possible landing

points . On August 6 he learned that Cornwallis had landed at Yorktown and was fortifying it and Gloucester Point just across the York River .

= = Convergence on Yorktown = =

Admiral Rodney had been warned that de Grasse was planning to take at least part of his fleet north . Although he had some clues that he might take his whole fleet (he was aware of the number of pilots de Grasse had requested , for example) , he assumed that de Grasse would not leave the French convoy at Cap @-@ Français , and that part of his fleet would escort it to France as Admiral Guichen had done the previous year . Rodney made his dispositions accordingly , balancing the likely requirements of the fleet in North America with the need to protect Britain 's own trade convoys . Sixteen of his twenty @-@ one battleships , therefore , were to sail with Hood in pursuit of de Grasse to the Chesapeake before proceeding to New York . Rodney , who was ill , meanwhile took three other battleships back to England , two as merchant escorts , leaving his remaining two in dock for repairs . Hood was well satisfied with these arrangements , telling a colleague that his fleet was " equal fully to defeat any designs of the enemy , let de Grasse bring or send what number of ships he might in aid of Barras . " What neither Rodney or Hood knew was de Grasse 's last minute decision to take his entire fleet to North America , thus ensuring a French superiority of three to two in battleship strength . Blissfully unaware of this development , Hood eventually sailed from Antigua on August 10 , five days after de Grasse . During the voyage , one of his smaller ships carrying intelligence about the American pilots was captured by a privateer , thus further depriving the British in New York of valuable information . Hood himself , following the direct route , reached the Chesapeake on August 25 , and found the entrance to the bay empty . He then sailed on to New York to meet with Admiral Sir Thomas Graves , in command of the New York station following Arbuthnot 's departure .

On August 14 General Washington learned of de Grasse 's decision to sail for the Chesapeake . The next day he reluctantly abandoned the idea of assaulting New York , writing that " [m] atters having now come to a crisis and a decisive plan to be determined on , I was obliged ... to give up all idea of attacking New York ... " The combined Franco @-@ American army began moving south on August 19 , engaging in several tactics designed to fool Clinton about their intentions . Some forces were sent on a route along the New Jersey shore , and ordered to make camp preparations as if preparing for an attack on Staten Island . The army also carried landing craft to lend verisimilitude to the idea . Washington sent orders to Lafayette to prevent Cornwallis from returning to North Carolina ; he did not learn that Cornwallis was entrenching at Yorktown until August 30 . Two days later the army was passing through Philadelphia ; another mutiny was averted there when funds were procured for troops that threatened to stay until they were paid .

Admiral de Barras sailed with his fleet from Newport , carrying the French siege equipment , on August 25 . He sailed a route that deliberately took him away from the coast to avoid encounters with the British . De Grasse reached the Chesapeake on August 30 , five days after Hood . He immediately debarked the troops from his fleet to assist Lafayette in blockading Cornwallis , and stationed some his ships to blockade the York and James Rivers .

News of de Barras ' sailing reached New York on August 28 , where Graves , Clinton , and Hood were meeting to discuss the possibility of making an attack on the French fleet in Newport , since the French army was no longer there to defend it . Clinton had still not realized that Washington was marching south , something he did not have confirmed until September 2 . When they learned of de Barras ' departure they immediately concluded that de Grasse must be headed for the Chesapeake (but still did not know of his strength) . Graves sailed from New York on August 31 with 19 ships of the line ; Clinton wrote Cornwallis to warn him that Washington was coming , and that he would send 4 @,@ 000 reinforcements .

On September 5 , the British fleet arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake to see the French fleet anchored there . De Grasse , who had men ashore , was forced to cut his cables and scramble to get his fleet out to meet the British . In the Battle of the Chesapeake , de Grasse won a narrow tactical victory . After the battle , the two fleets drifted to the southeast for several days , with the

British avoiding battle and both fleets making repairs . This was apparently in part a ploy by de Grasse to ensure the British would not interfere with de Barras ' arrival . A fleet was spotted off in the distance on September 9 making for the bay ; de Grasse followed the next day . Graves , forced to scuttle one of his ships , returned to New York for repairs . Smaller ships from the French fleet then assisted in transporting the Franco @-@ American army down the Chesapeake to Yorktown , completing the encirclement of Cornwallis .

= = Yorktown = =

On September 6 , General Clinton wrote a letter to Cornwallis , telling him to expect reinforcements . Received by Cornwallis on September 14 , this letter may have been instrumental in the decision by Cornwallis to remain at Yorktown and not try to fight his way out , despite the urging of Banastre Tarleton to break out against the comparatively weak Lafayette . General Washington , after spending a few days at Mount Vernon for the first time in years , arrived in the camps outside Yorktown on September 17 . That same day , the British military leadership in New York held a council , in which they agreed that Cornwallis could not be reinforced until they had regained control of the Chesapeake . Historian Richard Ketchum describes the decision of the council as leaving Cornwallis " dangling in the wind . " One day earlier , Cornwallis wrote a desperate plea for help : " I am of the opinion that you can do me no effectual service but by coming directly to this place . " Before dispatching the letter on the 17th , Cornwallis added , " If you cannot relieve me very soon , you must prepare to hear the worst . "

Washington , Rochambeau , and de Grasse then held council aboard de Grasse 's flagship Ville de Paris to finalize preparations for the siege ; de Grasse agreed to provide about 2 @,@ 000 marines and some cannons to the effort . During the meeting , de Grasse was convinced to delay his departure (originally planned for mid @-@ October) until the end of October . Upon the return of the generals to Williamsburg , they heard rumors that British naval reinforcements had arrived at New York , and the French fleet might again be threatened . De Grasse wanted to pull his fleet out of the bay as a precaution , and it took the pleas of Washington and Rochambeau , delivered to de Grasse by Lafayette , to convince him to remain .

The siege formally got underway on September 28 . Despite a late attempt by Cornwallis to escape via Gloucester Point , the siege lines closed in on his positions and the allied cannons wrought havoc in the British camps , and on October 17 he opened negotiations to surrender . On that very day , the British fleet again sailed from New York , carrying 6 @,@ 000 troops . Still outnumbered by the combined French fleets , they eventually turned back . A French naval officer , noting the British fleet 's departure on October 29 , wrote , " They were too late . The fowl had been eaten . "

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Disposition of the British army = = =

The negotiations for surrender were complicated by two issues . When American forces surrendered at Charleston in 1780 , they were not granted customary terms of capitulation that included flying colors and the playing of an enemy tune . Washington insisted that these terms be applied to the surrender of the British army at Yorktown , his negotiators pointing out that the defenders had in both instances acted with valor . The second issue concerned the disposition of Loyalists in the British camp . This issue was finessed with the addition of a clause to the terms that allowed one British vessel , the sloop Bonetta , to be sent without any sort of inspection to carry dispatches from Cornwallis to New York ; Americans , suspecting that either runaway slaves or Loyalists might be aboard , were prevented from searching the vessel .

When the British garrison marched out of their positions on October 19 , it was with colors cased , possibly playing the British tune " The World Turned Upside Down " . Cornwallis , claiming illness , did not attend the ceremony , sending his deputy General O 'Hara to deliver his sword . O 'Hara at

first sought to deliver it to a French officer , but he was finally directed to one of Washington 's officers , Benjamin Lincoln , the defeated commander at Charleston . Lincoln briefly held the proffered sword and then returned it to O 'Hara .

Over the following weeks , the army was marched under guard to camps in Virginia and Maryland . Cornwallis and other officers were returned to New York and allowed to return to England on parole . The ship on which Cornwallis sailed in December 1781 also carried Benedict Arnold and his family .

= = = Disposition of the allies = = =

The local militia that supported the siege were dismissed from service . Some of the American Continental forces were returned to the New York City region , where Washington continued to stand against the British presence until the end of the war ; others were sent south to assist in General Greene 's efforts in the Carolinas . Issues of pay and condition were an ongoing problem until the war ended , but Washington fought no more battles .

The French forces that came with de Grasse were reembarked , and he sailed for the West Indies , with the fleet of de Barras , in early November . After recapturing a number of British @-@ held targets there , de Grasse was preparing to join with the Spanish for an assault on Jamaica when Admiral Rodney defeated him in the April 1782 Battle of the Saintes , capturing him and his flagship . The forces of General Rochambeau wintered in Virginia , and marched back to Rhode Island the next summer .

= = = Reactions = = =

General Washington 's aide , Lieutenant Tench Tilghman , was dispatched to deliver the news to Congress . Arriving in Philadelphia on October 22 , he was two days behind the first notice of the surrender , which had been expressed from Baltimore ahead of him . The news electrified Congress and the populace . Church bells pealed , and the Liberty Bell was reportedly rung , actions that were repeated as the news traveled through the colonies . Some Congressmen introduced a resolution calling on General Washington to arrest and hang General Cornwallis ; after " [t] he debate continue 'd several Day 's " , the resolution was voted down .

The news put British @-@ occupied New York City into mourning . At first met with some skepticism , the news was finally confirmed on October 27 , although the city still awaited news of Clinton 's abortive relief effort . Clinton was recalled to London , and left the city in March 1782 . He was replaced by General Guy Carleton , who was under orders to suspend offensive operations .

When the news reached London on November 25 , Lord Germain described the reaction of Lord North to the news : " he would have taken a ball on his breast . For he opened his arms exclaiming wildly as he paced up and down the apartment , during the few minutes , ' Oh God ! It is all over ! ' " King George was reported to receive the news with calmness and dignity , although he later became depressed as the news sank in , and even considered abdication . The king 's supporters in Parliament were depressed , and the opposition elated . A resolution calling for an end to the war was introduced on December 12 , and failed to pass by a single vote . Lord Germain was dismissed in early 1782 , and the North administration fell shortly afterward . Peace negotiations followed , and the war was formally ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on September 3 , 1783 .

General Cornwallis , despite being the commander who surrendered , was not blamed for the defeat . He was well @-@ received on his return to London , and one writer echoed a common sentiment that " Lord Cornwallis 's army was sold . " General Clinton spent the rest of his life defending his own reputation ; he was " laughed at by the rebels , despised by the British , and cursed by the loyalists . " In 1783 , he published a Narrative of the Campaign of 1781 in North America in which he attempted to lay the blame for the 1781 campaign failures on General Cornwallis . This was met with a public response by Cornwallis , who leveled his own criticisms at Clinton . The highly public debate included the publication of much of their correspondence .

Admiral Graves also did not suffer due to his defeat by de Grasse ; he was eventually promoted to

full admiral and given a peerage . However , many aspects of the Battle of the Chesapeake have been the subject of both contemporary and historical debate , beginning right after the battle . On 6 September , Admiral Graves issued a memorandum justifying a confusing use of signals , indicating that " [when] the signal for the line of battle ahead is out at the same time with the signal for battle , it is not to be understood that the latter signal shall be rendered ineffectual by a too strict adherence to the former . " Hood , in commentary written on the reverse of his copy , observed that this eliminated any possibility of engaging an enemy who was disordered , since it would require the British line to also be disordered . Instead , he maintained , " the British fleet should be as compact as possible , in order to take the critical moment of an advantage opening ... " Others criticise Hood because he " did not wholeheartedly aid his chief " , and that a lesser officer " would have been court @-@ martialled for not doing his utmost to engage the enemy . "

The Comte de Rochambeau dispatched two messengers to deliver the news to Paris in a move that had unusual consequences in French military politics . The Duc de Lauzun and the Comte de Deux @-@ Pontes , both of whom had distinguished themselves in the siege , were sent on separate ships to bring the news . Deux @-@ Pontes was accompanied by a favorite of the French naval minister the Marquis de Castries , the Comte de Charlus , who Lauzun had urged Rochambeau to send in his stead for political reasons . King Louis XVI and his ministers received the news warmly , but Castries and the snubbed Charlus ensured that Lauzun and Rochambeau were denied or delayed in the receipt of rewards for the success . Deux @-@ Ponts was rewarded with the Order of Saint Louis and command of a regiment .

= = Analysis = =

Historian John Pancake describes the later stages of the campaign as " British blundering " and that the " allied operations proceeded with clockwork precision . " Naval historian Jonathan Dull has described de Grasse 's 1781 naval campaign , which encompassed , in addition to Yorktown , successful contributions to the French capture of Tobago and the Spanish siege of Pensacola , as the " most perfectly executed naval campaign of the age of sail " , and compared the string of French successes favorably with the British Annus Mirabilis of 1759 . He also observes that a significant number of individual decisions , at times against orders or previous agreements , contributed to the success of the campaign :

French ministers Montmorin and Vergennes convinced the French establishment that decisive action was needed in North America in order to end the war .

The French naval minister Castries wrote orders for de Grasse that gave the latter sufficient flexibility to assist in the campaign .

Spanish Louisiana Governor Bernardo de Gálvez released ships and troops to cover French territories while de Grasse sailed north with most of the French military establishment in the West Indies .

Spanish Cuban colonial official Francisco Saavedra cooperated in the decision @-@ making that enabled de Grasse 's northward expedition .

General Rochambeau and Chevalier Luzerne both urged de Grasse to decide on the Chesapeake .

Admiral de Barras violated his orders to operate off Newfoundland , making possible the timely delivery of the French siege train to Yorktown .

George Washington decided against an attack on New York and instead embarked on a risky march to Virginia .

Admiral De Grasse agreed to overstay his planned time in the Chesapeake , understanding the importance of the undertaking there .

Of de Grasse 's negotiations with the Spanish that secured the use of his fleet and his order to the economic fleet to remain in the West Indies , Royal Navy Captain Thomas White , in his 1830 analysis of the 1781 campaign , wrote that " [i] f the British government had sanctioned , or a British admiral had adopted such a measure , [...] the one would have been turned out , and the other would have been hung : no wonder they succeeded and we failed . "

= = Legacy = =

The principal points of commemoration of the events of this campaign are managed by the National Park Service in the Colonial National Historical Park . In addition to the battlefield at Yorktown , the park includes the Cape Henry Memorial , where the French naval victory by de Grasse is remembered .