

## HANS STIEGEL SOLDIER OF THE KING

### PART ONE - PREFACE TO THE WAR OF INDEPENDANCE

#### Intoduction

This story starts in Kertzfeld, a small Rhine Valley town in the heart of the province of Alsace. The claim to fame of this province is its historical status as a craved victory prize in the countless wars that France and Germany have waged against each other. After each one of them, Alsace would be granted to the victorious country until the next war, where once again its fate would be on the balance. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the time of our story, Alsace happened to be part of France, under the rule of the “very Christian” king Louis XV. The last annexation was relatively recent dating back to 1697 and was sealed by the Treaty of Ryswick which rewarded Louis XIV, “le roi soleil”, the Sun King for his victory over the Holy German Empire. In its great benevolence, the Sun King promised to respect the traditions and customs of his new province. Thus, Alsatians Protestants were granted the great privilege of permission to practice their religion freely unlike their French counterparts. In addition, the Alsatians were allowed to keep their Germanic language (called Alsatian) and notary transactions could continue to be written in German. Under these conditions, the progress of the French language in Alsace was slow, but on the other hand Alsatians soon developed a true French patriotism and real attachment to such a magnanimous leader, who on the other hand had been so ruthless in the rest of France.

My grand-grand-grand-grand-grand-grandfather's name was Ludovic (or Ludwig in German) Werner. Ludovic arrived in Kertzfeld in 1740, after his marriage to Anna Catharina Egg, the daughter of one the town's weavers. Ludovic whose father was a day worker in a neighboring town, probably learned the craft of weaving from his father-in-law because he would later inherit the business. The Egg family was fairly well established in town, since its arrival dated back a century, from the 1650s, when Jacob Egg, Anna Catharina's grandfather had arrived in Kertzfeld from Moravia (which was then on the eastern border of the German Empire and is currently in the Czech Republic), as he was fleeing the destruction of the Thirty Year War.



« Le tisserand » (The weaver) by  
Albert Decamps (1862-1908)  
Oil on canvas - 1887

As a consequence of this long presence in Kertzfeld, the family had many friends and business partners locally as can be seen on the parish records. For instance in the 1750s, Ludovic was often chosen as a godfather in other families and his wife as a godmother. Yet the couple could not read or write and Ludovic would sign the records with an “I” while his wife simply put a cross besides her name. The family was blessed with seven children of which only four would reach adult age. Through the marriage of Ursula Egg, Anna Catharina's sister, the Werner family was related to the Eckenfelder and Stiegel families. Unlike the Werners, the Eckenfelders and the Stiegels were relatively new in town and had no handcraft skills. Joseph Eckenfelder was probably a day worker, while Jean Stiegel was a Shepherd.

Therefore they had few relationships in town and on their family records they would always pick each other as witnesses, godfathers and godmothers.

Ludovic Werner had only one surviving son, my grand-grand-grand-grand-grandfather Francis-Joseph (born in 1754) who in time would take over the family weaving business. Joseph Eckenfelder too had one son, Jean-Michel (born in 1750), whose fate is not known to me. As for Jean Stiegel, he had two sons, Francis-Joseph (born in 1752) and Jean Jr. (born in 1757). Among these four cousins who grew up together in Kertzfeld, one would meet an extraordinary fate that would bring him to the other side of the Atlantic, to a country that he barely suspected existed and that was called America. This man was Jean Stiegel Jr. younger of the four cousins of Kertzfeld.

## 1- The Stiegel Family

The son of Jean Stiegel Sr., shepherd in Kertzfeld, and Anna-Maria Eckenfelder, Jean Stiegel Jr. (also written Stigel) was baptized on April 30, 1757 in Kertzfeld, in the jurisdiction of Benfeld. He was probably born the day before, on April 29 (coincidentally my birthday too). The couple had at least two other children. Records show that on October 6, 1752 their son François-Joseph was baptized followed by Maria Ursula on January 14, 1756. Unfortunately Maria Ursula did not survive, and she died less a month later, on February 10.

As mentioned, Jean Stiegel, Sr. was not from Kertzfeld, as he does not appear in the parish records before 1752. His wife, Anna Maria Eckenfelder lived in Kertzfeld at least since 1732 given that she was confirmed with her brother Joseph on June 30 of that year in Kertzfeld's church. By then, her father Mathias Eckenfelder had already passed away. On December 16, 1750, Anna Maria is chosen as the godmother of the new born child of her brother Joseph. It seems that Anna Maria and Jean Sr. were not yet married at this point. When Anna Maria Eckenfelder and Jean Stiegel, Sr. were married it was not in Kertzfeld though it is likely that the wedding occurred around 1750-51 somewhere in the region. The couple settled in Kertzfeld soon thereafter.

Neither Jean Sr., nor his wife could read, write or even sign their names. On the parish documents Anna Maria signs with a simple cross and Jean signs sometimes with a cross and other times with a circle. As a shepherd, Jean Sr. is probably among the poorest in town. In fact, with the exception of the military record of the death certificate of his son, his occupation is never mentioned in the parish records, unlike for example Ludovic Werner and the many weavers of the town. In the usual records, he appears only as "incola" which means simply "inhabitant" of the town of Kertzfeld. In those days shepherds had little land if any at all. They were semi-nomadic, hired by a town to watch the cattle of the community until their services were no longer needed. Then, they packed and moved on to the next town. The fact that Jean Sr. was never chosen as a witness or as a godfather in other families of Kertzfeld is a clear sign of his low social status. In addition, it seems that he had few close relations in



This traditional Alsatian house was built in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Kertzfeld and gives a good idea of the style of the time.

the town since his brother-in-law Joseph Eckenfelder was constantly chosen as godfather of his children and witness at his family funerals.

## 2- The early years in Kertzfeld

During the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Kertzfeld held just a few hundred inhabitants (515 in 1790). Its population was exclusively Catholic (100% of Catholics in 1807). The village was primarily populated by wine growers, weavers and daily workers, and was partially dependent on the larger neighboring town of Benfeld, which was crossed by the main postal road from Strasbourg to Colmar. The church of that time dated back to 1707 but it was probably small and of no great build since a new one would be built at the beginning of the 19th century. It is probably in that old church that the four cousins were confirmed sometime in the 1760s. In small towns, confirmations did not occur very often, but when they did it was an important event for the community. The parish records have kept the trace of only two confirmation events; that of 1732 and that of 1754. For the latter, two of Ludovic Werner's elder daughters were confirmed. The ceremony took place in the neighboring town of Benfeld and was conducted by the bishop of Soubise himself, coming especially from Strasbourg for the occasion.

The 1760s were relatively calm in Alsace. The country was slowly recovering from the disastrous Seven Year War which had taken the French armies deep into Germany and had ended in 1763 without any gain for the kingdom. That year Ludovic Werner celebrated the marriage of his eldest daughter, Maria Catharina. Yet these years of tranquility would not last and soon the storm would be once again on the horizon. In 1770-71, Alsace was swept by a famine that began with the poor harvest of 1769. The authorities took a few measures to try to avoid inflation but in July 1770, the steep increase in prices heated up the people's temper. The new crop turned out badly as well and in the fall another wave of inflation occurred that peaked in March 1771. The governor finally opened his wheat reserves and in August prices finally dropped. In spite of a return to price stability, hunger remained the daily problem in the years that followed. It is likely that this crisis took a serious toll on the Stiegel family because on April 23, 1773, Anna Maria Eckenfelder died prematurely, probably in her fifties. Jean Sr. was left a widower with his two sons. As for Ludovic Werner, the famine probably made him push for the marriage of his second daughter, as it is well known that during difficult times families are eager to reduce the number of mouths to feed.



The parade of the coopers of Strasbourg in honor of the visit of the King Louis XV – 1744. This episode was one of the rare moments of joy in a reign dominated by famine and war.

At the death of the King Louis XV in 1774, Alsace and France were in a bad state. Daily survival was the primary concern of all rural families. The number of drifters and part-time workers increased constantly. In Alsace people complained that the region also attracted drifters from abroad, namely from Switzerland and Germany. Anger spread everywhere and social tensions were heightened. It is

often in such times of distress that men are forced to take drastic decisions to insure the survival of their family.

Of the four cousins, the fate of two of them is unknown to me. Perhaps they died in dire times or more probably eventually left town to try their luck elsewhere. What I know is that around 1776, Francis-Joseph Werner, son of Ludovic the weaver married Elisabeth Kuhn in a neighboring town and brought her back to Kertzfeld to take over the family weaving business. Jean Stiegel, Jr. on the other hand had no such prospect. His father was a shepherd and at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this profession was slowly dying. Jean Jr. had probably received no training in crafts and had apparently met no salvaging marriage party. In his situation, options were few. Thus, probably at the end of 1777, as Francis-Joseph had just lost his first newborn daughter, Jean Stiegel Jr. took a drastic decision; he enlisted in the army of the King. Such decision was typically a difficult one since in those days people viewed their community and their family as a shelter against the harshness of life and were usually reluctant to leave them. Therefore recruiting sergeants targeted the most deprived within a community, and at the town's tavern, they worked hard at convincing the most hesitant men through an abundance of promises and large quantities of wine.

### 3- Jean Stiegel becomes "fusilier" of the King

Officially, it was only on February 8, 1778, that Jean Stiegel Jr., second son of Jean Stiegel Sr., was enlisted in the "Beauce" regiment, which was about to be transferred from the Northern city of Arras to the western city of Le Havre. In fact the date of enlistment has to be distinguished from the date of recruitment. Enlistment was effective only when the new recruit had reached his regiment and was registered on the regiment's roll. According to the historian Corvisier, these two steps were sometimes "so much apart that there were men who had fought in a campaign and were not yet enlisted." Some soldiers would not sign at recruitment and therefore would not receive any sign-up bonus, which allowed them in theory to leave the army when they wished. These men were labeled as "volunteers" on the Regiment rolls. Thus, Jean Stiegel was probably recruited many weeks before February 8, possibly even a few months. In fact, the Beauce regiment was stationed in Strasbourg, the capital of Alsace until November 1777, and it is likely toward the end of its sojourn in Alsace that Stiegel was recruited.

The roll of the "Beauce" regiment provides the following information about Stiegel's upon his enlistment:<sup>1</sup>

#### "Courcelle" Company

Jean SHTIGL nicknamed "The German",  
son of Jean and late Marie EGGLEFALTINE  
Fusilier (foot soldier)

From *Kersfelt* in *Alzace*, jurisdiction of *Binfelt*<sup>2</sup>  
Height of 5 foot 3 inches 3 lines (old French  
system)

Blond hair and eyebrows, gray eyes, long face,  
small nose, large mouth, round chin.

18 years old - recruited on February 8, 1778

Date of enlistment: February 8, 1778



Scene from a small village – The recruiting sergeant

Thus, Jean Stiegel enlisted as a foot soldier in the company of Captain de Courcelle. Interestingly, the names were not only recorded phonetically, but also were clearly done so by a Frenchman who was obviously not familiar with the Germanic names of Alsace. "Stiegel" became "Schtigl", "Eckenfelder" became "Eglefaltine" and the location names were significantly butchered. This point is confirmed by Jean's nickname in the regiment, "the German" which shows that at the time, more than a hundred years after the French annexation, average Alsatians were still speaking German and very few of them could speak French.

The record also provides information on his height and on his physical description. His height which corresponds to 5 feet 7 inches in the English system is relatively tall for the time. The physical description was originally designed to prevent desertions. This practice was perceived by the men as particularly humiliating. Officers and "volunteers" (i.e. those who got no sign-up bonus in exchange of an open-end service) were exempt from it.

It can also be noted that when he enlisted, Stiegel claimed to be three years younger than he really was. In February 1778, he was close to 21 years old. This habit was common among new recruits because younger men were usually likely to receive a higher sign-up bonus. Consequently the age of the soldiers on the regiment rolls has to be considered with a grain a salt. The minimum enlistment age was 16 years old.

In terms of the composition of the troops Jean joined, companies of foot soldiers were the basic units of the Infantry. After the 1776 reform, regiments were to be made of 12 companies, 8 of which were companies of foot soldiers. Each company bore the name of its captain and included in addition to the captain in command, one second-captain, one first-lieutenant, one second-lieutenant, two sub-lieutenants, one sergeant-major, one fourrier-écrivain (roughly QM sgt), five sergeants, ten corporals, one gentleman-cadet, one frater (roughly surgeon assistant), 144 foot soldiers and two drummers for a total of 171 men. This number would in fact remain a hypothetical number and in reality most companies would only reach half that size.

#### **4- Military service under the monarchy<sup>3</sup>**

##### Regular army and militia

From the middle of the 17th century, the permanent armies of France were generally raised through two channels, both of them centered on what was claimed to be a voluntary enlistment. First there was the professional army based on the enlistment of volunteers. It was the job of the infamous "recruiting sergeants" to gather it. The recruiting parties nailed on the walls what was to be the first advertising poster of history. It said: "Announcement to the great youth!" The sergeants were charismatic characters who roamed across towns and villages to recruit young men in search of adventure, those disgusted by their lot of exploited peasants, and others who were just trying to escape the scaffold. To the latter, the time spent in the army would bring the opportunity to resume their misdeeds in total impunity.

Next to this professional army, there was also depending on the need, a system of regional militias comprised of volunteers. Through the 17th century, the increase of the size of armies and an improvement of life conditions of the society's poorest classes, made the recruiting of volunteers less and less successful. A recruiting process controlled by the government was then put in place, whose

objective was to quickly offset the massive losses of men in time of war. Thus, each parish, alone or associated with others, had to provide to the militia one man, picked in a lottery. Only single men or widowers without children, who were less than 40 years old, and who were at least 5 feet tall (old French system equivalent to about 5 feet 4 inches in the English system) were eligible for the lottery. The numerous exemptions, made this first form of mandatory draft particularly unpopular. Militiamen were considered second class soldiers but the military authorities needed this form of draft to achieve recruiting goals. Thus, in war time, up to one third of the French army was comprised of militia reserve. Due to their lack of training, these infantry troops were more vulnerable in battle and because they were often drafted against their will, they had a greater inclination to desert than the professional soldiers.



A popular drawing from the time of the French Revolution: “Save us my Lord from the militia”.

When the need for additional soldiers was particularly acute, and the traditional recruiting means were insufficient, additional drafts were organized. To avoid being drafted, men used all the tricks at their disposal including a visit to the local sorcerer to obtain substances that would make them temporarily incapacitated or provoke health hazards such as cavities. Others would rush to get married to take advantage of the exemption for married men.

### Composition of the King’s army

Approximately two thirds of French regular soldiers came from the Countryside and this percentage was even higher among the cavalry. This preponderance of peasants is in fact surprisingly low given that in the 18th century the urban population was much less than one third of the total population of France. The higher representation of city men is due primarily to the attachment of the rural population to the village community. This fact was well known to the recruiting agents of the King’s regiments who usually preferred to recruit in large cities where it was much easier to extract a man from his neighborhood as people were strangers to each other and the ties were traditionally much weaker. This phenomenon can be noticed among all European armies after the Thirty Year War. It is clear that military service was sought in particular by those who had lost the protection of their social group, a protection that they hoped to find in their military unit.

Many of the rural recruits who were initially part of the regional militias later joined the professional army. A break down by regions of origin of the recruits shows that it was the poorest regions of France that provided the highest numbers of rural recruits. Another noteworthy trend is the higher rate of enlistment from the border regions of the Kingdom. For example in the jurisdiction of Auch, in central France, in the middle of the 18th century, only 1413 men out of 887,000 inhabitants volunteered for military service (i.e. 1.6 per 1000), as in Alsace 10,600 men out of a population of 650,000 were recruited in the King’s army (i.e. 16 per 1000, 10 times more). In the decades following the Thirty Year War, in the border regions of northeastern France, a larger number of men than average joined the army due to the general feeling of insecurity and to the larger number of garrisons there. After the Seven Year War, the armies of France were downsized and the proportion of soldiers decreased

substantially. Thus in 1760, the French average was 1 soldier for 85 inhabitants as in 1788 it was down to 1 for 140 inhabitants.

In Alsace, because of its late integration into the French Kingdom (the region was occupied since 1648, but the formal annexation only took place subsequent to the treaty of Ryswick in 1697), large scale recruiting of troops only started in the middle of the 18th century, particularly during the War of the Polish Succession (1733-35), and the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48). Recruiting then spread rapidly through Alsace and peaked during the Seven Year War (1756-63). As far as the town of Kertzfeld was concerned, the parish records show that during the whole second half of the 18th century, the community was a fertile ground for the recruiters. The list below provides the date and place of death of the King's soldiers from Kertzfeld who died during military service. If we accept the rate of one death for every five or six recruits, it means that there were about 50 or 60 soldiers recruited in the town in half a century, which is considerable for a population of just a few hundreds souls. This proportion is unusual and is perhaps the consequence of a garrison located nearby.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Military death</u>	<u>Location</u>
Mathias Dresch	1790	Thionville, France
Jean Herd	1782	Mahon, Minorca Island (off Spain)
Jean Stiegel	1781	at sea near the West Indies
Jean Hechinger	1762	Frankfurt, Germany
Antoine Heffter	1759	Frankfurt, Germany
Jean-Jacques Reibel	1757	Cassel, Germany
Mathias Dorni	1749	Rochefort, France
Joseph Sur	1748	Antwerp, Belgium
Jean-Michel Hürstel	1747	Italy
Arbogast Martin	1742	Prague, Bohemia

## **5 - The political situation in 1778, the time of Jean Stiegel Enlistment**

The time Stiegel chose to enlist was particularly critical for France as on February 6, 1778, exactly two days before Stiegel would be officially part of the King's army, Louis XVI formally recognized the independence of the United States of America by signing a treaty of commerce and alliance with the new Country. The British government reacted immediately by recalling its ambassador from Paris, marking the beginning of yet another war between France and England. This war would last 5 years, and for the French it would be an opportunity for revenge after the disastrous defeat of the Seven Year War (1756-63).

The treaty of alliance and friendship was the culmination of an intense diplomatic effort by the nascent US diplomacy to convince the King of France to support the young republic. This initiative was facilitated by the strong desire among the people of France to seek retribution after the Seven Year War which ended with France losing all of its Canadian possessions.

The court in Versailles had been following closely the events leading up to the American Revolution. In 1775, when the fighting began in America, the French government decided to send six infantry battalions to the West Indies to reinforce the existing troops guarding the French colonies. These

would be stationed in the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique and St-Domingue (Haiti). When on July 4, 1776, the thirteen colonies declared their independence from Britain, Vergennes (the French State Secretary of Foreign Affairs) recognized an opportunity to take revenge on the British, and he advised the King to support the rebels. Yet, the King Louis XVI was hesitant to assist a rebellion which undermined another monarch. Furthermore, many government officials wanted to test the American determination before embarking into a full scale conflict with England. Thus, in spite of growing sympathy for the insurgents, French support was far from secured.

In December of 1776, Benjamin Franklin, arrived in Paris to join Silas Deane, the nascent US's Ambassador to France. Sent by Congress, Franklin's mandate was to win the King's support for US independence. Franklin was well received in France as his reputation as a modest man of great learning preceded him and served him well in obtaining French support for the revolutionary cause. Official aid was at first discreet. For example, the playwright Beaumarchais ("*Le Barbier de Seville*") was entrusted by Vergennes to smuggle uniforms, light weapons and other supplies to the Americans. Soon however, the assistance became more wide spread. The revolutionary cause attracted many volunteers. For young Frenchmen, America held a great deal of appeal: the attraction of new ideas, a thirst to fight the inveterate British enemy, a desire for adventure and the chance for exotic travel in the New World.

In 1777, Silas Deane would write: "the rage to sign up to serve with the Americans is continually growing. As a consequence I am inundated with offers, many from persons of consequential rank..." The King himself had to intervene when members of distinguished families wanted to leave for the New World. The Count of Noaille and the Count of Ségur, two of the most important names in the French Kingdom, wanted to leave with the young Marquis de Lafayette but it was feared that these young men would compromise the officially neutral position of France. Noailles and Ségur bowed to the pressure, but Lafayette stole away on the boat *La Victoire* which sailed first to Bordeaux, then to Spain, and finally to Georgetown, where he arrived in June 1777. Many of the volunteers were greatly disappointed in the New World. Most of them did not speak English and they did not understand how the Revolutionary Army, unlike anything in Europe, could function on a battlefield. Furthermore, their aristocratic background made it difficult for them to adapt to the democratic style of George Washington's soldiers and many were sent back to France.

Although welcomed with little enthusiasm in Philadelphia, Lafayette persisted in his intention the fight on the side of the Americans, even offering to serve in the army as a foot soldier, and to pay his own way. Ultimately Franklin explained to the Continental Congress that it would be politically advantageous to enlist foreign soldiers whose families could influence the court at Versailles. Lafayette was finally appointed to the rank of Major-General. Reaching the front just as the English General Howe marched on Philadelphia, he was injured at the Battle of Brandywine but soon thereafter, he followed Washington to his headquarters at Valley Forge.



Lafayette and Washington at Valley Forge

Meanwhile in Paris, Franklin did his best to convince the court to officially adopt the American cause through a formal alliance with the United States but Vergennes, who was under close surveillance by the British Ambassador cautiously wanted to wait for Spanish support against the British before a formal commitment to the Americans. Then, in November 1777, the news arrived in Paris of British General Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga. This event ended French indecisiveness. As soon as December 17, Vergennes, worried that a peace could be struck between England and the insurgents, informed Franklin that Louis XVI had decided to recognize the independence of the United States. In addition, France would side with the USA in the armed struggle against England. It was about time because the winter of 1777-78 was particularly rough for the rebels; badly fed, clothed and armed, Washington's troops were on the verge of collapse and only due to the stubborn determination of their commander in chief did they remain a united force. An English attack at that moment would have likely borne disastrous consequences for the revolutionaries.

As a preemptive measure of the coming conflict, Louis XVI ordered on January 30, 1778, an activation of the provincial militia. 75,000 men would be available to serve as the national guards, in coast-guard duty, and some would be available to fight with the professional army. Thus, the French armed forces were ready when on February 6, 1778 Louis XVI formalized France's recognition of the US independence by signing the treaty of commerce and friendship. Two days later Jean Stiegel enlisted in the French army.

## **PART TWO**

### **THE FIRST PHASE OF THE WAR ( 1778-1780)**

In April 1778, a few months after the signature of the Franco-American treaty, war had not yet been declared, but tension was rising between England and France. Admiral d'Estaing was sent to reinforce the West Indies with his fleet and two infantry battalions, bringing the forces in the islands to 13 infantry battalions in addition to the pre-existing troops protecting these French colonies. On June 17, 1778 several British ships attacked the French ship *Belle-Poule* off the coast of Brittany. On 10 July, Louis XVI ordered his warships to pursue those of the Royal Navy and on July 27 the first naval battle took place off the coast of the French city Ushant. With this the real war started. It was a gamble for France which had a fleet of 52 ships against Britain's 66. Fellow Bourbons in Spain hesitated for nearly a year before coming into the conflict as they refused to recognize the US independence. Nonetheless, sharing a common enemy -- England, on 8 May 1779, the Spanish lent their support to France by adding their fleet of 58 ships to France's fleet of 63 to battle against Britain's 90.

#### **1- Overseas Operations**

From the onset of war it was clear that France and England would fight each other primarily in the colonies since neither of the two had the military strength to invade the other, although France was studying the possibility of such a plan. In Martinique, the news of war between France and England arrived on August 17, 1778 and immediately the Governor General Marquis de Bouillé gathered a mixed force of professional, colonial and militia troops totaling 1800 and seized the English island of

Dominica on September 7. The British answered a week later by seizing the French islands of St-Pierre-et-Miquelon off the Canadian coast. The British remained on the offensive for the rest of the year by capturing the French post of Pondichery in India on October 17 and the island of St-Lucia in the West Indies on December 13.

The year 1779 saw an increase in fighting on all the fronts. Reinforcements continued to pour into the colonies from England and France and later Spain after they joined the fight in May. It was now time for France to go on the offensive. On January 31, the French captured the African town of St-Louis in Senegal. On June 18 French troops captured the island of St-Vincent and on July 4, the French took Granada. The first action of French troops on American soil took place on September 13 when Admiral d'Estaing sailed to Georgia with 2,800 troops where he joined the American army of Major-General Benjamin Lincoln and together they besieged the British stronghold of Savannah. The struggle for Savannah endured for a month and ultimately the allies were forced to withdraw.



Franco-American attack on Savannah, Oct. 8, 1779. Illustration by A.I. Keller. The failed assault ended in the ally withdrawal.

To capitalize on this success, the British launched an operation in South Carolina on February 21, 1780. They besieged Charleston which fell on May 12. However, in the Southwest the British were less successful. They lost Baton Rouge to the Spanish on September 21, 1779 and Mobile on March 14, 1780. Still by mid-1780 the British were firmly entrenched in the major towns of the Atlantic coast while the rebels were mostly contained inland. Meanwhile in 1780, the French and British met in three naval engagements, all of them indecisive (April 17, near Martinique, May 15 near St-Lucia and May 19 near Savannah).

## 2- Invading England

As soon as the war began in 1778, the old French dream of invading the British Isles came back to the forefront of war planning, and a military concentration was built on the shores of Brittany and Normandy. French officials began work on an invasion plan and a draft was ready by March 19, 1779. The goal was to occupy the Isle of Wight with 20,000 troops and subsequently to land at Gosport from which the Portsmouth naval arsenal and hopefully the British fleet could be destroyed by mortar fire. On April 12, 1779, Spain joined the coalition against Britain and signed an alliance treaty with France, although it was not prepared to recognize formally the United States. Yet, Spain's backup made the plan of a British invasion more plausible, since the King of Spain saw such a plan as the best guarantee to protect its own dwindling colonial empire. However Spain was not prepared to contribute any troops to the invasion but agreed to contribute financially to the operation. In return, Spain agreed not to make a separate peace with England until American independence was secured, in recognition of France's obligation to the American colonies. Vergennes hoped that by the end of May transports and supply ships could be collected for the invasion. The plan seemed well under way but the feasibility of the whole operation rested on one critical point: The French and Spanish fleet had to join forces to destroy or at least incapacitate the British Fleet patrolling the channel in order for the troops to cross. Admiral d'Orvillier was put in charge of this task, but by May, his fleet was not prepared and he would not be able to sail before June.

Meanwhile, in Le Havre, Normandy and St. Malo, Brittany, the buildup of troops and transports was continuing reaching almost 40,000 men. Lafayette, who had been asked by the US Continental Congress to come back to France to convince the King to send an army to America was among those in Le Havre. While continuing his efforts on behalf of America, he also sought command of the invasion force to England. Yet, the chief command was entrusted to the Comte de Vaux, a more experienced general. From an operational point of view, this enterprise was primarily the work of General Rochambeau who had been working on the invasion of England since 1776, and in pursuit of that goal had spent tremendous energy preparing his troops. Still, Lafayette was promised a command of some importance, and he was filled with delight at the prospect. He wrote Vergennes: "The idea of seeing England humiliated, annihilated, makes me tremble with joy . . . Judge then if I am eager to know whether I shall be the first to arrive on that coast, the first to plant the French flag in the midst of that insolent nation." <sup>4</sup>

On May 1, 1779, to test the British, the Prince of Nassau was sent with his legion of volunteers, to storm the channel island of Jersey. Unfortunately, he was unable to land and was forced back to St.Malo where 5 of his ships were destroyed by the British Navy. Although this failure cooled off French enthusiasm for an invasion, it did not stop the will to move forward with the plan.



Le Havre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

### The French-Spanish Armada<sup>5</sup>

In June, d'Orvilliers finally sailed to Corunna to rendezvous with the Spanish fleet. Although the Spanish had been eager for the invasion, when the time for action came they were not ready and it took their fleet six weeks to organize for departure. More worryingly The Spanish refused to follow French orders, and even tried to dissuade the French from invading England, insisting that the fleet should attack Gibraltar instead. Eventually though, the fleet of the allies cast off and sailed north with a fleet of 66 ship, widely outnumbering the British Home Fleet.

Finally in August 1779 the Franco-Spanish Armada entered the channel. Yet, since the French ships had not renewed their supplies in three months, they were running low on food and water and to make matter worse, diseases such as smallpox and scurvy started to spread among the crew. D'Orvilliers even lost his son. The Armada still managed to reach Plymouth but head winds forced it back into the Atlantic. D'Orvilliers was persistent and tried again only to be blown back. When they finally reached the English coast, the British navy operated a strategic retreat avoiding d'Orvilliers who never found the battle that he was looking for. At last on September 3, the French admiral gave up the chase and returned to Brest with over 8000 of his men sick.

For six weeks the French and Spanish fleet had controlled the English Channel unchallenged, and ironically an invasion could have been launched at any time with a good chance of success, as the English defenses were in total disarray. In fact the Governor of Plymouth had indicated that his defenses were so weak that the French only had to land there to be masters of the dockyard "in less than six hours". It was only the French Admiral's lack of confidence that saved the day for England.

D'Orvillier returned to Brest on September 19, 1779. Soon thereafter the storms of autumn began, and the health of the men grew worse. In October the invasion plan was abandoned. Rochambeau would

reflect back on it as an exceedingly expensive and ill-arranged enterprise. Yet the money expended in this foolish project was not altogether wasted, for it had prepared the ground for another ambitious expedition that would eventually take Rochambeau's troops across the Atlantic.

### 3- The "Beauce" Regiment

During the first three years of the war, Jean Stiegel remained with the Beauce regiment took part in the military buildup in Normandy intended for the invasion of England. In Normandy, Stiegel lived the simple life of the barracks with the knowledge that an attack could be imminent. It is unclear, if the soldiers on the continent were aware of the operations taking place overseas, but during this period all had their eyes on England where every French general dreamt of pitching the flag of the first invading power since the days of William the Conqueror!

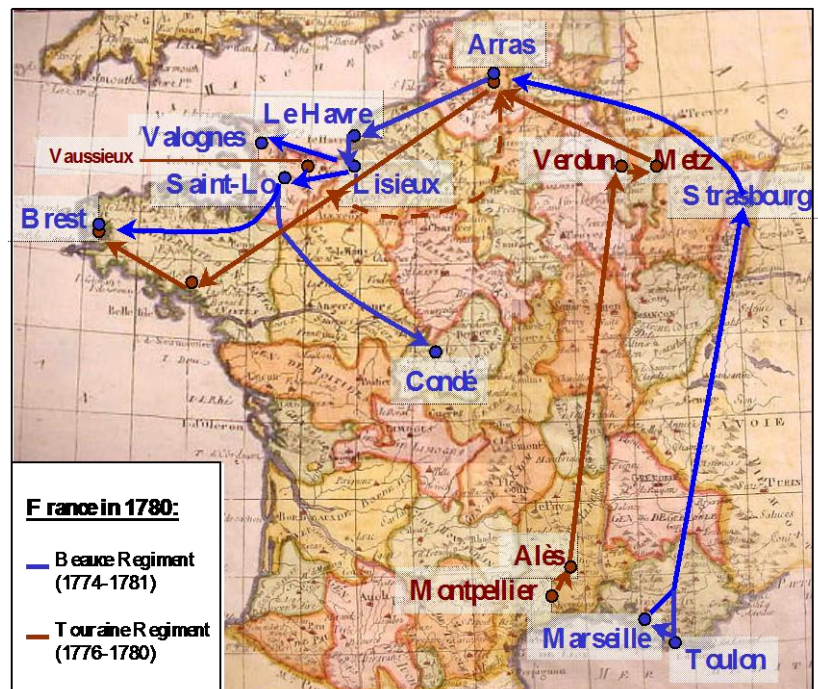
#### History of the regiment (1761-1774)<sup>6</sup>

During the Seven Year War, the regiment participated in the 1761 campaign on the French coasts and in 1762 its first battalion was sent to Portugal to participate in the siege of Almeida. After the peace of 1763, the regiment was assigned to the service of the French ports and colonies and was renamed from "Gentilshommes" to "Beauce".

At the beginning of 1763, the second battalion which was stationed in the French city of Saintes moved to Carcassone, on the Mediterranean coast where it was joined by the first battalion coming back from Spain. After the regiment's regrouping, it was sent to Toulon and from there to the Alsatian town of Neuf-Brisach in 1767. In July 1769 it went to the camp of Verberie and during the following month of August to Landrecies and Avesnes. In October 1770, the regiment was sent to Corsica.

#### Garrisoned in France (1774-1780)

The regiment was back in Toulon in July 1774. In August 1775 the second battalion was dispatched to Marseille and in October 1776 the whole regiment moved to Strasbourg. The regiment only stayed in Alsace for one year before leaving in November 1777 for Arras in Northern France. It is likely that during this period, in late 1777, as the regiment was still stationed on the German border that Stiegel was recruited by one of the regiment's sergeants. As we have already mentioned the town of Kertzfeld provided many soldiers along the 18th century and it is probable that there was a small army post nearby.

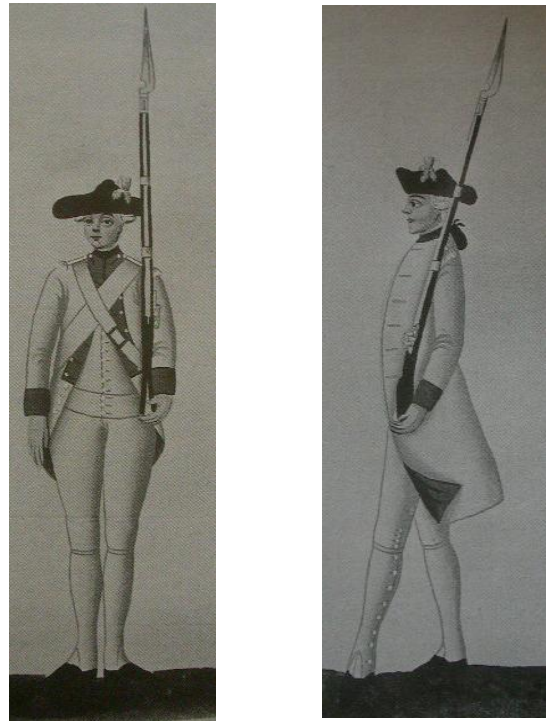


Garrisons of the Beauce and Touraine regiments before and during the war of Independence.

Stiegel went on with the regiment to Arras where it stayed only for three months. In February 1778 the war between France and England was imminent and Beauce was sent to the coastal town of Le Havre, in Normandy where the King was gathering an army to attack England. As the regiment arrived in Normandy, Stiegel was finally officially enlisted in the company of Captain de Courcelle. There in Le Havre, France's greatest generals including Rochambeau, Lafayette and the Comte de Vaux were hard at work drilling and forming their troops for the potential invasion. When in October 1779 the King finally renounced the invasion, the concentration in Le Havre was disbanded. Yet, since other overseas operations were on the drawing board, the regiments stayed stationed locally. In November 1779, Beauce moved a few miles inland to the Norman town of Lisieux.

### Colors and Uniform<sup>7</sup>

These first years of war saw the production of the Count of St-Germain's short lived revolutionary uniform. The French troops hated it because it looked too Prussian and with this uniform they had the impression of being enlisted in a foreign army. So, as soon as 1779, a Counter-order was issued to restore the French cut to army uniform. Still from 1778 to 1780, the troops had to wear the Saint-Germain design with its short gilet and its long redingote. All French infantry regiments wore white uniforms but each regiment had its own colors for some uniform details. Thus the 1776 order specified for Beauce that lapels and cuffs were to be aurora, the collar green and the buttons yellow.



1776 regulation: Fusilier of La Reine regiment wearing the short tail coat with lapels of Prussian inspiration (left) and of the Saintonge regiment wearing the short-lived redingote (right).

#### **4- The Life of France's foot soldiers under the monarchy**

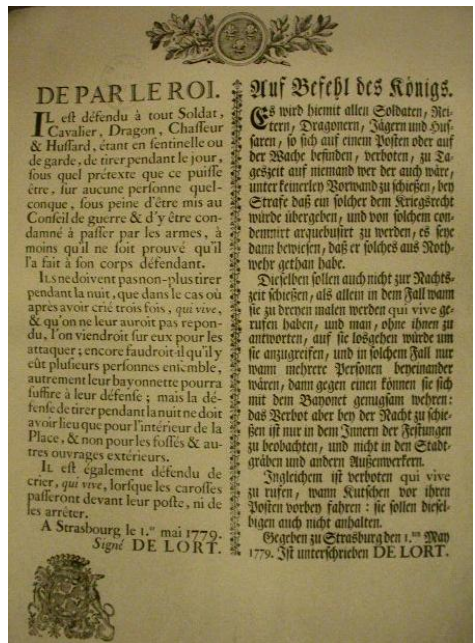
When a soldier enlisted in the King's army he did so for a minimum period set by decree. However this minimum period of duty increased consistently, from 3 years at the end of the 17th century, to six years at the beginning of the 18th century, to reach 8 years at the end of that century. After that initial period, soldiers could re-enlist for shorter terms. More elaborate military tactics meant more time needed for the drills and to build expertise. In 1762, a veteran army officer wrote: "recruits from the Countryside are only good after 6 years of exercise."

When not at war, the pay of the soldiers is meager and the men are often forced to live off their loot. Under the monarchy, common soldiers were not only scorned by their blue-blooded officers who called them "Racaille" (worthless scoundrels), but they were also despised by the civilian population for their ruthless behavior. Town officials barred them access to some public sites. Yet, due to a shortage of barracks, villagers were often forced to accommodate them and complaints were constantly on the rise.

In the regional archives of Strasbourg, I found an order of the King issued in 1779 relating to the soldiery's misconduct. It was written in French and German (most Alsatians did not speak French) and was posted all over town. It threatened soldiers of harsh punishment for careless use of their weapons. Each decision to shoot would have to be clearly justified and the soldiers were forbidden to stop any carriages that passed before their post.

Desertions were Countless even in peace time despite the threat of harsh punishment including the death penalty. When several deserters were caught and judged at the same time, the court marshal would take them three by three and have them draw to see which one of the triplet would be executed. The two others were condemned to galleys. If only one or two soldiers were to be punished he or they were shot. In reality, only a very small number of deserters were caught by the military police.

Mortality was very high among the 18th century troops. Disease was by far the first cause of death and epidemics as shown by the hospital records of the time. Battlefield casualties were few in comparison, especially among the troops sent overseas. All in, a soldier of the King had little more to hope for than to survive his period of duty and to make it back home with a few coins and many harsh memories.



1779 king order in French (left) and German (right) threatening soldiers against reckless use of their weapons

### PART THREE

### THE AMERICAN EXPEDITION

#### 1- Convincing the King

At the beginning of 1780, the French government had many reasons to be frustrated. In the West Indies, the French army and navy had had good successes but in America after the failed attempt of a Franco-American force to take Savannah, the British seemed inexpugnable from the American shore. In Europe, the ambitious plan to invade England had been abandoned. An immense fleet had been

gathered, an army had been stationed on the shore for a year and huge sums of money had been spent for no result. This failure had built a great deal of frustration in the army and in the government and all called for action against England. This situation was probably the perfect catalyst for a massive engagement of France on American soil and Lafayette deserves much of the credit for having transformed an opportunity into a reality by his relentless efforts for the cause of the insurgents.

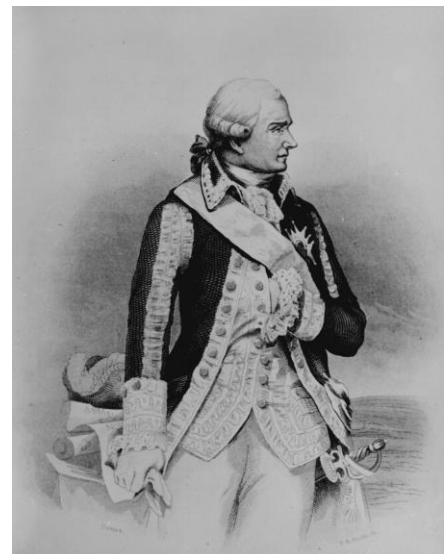
The fleet gathered in Saint Malo and Le Havre made it technically possible to send an expeditionary force to the New World but Louis XVI was still worried about the trustworthiness of the Revolutionaries and feared that Spain's Charles III, although allied with France against England, would dislike an increase of American power right next to his overseas empire. In addition an American expedition meant another large cost for a Country already close to bankruptcy. Vergennes had other concerns; there were serious difficulties in sending several thousand men across the Atlantic, including numerous diseases and the danger of the overwhelming English navy. It was not certain that a French army on American soil would be agreeable to the Americans, or that French soldiers could cooperate successfully with the American army. In addition, the early Franco-American efforts under d'Estaing had not been successful and the Americans' failure to recover ground after the British repelled the Franco-American attack on Savannah did little to encourage the reluctant Vergennes. After all, General Washington had little to show for himself in the winter of 1779-1780.

In the end all knew that without an invasion of England, France's chances to defeat the British rested in America. However the British were firmly entrenched in their bases in America and it was clear that the American forces, although efficient in guerrilla tactics were not strong enough to beat the British on the open field or storm their fortresses. Therefore in March 1780, the King finally decided to send an army to America to the great joy of Lafayette and thousands of French volunteers who burned with the desire to serve the cause of freedom at the expense of the hated enemy. Vergennes felt that Lafayette was too young to command such an expeditionary force. Therefore, he was sent back to America to announce the imminent arrival of an army under the command of the Lieutenant General Rochambeau.

## 2- The First Expeditionary Force (July 1780)

The plan that Rochambeau would follow was in substance the same one that was devised by Lafayette one year earlier. The army would land in Newport, Rhode Island and from there join forces with Washington.

When Rochambeau arrived in Brest in March 1780, he found that the ships were not as numerous as expected. The largest part of the fleet had returned to the West Indies in February to fight the British navy. Thus, only the first division of his army could embark under Admiral Chevalier de Ternay: a sad blow for the commander-in-chief. Therefore Rochambeau decided that passage be given to only the strongest men, and, in order to save space, that all horses be left behind, including his own.



Rochambeau - Engraving by T. D. Booth from painting by J. D. Court

When all were onboard, forming a total of 5,000 men, capacity was so stretched that a number of young men, some belonging to the best-known French families, and who hoped to be a part of the expedition, had to be sent back. The fleet was already on the high seas when a messenger boat brought the government's last instructions to Rochambeau. On that boat were two brothers called Berthier, who pleaded to be allowed to volunteer. "They have joined us yesterday," Rochambeau writes to the minister de Castries, "and have handed us your letters.... They were dressed in linen vests and breeches, asking to be admitted as mere sailors." But there was really no place to put them. "Those poor young men are interesting and in despair."<sup>8</sup> They had, nevertheless, to be sent back, but did manage to join the army later.

While the French army was crossing the ocean, the British were pushing forward on America's southern theater and took Charleston in May. Rochambeau's convoy finally sighted land at Newport, Rhode Island, on July 11, 1780. Among the officers, were some of the most renowned names in France : Montmorency, Custine, Chartres, Noailles, Lauzun... Yet, the hopes raised by their arrival were short-lived; soon after, a large British fleet was sighted. It was under the command of Admirals Arbuthnot and Rodney. Such a massive naval presence spoiled the plans for a quick attack on New York. One month later, matters got worse since on August 16, on the southern front, the British inflicted the most severe defeat of the war to the American army. It was reported that among the 3,000 Americans (mostly militia) who faced the same number of experienced British troops, 2,000 fled without firing a shot. This engagement proved once more the weakness of the insurgents on an open field.

In September 1780 Lafayette organized a meeting in Hartford between Rochambeau and Washington. The allies recognized that containing the British was one thing but to achieve a final victory more troops would be needed and it was decided to send the King of France a request for more French reinforcements. In addition to more troops, the allies stressed the critical need for a full-size naval force to push back the Royal Navy and isolate the British army. At this time Washington returned to his camp at West Point, and learned of the blow of Benedict Arnold's treason. Becoming chief counselor to General Clinton, Arnold pushed for quick action to exploit the weakness of the Continental Army. Victims of the naval blockade, the American soldiers were neither paid, nor fed, nor clothed. Rochambeau began to worry, quite legitimately, about the effectiveness of these "men pushed to the limits of their resources."<sup>9</sup> Once more Louis XVI and Vergennes were expected to respond to the urgent needs of the Revolutionaries.

## **2- Build-up of a Second Expeditionary Force**

In the Summer of 1780, the French fleet then embattled in the West Indies was recalled to Europe to try once again to meet the Spanish fleet with the ambition of joint operations against the English. Infantry regiments standing by in the French coastal provinces were once again on the move. In August 1780 Stiegel's Beauce regiment moved further west to the towns of Valognes and Saint-Lo. Stiegel and his company were yet again on stand-by for a potential overseas operation. Meanwhile, the best French naval officers of the time including d'Estaing, Guichen, La-Motte-Piquet, and Suffren gathered in the Spanish port of Cadiz along with 100 ships of the line. However Spanish Armada disappointed the French by deciding not to participate in the expedition and on November 6, the French fleet sailed off alone in the direction of the north.

The French were resolved to pursue their military efforts against England even if they were to fight alone. Financially, the Country was in dire straights and the King demanded a decisive victory. As the fleet from Cadiz was expected to return to Brest around year end, its mission would be directed on three critical theaters: India, the West Indies and America. To assist the fleet in its naval operations, an army gathered in Brest. In the fall of 1780, detachments from several regiments started to move toward Brest. The Beauce regiment was among those that contributed to this effort. After providing recruits for the garrison of the Armada, the core of the regiment went back east to Condé, in central France. Jean Stiegel along with others of his fellow comrades was chosen to be among those to be sent overseas. The last entry on Stiegel's record on the roll of the Beauce regiment indicated that "he was discharged to be incorporated in the troops of the navy on December 1, 1780". He was to become a "Marine". Jean Stiegel probably reached Brest during the last days of 1780 to be put once again on stand-by for an overseas operation. This time however, he would be sent away and his destiny was about to take a dramatic turn as the son of the poor Alsatian shepherd would soon be part of events that would change the world forever.

### 3- An Admiral for the fleet

As the French fleet sailed back to Brest, in America, the British advance in the south had finally been stopped. On October 7, 1780 the American militia had defeated the troops of General Cornwallis near Kings Mountain, SC, and the British general decided to abandon his invasion of North Carolina.

On January 3 1781, the French fleet finally reached Brest from Cadiz, after two months of exhausting sailing against contrary winds, its crews decimated by scurvy, exhaustion and fevers. This concentrated force of 38 ships of the line had not seen a single English vessel, and the French people still had to wait to witness the major naval victory that was so hoped for, for so long. On January 5, the unit known as the Volunteers of Luxembourg failed on a new attempt to seize the Channel Island of Jersey. The attention would now shift for good to the overseas operations.



De Grasse - Engraving by Lemercier from painting by A. Maurin, 1837

As mentioned, the plan worked out in Versailles called for the naval army in Brest to be split into three divisions. One squadron (led by 10 ships of the line) would go to India, the second (led by 7 ships of the line) would be sent to Rhode Island to bring supplies, siege artillery and recruits to the army of Rochambeau, while the third and largest (21 ships of the line) would escort a fleet of merchant ships to the West Indies before sailing to America and assist the land armies of Washington and Rochambeau. On the basis of his ministers' recommendations Louis XVI appointed the Count de Grasse Lieutenant-General of his naval armies and entrusted him with the largest portion of the fleet. The King hoped that de Grasse would give France the decisive victory over England by fulfilling three goals: first, de Grasse would go to the West Indies to insure protection for the 92 merchant ships waiting to cross the Atlantic. Second, the fleet had to break the supremacy of the Royal Navy in the islands and in coordination with its army of marines, seize strategic British islands. Third, the fleet would assist the operations of the ally land armies in America. The King also appointed Count de Barras at the head of

the division to be sent to Rhode Island and Admiral Suffren to command the squadron headed to India.

#### **4- Admiral De Grasse**

De Grasse married his second wife Catherine in the West Indies where they both had plantations. She died as he was fighting in America. She gave him two daughters, which with the children from his first marriage gave him a total of 4 daughters and only one son. He, himself was the 10th and last child of the Captain de Grasse-Rouville. Born in 1722, de Grasse was accepted as a page in Malta at 12 years old, where he stayed for three years. Upon his return, he entered into the service of Louis XV's navy where he saw his first naval engagement in 1744. Wounded and captured by the British in 1747 after a fierce battle where four French vessels tried to protect a merchant convoy against the assault of 14 British ships, he was freed one year later after a peace treaty was signed. He obtained his first command in 1757 when war with England resumed. This war was marked by a series of defeats which established the absolute superiority of the English navy. As the disastrous peace of 1763 sealed France's loss of Canada and other colonies, de Grasse's heroism in the West Indies got him a promotion to Ship captain. In 1764 he married Antoinette Accaron, his first wife, before leaving again to fight pirates in the Mediterranean. He spent most of the early 1770s in France participating in the effort to prepare the French navy for a new war with England. As war started in 1778, de Grasse participated in the Ushant battle where he commanded three vessels of 64 guns. The outcome was indecisive but the French managed to keep the field. For the first time in many decades, the power of the Royal Navy was being challenged. He was then sent to America where in 1779 he participated in the conquest of St. Vincent, Barbados and Granada and in the failed attempt on Savannah under Admiral D'Estaing. In 1780, again in the West Indies he fought under Admiral Guichen a series of indecisive battles, before being recalled to Europe for the gathering in Cadiz.

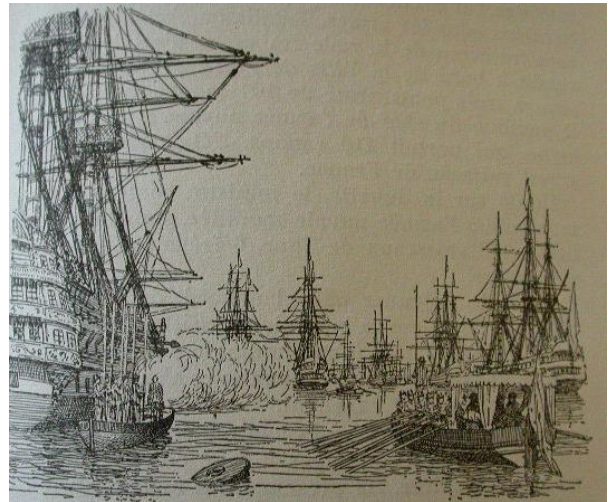
#### **5- Readyng the fleet**

The Marquis de Castries, Secretary of State of the Navy expected de Grasse to be ready to cast off on March 15 with two months of supplies. This meant that de Grasse had only one month to revamp the fleet. 50 vessels had to be graved and the sheathing of the hull had to be remade. All ships needed to be newly remasted, rigged and the ropes had to be changed. There was not enough copper for the hulls, hemp for the ropes and cloth for the sails. The Count of Hector, commander of the great arsenal of Brest and Monsieur de Sané, the naval engineer were doubtful that such a task could be achieved in so little time. However de Castries had promised de Grasse his full support and had arsenals all over France were cleaned out to supply the fleet in Brest.

Additional manpower was badly needed to complete the work and sailors were asked to help. Yet, after 32 months of campaigning in the West Indies and America, the crews were exhausted. Thousands had been weakened by scurvy or fever and were just coming out of the hospital. Still, all participated in this effort, working from dawn to midnight, including de Grasse himself who could be seen at 4 in the morning supervising the work in spite of a bad fever that he had brought back from the West Indies.

It is unclear if the foot soldiers were asked to participate in this effort given their lack of knowledge in naval affairs. It is likely that many were used to escort the many goods and supplies that arrived to Brest and were stored on the harbor before being loaded on the ships.

It is said that during this winter of 1780-81, a thin rain was constantly drizzling over Brest which challenge even further the morale of the men. Nonetheless, on March 13, the fleet was ready and de Castries himself came to Brest to visit. He was welcome at the entrance of the Arsenal of Brest by the full garrison under arms and by salvos of artillery. It is likely that Stiegel participated in this ceremony before the Secretary of State of the Navy unless by chance he was on guard duty that day. De Castries then boarded the "Ville de Paris", the admiral ship of 104 guns, where de Grasse presented him the fleet and a simulation of naval combat. There evolved 38 warships of the line, six frigates, two corvettes and two cutters.



March 1781: Secretary of State de Castries boards the "Ville de Paris"

## 6- The naval army casts off to America

On March 17, the troops garrisoned on the shore boarded the ships and the sailors were on the decks. Brest started to breathe again. In the past weeks indeed, the presence of thousands of sailors who had sent for their families to come to Brest had triggered an increase in local prices and a shortage of housing. Furthermore the presence of hundreds of bored naval officers started to create scandals in town. On March 20, the convoys of food and other ship supplies reached Brest. The fleet of 200 merchant and war ships was now ready to cast off. Unfortunately the wind was unfavorable and the fleet had to wait until the 22nd to be finally able to weigh anchor before tens of thousands of citizens from Brest, and personalities from Versailles led by the Minister de Castries, who all wanted to see the departure of the naval army. They all wished for a victory over the hereditary enemy.

As the fleet of de Grasse cast off, Count de Vergenne's diplomatic skills had left Britain completely isolated. In November 1780, England which could find no ally also declared war on Holland. In 1781 the lesser naval powers of such as Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Russia formed themselves into an "armed neutrality" while Austria and Prussia would have nothing to do with the conflict. Therefore the war would be fought and won exclusively at sea and overseas.

De Grasse's military fleet was made of three squadrons. In front was the white and blue squadron commanded by Bougainville, famous for his recent trip around the world. In the center, sailed the main battle corps of Admiral de Grasse and his white flag, while in the rear was the blue squadron of M. d'Espinouze. On the way, the fleet encountered a Swedish ship which announced that Admiral Rodney had seized and looted the Dutch West Indian island of St. Eustatius. The Dutch had also lost the islands of St. Martin and Saba in the attack. The British did not even wait for the declaration of war

to reach the West Indies to pounce. Furthermore they fell on the Dutch by flying the Dutch banner, thus capturing 120 ships and their goods.

On March 29, near Madeira, de Grasse signaled Suffren that he could split from the convoy and sail south toward India. On April 4, the fleet of de Barras, which had left Brest four days after de Grasse, caught up with the convoy near the Azores before sailing toward Newport. He was to escort 30 merchant ships containing important supplies for the land army of General Rochambeau as well as 660 recruits to reinforce his regiments. De Grasse gave de Barras a letter for Rochambeau:

"His Majesty entrusted me with the command of the naval forces bound for his possessions in the West Indies and for his allies of North America. The forces under my command are sufficient to fulfill the plans of attack from which will come an honorable peace in the interest of the allied powers. It will not be before July 15 in the earliest that I shall reach the coasts of America, but it will be essential given the short time that I intend to stay there due to the end of the season, that everything that is necessary to the success of your plans will be ready and that no time is lost for action."<sup>10</sup>

### The Atlantic crossing

On the way to the West Indies, the slower merchant ships constantly trailed behind and in the fog the convoy stretched quickly across several miles. In addition many sailors were getting sick, hit by the scurvy and other diseases typical of the Atlantic crossing. De Grasse was worried that a faster British fleet might take advantage of these moments of weakness to fall on the convoy, but no enemy sail appeared on the horizon.

It is difficult today to grasp the magnitude of the ordeal of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic crossing, especially given the scarcity of direct accounts from enlisted men. Yet, not so long ago a manuscript was rediscovered in Strasbourg's library. This document is a journal written by a foot soldier of the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment which was part of the expeditionary force of Rochambeau. It was in Strasbourg that in 1787, Georg Daniel Flohr, a German from the duchy of Zweibrücken wrote his memoirs relating to his the expedition in America. This is what he said about his departure from Brest:<sup>11</sup>

"around 2 o'clock after the noon hour we had already left the French coast behind and lost sight of the land. Now we saw nothing but sky and water and realized the omnipotence of God, into which we commended ourselves. Soon the majority among us wished that they had never in their born days chosen the life of a soldier and cursed the first recruiter who had engaged them. But this was just the beginning; the really miserable life was yet to start."

Every ship had limited space onboard. Each was typically shared by 350 soldiers, 12 navy officers, 10 army officers with their servants and a crew of about 45. The men slept on hammocks described by Flohr as "not very comfortable". Since two men had been assigned to each hammock, "the majority always had to lie on the bare floor." Flohr concluded by saying that "He who wanted to lie well had better stayed home."

Even officers had to share a cabin that included each ten of them. At meals, 22 people squeezed into a chamber 15 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 4 1/2 feet high. Odors from "men as much as from dogs," not to mention the cows, sheep, and chickens, "the perpetual annoyance from the close proximity" of

fellow officers, and "the idea of being shut up in a very narrow little old ship, as in a state prison," made for a "vexatious existence of an army officer...on these old tubs, so heartily detested by all who are not professional sailors."<sup>12</sup>

According to Flohr, "The food consisted of 36 Loth (a little over a pound) Zwieback (hardtack) daily, which was distributed in three installments: at 7 o'clock in the morning, at noon, and at 6 o'clock in the evening. Concerning meat, we received 16 Loth (about 1/2 a pound) per day, either salted bacon or beef, which was prepared every day for lunch. This meat, however, was salted so much that thirst was always greater than hunger. In the evenings we had to make do with a bad soup blended with oil and prepared from soybeans [called Schweinebohnen, or pig's beans, by Flohr] and other such stuff. Anyone who has not yet seen it should just once take a look at this grimy mass and he too would lose all appetite." With starvation the only other choice, the soldiers forced it down, living proof for Flohr of the proverb, "Hunger is a good cook."

Their drink consisted of "1/2 Schoppen (1/4 liter) of good red wine, distributed in three rations; when it was brandy, half of that." Of water there was "very little, mostly half a Schoppen per day." This poor diet lacking in vitamins and minerals soon claimed its victims, and Flohr witnessed "daily our fellow brothers thrown into the depths of the ocean. No one was surprised though, since all our foodstuffs were rough and bad enough to destroy us."

On April 15, finally, the tip of the island of Samana, part of the French possessions of St. Domingue (Haiti) was in sight and de Grasse sent a ship to Governor General de Bouillé in Fort Royal, Martinique Island to let him know of the arrival of the fleet.

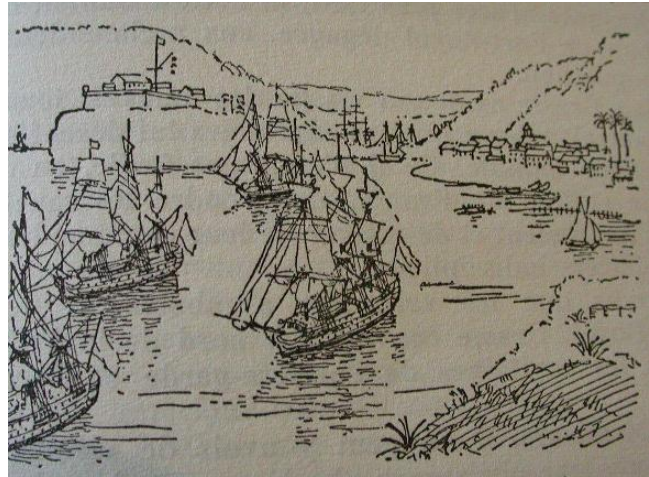
## **7- Arrival in the West Indies**

De Grasse dropped parts of his convoy in St. Domingue and Guadeloupe and sailed on south with the rest of the ships including 21 vessels of the line, toward Martinique, his final destination. Stiegel and the other recruits that were to reinforce the already strong colonial army were probably packed like sardines aboard some of the fleet's transports, fighting the unavoidable diseases and sicknesses of those days' Atlantic crossings and wondering what life was like on the tropical islands they were approaching. On April 28, the fleet was in sight of Martinique when an English frigate was spotted off the coast followed by a full British fleet. De Grasse then sent a scout on shore to investigate the situation. Upon his return the scout told the admiral that the island had not been taken by the British but that the fleet of Admiral Hood blockaded the port of Fort Royal, capital of Martinique, and intercepted all convoys with his 17 ships of the line. De Grasse also learned of Admiral Rodney's return to the West Indies from America, and that in conjunction with Admiral Hood he captured the Dutch island of St. Eustacius, along with 2,000 American civilians. It was after that operation that Hood started his blockade on Fort Royal on February 12. De Grasse decided to attack the next day, before Hood's frigates had a chance to alert Rodney of the presence of the French fleet.

On April 29 (probable birthday of Jean Stiegel), the French fleet whose men had still not completely recovered from the ordeal of an Atlantic crossing, engaged Admiral Hood. The merchant ships were to stand by between the shore and the warships. The battle started at 10 am. At 12:30 four British ships were hit and Admiral Hood commanded the withdrawal of the fleet. De Grasse decided to chase the British. The pursuit would last two days, but because of its slower rear guard commanded by

Bougainville, the French would never be within reach of a full assault. On May 1, de Grasse gave up the chase and returned to Fort Royal.

On the way, de Grasse blamed Bougainville for refusing to follow orders. The battle cost the French 18 dead and 56 wounded, while the British lost 39 dead and had 162 wounded. In Fort Royal de Grasse was acclaimed for the end of the blockade and the famine that had started on the island. Aboard a small boat, Monsieur de Bouillé, Governor of the island welcomed heartedly the arrival of the naval army. De Grasse ordered the landing of the troops which were presented to the governor. When the officers saw the troops they all agreed that the English could have caused no greater damage on these men than the ocean had!



May 1781: After chasing away the fleet of Admiral Hood, the French fleet enters the bay of Fort Royal in Martinique.

Rochambeau wrote in his correspondence how the diseases and the sanitary conditions on the ships had significantly weakened his troops, when they landed in Rhode Island the previous year. According to Flohr sailors like soldiers were all weakened by scurvy when they landed in Rhode Island. He claims further that in the companies 110 men strong "barely 18-20 could still be used" to throw up defenses around the harbor. As the Newporters "could now daily see the misery of the many sick, of whom the majority could not even stand up and move...they had very great pity on them and did all they could for them." According to the statistics, Flohr's regiment lost about a dozen men during the crossing. That day of May 1, 1781, as he landed in Fort Royal, Jean Stiegel, son of an Alsatian shepherd was likely among the most weakened, as he was probably coming off his first boat trip.

## 8- The French garrison of Martinique<sup>13</sup>

The garrison of Fort Royal was made up of colonial troops in charge of protecting the island, reinforced by a series of regiments and battalions sent from France in the context of the war with England. The colonial troops of course were a different entity that did not obey to the regulations and reforms which affected the continental regiments. After the seven year war, Choiseul sent regular army battalions to protect the remaining colonies but those were not popular among the local population who saw them as arrogant and cut-off from their society. Therefore in the 1770s an effort was made to raise local troops. In Martinique, the Martinique Regiment that was raised in 1772 included two battalions of local recruits, generally free non-white men. The officers in these units did not need to be of blue blood like their continental Counterparts. Most of them came from the local white bourgeoisie. This infantry regiment was strengthened by the artillery of one or two companies of Cannoniers-Bombardiers that was raised in 1774. In addition to local battalions, the colonial troops typically included companies of volunteers raised in France for colonial service. In Martinique there were three companies of volunteers all of them raised in 1778; the company of Volontaires de Bouillé, the company of Cadets de St-Pierre and the company of Cadets du Gros-Morne.

Among the battalions sent from the continent, those garrisoned in Martinique included the following troops:

<b>Regiment</b>	<b>Nb of Battalions</b>	<b>Sent to Martinique</b>	<b>Part of Tobago Exp.</b>
Auxerrois	1	November 1775	Yes
Gâtinais	1	November 1775	
Viennois	1	November 1775	Yes
"	1	October 1777	Yes
Walsh	1	April 1778	Yes
Hainault	1	April 1778	
Champagne	1	January 1779	
Dillon	1	March 1779	Yes
Foix	1	July 1779	
Enghien	2	February 1780	
Touraine	2	February 1780	
Royal-Comtois	1	February 1780	Yes

By 1781, some of these regiments had been relocated elsewhere in the West Indies. For example Touraine was in St.Domingue. Yet a considerable force was still garrisoned in Martinique and together with the troops in St. Domingue and Guadeloupe, it was a force of about 25 battalions that had been sent from France to the West Indies.

## 9- Operations in the West Indies

Upon his arrival in Martinique, De Grasse was determined to attack the British island of Tobago immediately before Admiral Hood and Admiral Rodney had a chance to regroup. It seems that the contingent brought by de Grasse was probably still recovering from the Atlantic crossing. Therefore Governor de Bouillé gathered 2600 of his own men from several regiments garrisoned in Martinique and embarked on de Grasse's fleet. On May 22, the fleet with Bouillé's troops onboard sailed toward Tobago. They arrived on May 30. The troops disembarked immediately and Rodney sent an armed fleet to attempt a rescue operation. Yet, when he saw the more powerful French fleet before the island he decided to turn around. The British governor of the island surrendered on June 1. The French seized the merchandise in the port and fortified their positions.

On June 4, Hood and Rodney who had finally regrouped appeared north of the island with 24 ships and de Grasse with his 23 ships decided to sail toward them. However, once again the British admirals decided not to engage the French fleet and to sail away. On June 15, de Grasse sailed back to Martinique which he reached on June 18. In addition to the successful conquest of Tobago, de Grasse was proud to give France for the first time control of the West Indies' seas. It was now time to prepare a much larger expedition.

## 10- Gathering in St-Domingue

On July 5, 1781, the French fleet cast off Fort-Royal with 24 vessels of the line and 160 merchant ships. The latter were to cross the Atlantic as soon as the opportunity would present itself. The fleet

sailed passed Puerto Rico and was soon in sight of St. Domingue, first French colony of the West Indies. On July 16 the fleet reached the port of Cap Français where it met the division of the Marquis de Monteil.

Next to Martinique, Saint-Domingue was like a continent and Le Cap was to the French settlers the Paris of the West Indies. All French gentlemen-adventurers ended up there seeking plantations. De Grasse himself had bought an important domain on the island. 20,000 Frenchmen ran the island with the help of 150,000 mixed-race and slaves. In spite of the "Black" code of 1685 which guaranteed for the black the practice of religion, food and care, their lives of servitude was so tough that the births did not compensate the deaths. To compensate for the loss, the French slave traders were slowly depopulating the French African colony of Senegal. Next to this misery, the city of Le Cap was a pleasant haven of opulence. It was home to 3500 inhabitants. The two story houses were elegantly built with a refined comfort which gave the city its feeling of luxurious prosperity. The streets were also swarming with sailors and soldiers, since the Cap was the main center of the commercial and military activity of the Northern West Indies. Clearly for the Jean Stiegel, the sight of this tropical city must have been an amazing experience, quite different from anything that he had seen before.



French privateer of Saint-Domingue

## 11- The situation in America as of June 1781

Upon his arrival, de Grasse found three letters, one from Rochambeau, General in Chief of the French army in America, one from M. de la Luzerne, Ambassador of France to the US Congress forwarding a letter from General Washington, and one from the Court of King Louis XVI in Versailles.

In Rochambeau's letter, he described the military situation in America as of May 1781. In the north Rochambeau with his army of 5,500 troops and Washington with barely 8,500 regulars and 3,000 militias were containing the British army of Clinton which held New York. To Rochambeau's estimation, in the current state the allies could contain the British offensive but their forces would be insufficient to take New York that was well supplied by sea. In the south, Cornwallis with his 6,000 troops was marching from Wilmington, Delaware toward Virginia to join the troops of General Benedict Arnold. There, the army under Lafayette, mainly made of American militia with less than a thousand regulars, was losing ground before the superiority of the British troops. The militias of General Greene were expected to join Lafayette soon to reinforce the ally southern front but Rochambeau did not know when that would occur. Washington would have liked the fleet of Admiral de Barras anchored in Newport, Rhode Island to convoy Rochambeau to the southern theater but it was impossible for Barras' small fleet to force the British Naval blockade around New York.

In consequence of this dramatic situation, Rochambeau was asking de Grasse to help in three critical ways. First, his powerful navy had to come either to the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia or to New York, to insure for the allies the control of the seas. Second, Rochambeau was asking for an army of 5000 men from the West Indies, to give the allies the superiority on the ground which alone could provide a decisive victory against the British. Third, de Grasse was asked to bring a sum of 1,200,000 pounds dearly needed by the army of America whose remaining funds only ran to the end of August. The final

letter of Rochambeau dated June 11, insisted on the importance of de Grasse's expedition due in part to the American's exhaustion and lack of resources. By then, Rochambeau estimated Washington's troops to be less than 6,000 men.

Washington's letter emphasized the importance of de Grasse's mission in securing the seas in order to insure the convergence of all allied armies that would be required to inflict a final defeat to the British. Washington promised to stay in touch with the French fleet and keep it informed of the latest developments.

Meanwhile the letter from Versailles pressed de Grasse to insure the safe return of the merchant convoy (the French government by then was close to bankruptcy) and in accordance to the French-Spanish treaty, to help the Spanish seize Jamaica. De Grasse also received confirmation from France that no more French troops would be sent to America, but only a financial aid of 6 million francs. A secret addition stated that in case the American forces were destroyed, de Grasse was to assist the army of Rochambeau in withdrawing to the West Indies.

Thus, by May-June 1781 the situation in America seemed at a standstill and the capture of Pensacola by the joint Franco-Spanish troops on the minor theater of West Florida did little to sheer the global mood. Therefore the ambitions of the French government were by then rather conservative to say the least. In spite of this conservative stance, de Grasse remembered the King and Secretary of State's express demand for a decisive victory as they put him in charge of the fleet. Therefore de Grasse decided swiftly that the merchants and Jamaica could wait. He would go to America first. He realized that his initiative could get him a promotion in case of a victory or a court Marshal in case of a defeat. Yet de Grasse was resolved in his decision to sail to America and inflict a final blow to the British army and navy.

## **12- Drawing the plan of a massive assault against British forces in America**

De Grasse knew that in order for the battle in preparation to be decisive, the British army had not only to be defeated but also to be at best destroyed or at least captured. Only then could the balance of power shift in America. To do so, the fleet had to move in coordination with all allied troops in order to surround and isolate the British army. Washington was leaning toward an operation on New York. Rochambeau was more inclined toward attacking Cornwallis in Virginia but left it to de Grasse to decide which theater would be more appropriate. De Grasse was immediately more inclined to intervene in the Chesapeake Bay, around the fortress of Yorktown. This fortress was reputedly impregnable but if his fleet could seal the bay long enough for the allies to besiege the town, the victory could be at hand. Furthermore Virginia was closer to the West Indies which would favor his prompt return before the winter. It was true that the coast was unknown to the French admiral but the ships carrying a message from de Barras also included 20 American pilots for the fleet. His decision was made; Yorktown would be the tomb of the British army. De Grasse exposed his plan to St. Domingue governor de Lillancourt, who approved it and pledged troops which together with the contingent that was brought from France would constitute the army of reinforcements that Rochambeau needed. This army would be commanded by the Marquis de Saint-Simon, who had been a Colonel of the Touraine regiment in St. Domingue.

On July 28, de Grasse wrote a letter to Rochambeau informing him of his planned departure from Le Cap on August 3 for the Chesapeake Bay. De Grasse announced that he had gathered an army of 3000

troops and some artillery but stressed the fact that he acted against the will of the King and therefore it was imperative that the army return before the winter. Consequently de Grasse asked Rochambeau to arrange for the allied armies in America to be ready at the time of his arrival. Rochambeau who had made his junction with Washington's troops in Dobbs Ferry, New York on July 6, communicated to Washington on August 14 de Grasse's plan to converge on the Chesapeake. Washington was at first bitter that the French did not support his plan to attack New York. In addition he was upset that the colonies had showed little interest to his request to raise more troops. Having no choice he agreed to the concentration of the Chesapeake. With 2000 troops and with Rochambeau's 5000, he marched south in great secrecy to prepare the military buildup in the Chesapeake Bay. Washington informed Lafayette of the ally plan. The British high command was soon aware of troop movements but it did not suspect de Grasse's move and confident in its control of the seas, it ordered Cornwallis to withdraw to the fortress of Yorktown, which was exactly what de Grasse was hoping for and expected.

### **13- Another French army for America**

#### The Marquis Claude-Anne de Saint Simon

Three Saint-Simons took part in the American War of Independence, all relatives of the famous Duke, the author of the memoirs: the Marquis Claude Anne (1740-1819), the Baron Claude (retired, 1806), and the Count Claude Henri (1760-1825), then a very young officer, the future founder of the Saint-Simonian sect, and first philosophical master of Auguste Comte. The Major General Claude-Anne-Montbleru, Marquis de St.Simon attended the military school at Strasbourg, Alsace before joining the Auvergne regiment. He became colonel of the Touraine regiment, with which he was serving in the West Indies when war broke out.

On January 7, 1781 he wrote a letter<sup>14</sup> to Rochambeau to say how much he would like to go and fight in the General's army on the continent: "I would be delighted to be under your orders, and to give up for that the command in chief I enjoy here." In the same unpublished letter Saint-Simon provided Rochambeau with a most interesting account of Cuba, just visited by him: "This colony has an air of importance far superior to any of ours, inhabited as it is by all the owners of the land, so that the city (Havana) looks rather a European than a colonial one; society is numerous and seems opulent. If Spain would extend and facilitate the trade of Cuba the island would become exceedingly rich in little time. But prohibitory laws are so harsh and penalties so rigorous that they cramp industry everywhere." A postscript in the same letter shows better than anything else what was the common feeling among officers toward Rochambeau: "Montbrun," writes Saint-Simon, "who has been suffering from the fever for a long time, asks me to assure you of his respectful attachment, and says that he has written you twice, that your silence afflicts him very much, and that a token of friendship and remembrance from you would be for him the best of febrifuges. All your former subordinates of Auvergne think the same, and have the same attachment for you, in which respect I yield to none."

The desire of Saint-Simon to come and help had, of course, not been forgotten by Rochambeau, and he counted on his good-will. After having described in his letters the extreme importance of the effort to be attempted, Rochambeau concluded: "The crisis through which America is passing at this moment is of the severest. The coming of Count de Grasse may be salvation."<sup>15</sup>

## The French garrison of St-Domingue<sup>16</sup>

The garrison of St. Domingue was made up of similar colonial troops as in Martinique. These included the regiment of Le Cap and the regiment of Port-au-Prince both raised in 1772. In addition there were two battalions of chasseur-volunteers raised in 1779, made up of free black and mulattoes and commanded by white officers. There were also 4 companies of grenadier-volunteers. Among the battalions sent from the continent, those garrisoned in St.Domingue included initially the following troops:



Saint-Domingue was shared between the French (west) and the Spanish (east)

<u>Regiment</u>	<u>Nb of Battalions</u>	<u>Sent to St. Domingue</u>
Agenais	1	November 1775
Cambrésis	1	November 1775
Gâtinais	1	October 1777
Agenais	1	October 1777

They were reinforced later by additional battalions including the second battalion of Gâtinais and the full regiment of Touraine.

## The army of Saint-Simon

The forces that would be placed under Saint-Simon's command would not include any colonial troops from St. Domingue. Instead it would be comprised of three continental regiments that were garrisoned on the island in 1781. These were Agenais, Gâtinais and Touraine which had each two battalions in St.Domingue. These regiments were reinforced by several detachments from other infantry regiments including the contingent brought by de Grasse (Brissac, Barrois, Béarn and Royal Marine). In addition the army would also carry a little artillery and a small cavalry force (legion of Lauzun and Hussards of St. Simon). In total the army could Count on 3,000 infantry troops, 100 dragons (cavalry), 100 artillery men, 10 gunners along with their siege guns and equipment and 2 mortars. This army would be sent to America but since it was also needed for the conquest of Jamaica that Louis XVI had promised to the King of Spain, it was imperative that the mission be complete before the winter.

## **14- Jean Stiegel assigned to the Touraine Regiment**

The recruits raised at the end of 1780 for the naval army would be used for two main purposes. First, they constituted the core of the naval garrison, "the marines" needed to protect the warships during the time spent on shore and engage light operations on land in the islands. Second, the rest of the men were to reinforce the regiments already garrisoned in the West Indies that were to participate in major invasions such as operations in America, Jamaica or elsewhere in the islands. It was in this context that Jean Stiegel was assigned to the Touraine regiment, which at the time was garrisoned in St.Domingue. His company was that of Captain Despenan. The roll of the Touraine regiment gives us the following information about Stiegel:

### **"Despenan" Company:<sup>17</sup>**

Jean SCHLIGET son of Jean and late Marie Anne EQUEFALTINE, nicknamed "plaideur" (pleader), Born in Kersfeld, Jurisdiction of Binfeld, in the County of Strasbourg, in 1762.

Height: 5 feet 3 inches (old French system)

Description : blond hair and eyebrows, gray eyes, small nose, large mouth, round chin and long face.

Date of enlistment: Beauce Regiment on February 8, 1778.

There is one piece of information that this record lacks, and that is the date when Stiegel joined his new regiment. The roll only includes his date of enlistment in the army. Therefore there is some uncertainty as to when that occurred. The simplest and likeliest possibility is that Stiegel was dispatched to Touraine at the moment of the great gathering of troops that occurred in St. Domingue in anticipation of the landing in America.

In addition to his new regiment and company, Stiegel's record also shows that by then he had fully mastered the French language and was no longer called "The German." The entry shows a further French influence of his name, which now reads "Schliget", a far cry from "Stiegel". This comes from the fact that his previous regiment, Beauce, had spent some time in Alsace and some of his officers were a little familiar with this Germanic region of France. Touraine, on the other hand, had never been garrisoned further east than Metz, and to its clerks, French names, were the great majority of what they knew.

His new nickname of "plaideur" (pleader) seems to confirm as well his mastership of the French language. In French the word pleader does not have the sense of imploring like in English but rather that of negotiating or arguing like a lawyer or a union leader. Therefore it is possible that Stiegel had made himself a reputation for his big mouth (both literally - as per his description - and figuratively!)

It can also be noted that his physical description is the same as the one recorded on the Beauce regiment roll. Yet, as he joined the Touraine regiment Stiegel made himself younger for the second time gaining another two years from his previous claim where already he had made himself three years younger. Now he was officially 19 years old in 1781 when in reality he was 24!

### **15- The Touraine Regiment**

The new Touraine regiment was made of the first and third regiments of the old 4-regiment Touraine after the reform of the 1770s. In January 1776, the regiment leaves the Mediterranean city of Montpellier for Alès. In November of the same year it is sent to Eastern France, to the Lorraine town of Verdun. In October 1777 it is moved to the neighboring city of Metz. As the war with England shifted focus to the West, in April 1778 Touraine is sent to the northern city of Arras that the Beauce regiment had just left. That same year the government calls 30,000 troops for maneuvers in the camp of Vaussieux near Bayeux, Normandy, to test two competing military tactics. Touraine is called to



Chasseur of the  
Touraine  
Regiment -1779

participate in the exercise that lasted several months after which it returned to Arras in October. At the beginning of 1779 the preparation of the invasion of England is under way and Touraine is sent in May to Hennebont, Brittany near Lorient where it stayed until November. When the plan was abandoned, the government decided to use some of the troops gathered on the coast to reinforce the garrisons of the West Indies and Touraine is chosen to be part of the three regiments to go. It sailed from Brest in February 1780, right before Rochambeau left for America. Touraine was first stationed in Martinique and later moved to St-Domingues. In April and May, detachments from the regiment used as marines participated in the three naval combats that Admiral Gichen led against Rodney. Touraine captain Sarrazin was killed during one of the engagements. When in 1781 de Grasse arrived in the Islands Touraine was based in St-Domingue and as the French admiral decided to intervene in America, Touraine was chosen to be part of the invasion force.

At the time, the Touraine regiment was commanded by Henri-François Léonard, Vicomte de Pondeux. Besides St-Simon and de Pondeux, Touraine included in its ranks other officers who would soon become famous. There was first Boniface de Mirabeau, younger brother of Gabriel, the famous orator of the revolution to come in France. Unlike his brother, Boniface was a committed royalist that would become famous ten years later at the French national assembly with his cynical humor. He was nicknamed Mirabeau-Tonneau (Mirabeau-Barrel), because of his fat body and his uncontrolled taste for good wine. Among the officers that commanded Stiegel and the Despenan company, was also major Thibault de Ménonville, lord of Villé and Jambrot. Ménonville would be the officer that would write the last chapter of Stiegel's life. He was the brother of the famous François-Louis Thibault Count of Ménonville, who was part of Rochambeau's staff, and as such was sent in April 1781 to the President of the US congress with a letter from Washington, to negotiate the delivery of supplies for the French army in America. The Count of Ménonville is also the author of the only known manuscript describing the operations of the siege of Yorktown. He would end the war with rank of camp marshal.

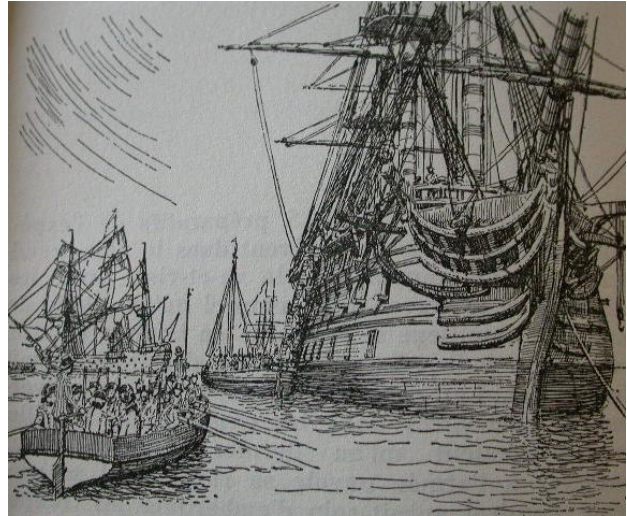
At the beginning of July 1781, Louis-Antoine de Ménonville, the major of the Touraine regiment, was taking advantage of the short respite given to him and married the daughter of a French officer expatriated in Saint-Domingue. The ceremony took place on July 10 (i.e. one week before the arrival of de Grasse in Saint-Domingue) in the church of Saint Jean Baptiste du Trou in Fort Dauphin, not far from Le Cap. In the historical campaign that was about to begin, all these men from the most modest like Stiegel to the most glamorous like St-Simon, would be nothing less to each other but committed brothers in arms.

## **16- Final preparations**

The preparation of the fleet and the expeditionary force in St.Domingue took place in the greatest secrecy, in spite of the constant shuttling between the ships and the shore. Ammunitions, gunpowder and other supplies were hurriedly loaded onboard the ships while on the shore the regiments of the invading army were regrouped and concentrated in the garrisons of the town. They would board the ships at the last moment. It was the third time for Jean Stiegel to live the tense moments of an invasion preparation. First it was the aborted invasion of England in Le Havre, then the boarding of the expeditionary force in Brest and now here, in St.Domingue, yet another expedition, this time to America. Had he ever even heard of this gigantic continent?

To keep the flexibility and speed of his Fleet, de Grasse planned to load the troops on the warships instead of the slow merchant ships. This choice would surely hamper the moves of the crews but it was the price to pay for swift action. As for the merchant convoy it would be left in Le Cap and wait for his return.

It is possible that the warship chosen to transport the Despenan Company of foot soldiers to which Stiegel belonged was the Bourgoigne since this was the ship that transported him on the way back from America. This ship was part of the front division of Bougainville and it was commanded by the Count de Charitte. It was built in 1766, had a crew of 439 and was armed with 74 guns, which size was the most common in the French fleet.



The troops of Saint-Simon board the French warships

On July 23, aboard the *Intrépide*, a clerk involuntarily set a barrel of Rum on fire. The fire grew quickly and since this ship was anchored in the middle of the fleet and was loaded with gunpowder, the threat to the whole expedition was significant. By a miracle the sailors managed to pull the ship toward the exit channel before it exploded and sunk instantly. A rain of fire fell on the other ships and on the shore but the sailors managed to put it out without any further damage. This tragedy claimed 20 men and a Countless number of wounded but the fleet had been saved. The same day, a frigate that was sailing off the shore of St.Domingue also caught fire and sank. Only 77 sailors out of the 300 crew survived by grabbing onto some floating remains of the ship. In spite of this second tragedy, de Grasse refused to see in these events a bad omen and nothing was changed in the plan.

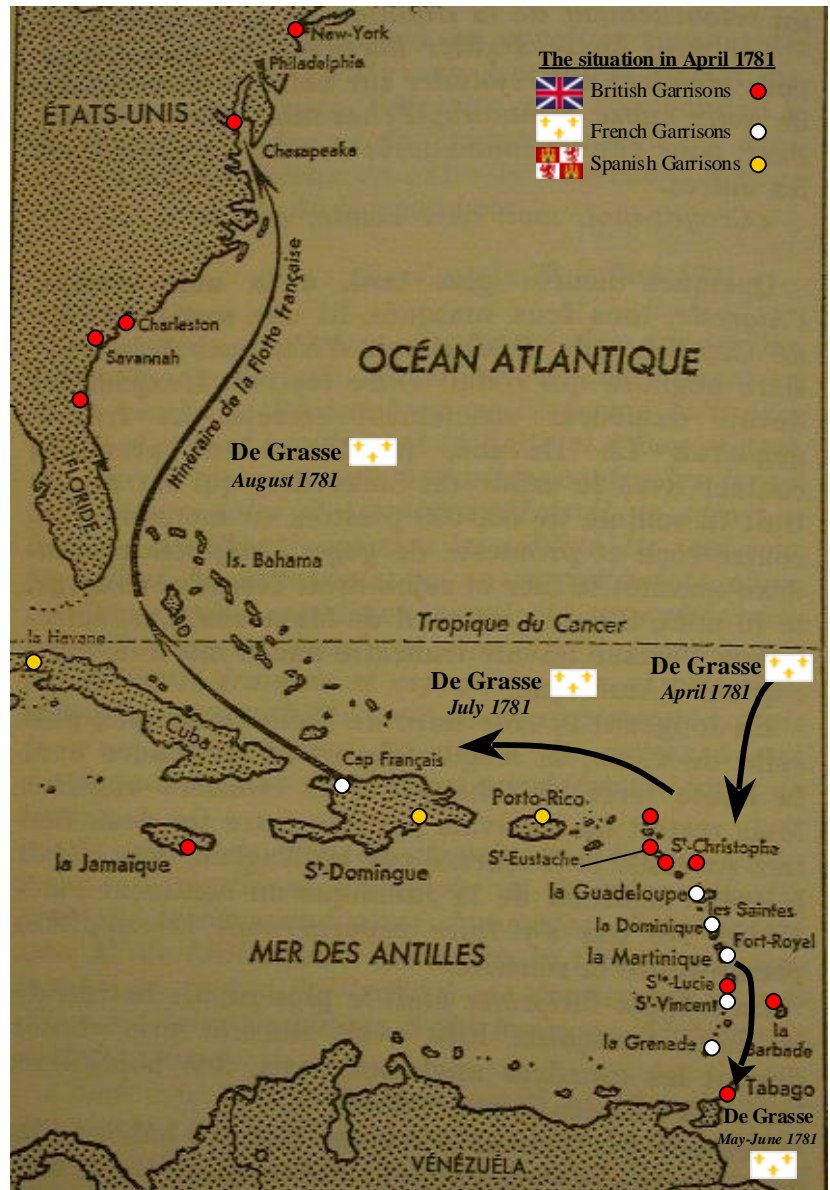
### The Money

By the end of July, 1781, everything seemed to move according to plan and de Grasse had reasons to be satisfied. Yet, if his navy and his army were ready, de Grasse still struggled with the third item on Rochambeau's list, which was the money. The governor of St. Domingue had agreed to supply troops but not the funds as money was short and badly needed by the colony. To influence his decision de Grasse had even offered to pledge his plantations of St.Domingue and his domain of Tilly in France. M. de Charitte, captain of the ship *Bourgoigne* and owner of plantations on the island had done the same but the governor remained adamant.

Since America was lacking the resources to provide the funds, de Grasse had to find a solution. He tried the lenders of St. Domingue but they refused. He was then introduced to a Spanish gentleman that had arrived to Le Cap a few days before and who believed that the money could be raised among the lenders of Cuba. A few days later the negotiations with Havana succeeded and de Grasse sent a frigate to collect the funds.

## 17- Casting off toward the Chesapeake

De Grasse finally left St. Domingue on August 4, with 26 ships of the line, five frigates and the 3,200 men commanded by St. Simon. Instead of sailing straight north, east of the Bahamas de Grasse engaged the fleet in the dangerous straight stretching between Cuba and the Bahamas to confuse the British. On August 7, the ships *Bourgogne* and *Hector* who had just finished repairs caught up with the fleet. On August 17, off the coast of Florida, the fleet was joined by the frigate *Aigrette* who carried the money back from Cuba. De Grasse then sailed on north between Florida and the Bahamas and followed the American coast. On the way, He captured four British ships to prevent the detection of his whereabouts. Meanwhile Admiral Hood alerted by the French movement left the West Indies in haste, convinced that de Grasse was bound for New York. Therefore, He rushed up north and on the way entered the Chesapeake on August 25. Since the Bay was empty, he continued on north toward New York. Five days later, on August 30, the French fleet was in sight of the Chesapeake Bay and cast anchor in total tranquility. An English frigate which thought the fleet was British approached unwarily and was immediately captured. Since the bay was empty, de Grasse ordered the landing of the troops in Jamestown.



De Grasse's 1781 expedition took him from Brest to Martinique, to Tobago, to St. Domingue and to America.

## 18- Saint-Simon joins Lafayette

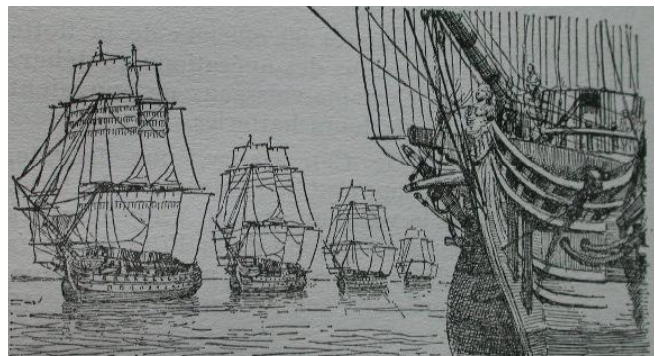
On September 2, the American troops by-passed Philadelphia, leaving their French colleagues to enjoy the triumphant march through the city. In the outskirts of Philly, the US army received about 700 more American recruits, bringing the revolutionary troop size to about 2,000. The next day the French troops of Rochambeau marched through Philadelphia. Washington had written a letter to the Congress about the turn of events and the buildup to come on the Chesapeake. The announcement was met with great joy in Philadelphia. All wanted to believe in the coming victory. A crowd gathered outside the French ambassador's house and screamed "Vive Louis XVI!"

In the meantime, Saint-Simon proceeded with the landing operations. Thus, on a day of fall 1781, Jean Stiegel foot soldier of the King of France along with his commanding officers Captain Despenan, major de Ménonville, the Vicomte de Pondeux and the Marquis de Saint Simon, landed for the first time on the shore of America! By September 4, all of Saint-Simon's troops were on James Island, adjacent to Williamsburg. We can wonder about the first impression that Stiegel had of his first contact with the new world. According to the description of Lieutenant-Colonel Ludwig Eberhard transcribed in Flohr's journal, James Island was "a desert island," where the buildings had been "almost entirely destroyed by the English who left barely the four walls." About Jamestown, Flohr added: "a little village and one of the oldest settlements in America.... It used to be a nice trading town, but it is now completely ruined. But there are signs, still visible, that it once was a sizeable city, about six miles from Williamsburg."

While waiting for Washington and Rochambeau to arrive Saint-Simon joined forces with the army of Lafayette and put himself under his command. In Virginia, Lafayette had been playing cat and mouse with Cornwallis for more than two months. Since the British general had joined Arnold on May 19, he had a force of 5000 men and Lafayette with just a 1000 regulars and 2000 militiamen had been forced to withdraw, attracting Cornwallis inland, far from his bases. By mid-June Cornwallis became concerned of his situation and started to retreat toward Richmond. Lafayette had been reinforced with more militia from Wayne and von Steuben and was now chasing his enemy. Cornwallis was in Williamsburg on June 26 and on July 6 a battle occurred between the two armies, but with no decisive victory. Still, Cornwallis continued his retreat toward Yorktown. On August 31, Cornwallis sent a dispatch to Clinton in New York informing him of the French fleet's arrival. Clinton received it 5 days later. By September 5, Lafayette now had 5000 men (a thousand of which were regulars) increased by the 3000 troops of St.Simon. With his army of 8,000 he occupied on September 7 a position across the neck of the peninsula at Williamsburg, to cut off Cornwallis's retreat until Wahington's arrival. The complete English army of Virginia was trapped.

## 19- Naval operations

On September 5, Washington received a message at Chester, PA, from de Grasse informing him that he was at the Chesapeake with 28 ships of the line and that he had send some frigates up the Bay to transport part of his army. Rochambeau went to Chester by boat and met Washington. The same day, as 1800 sailors of the French fleet were still on shore as part of the landing operation, The British fleet appeared on the horizon and de Grasse cast off at once to avoid being trapped in the Bay. The Bourgoigne of Captain de Charitte, which was part of Bougainville front squadron, was among the first to come out of the Bay.



The French warships line up before the attack.  
Chesapeake Bay – September 5, 1781

The English under Thomas Graves had 19 ships of the line, plus others arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake in the morning. Luckily for the French, Graves took his time and de Grasse managed to

free all his ships before the battle. De Grasse had 24 ships but this superiority was mitigated by 1800 sailors and officers that he had left behind to help in the transport of troops across the Bay. The battle started at 4:45pm and lasted until 6:30pm. The English suffered 90 dead and 246 wounded. The French had 230 killed or wounded. Overall the British ships had suffered more damage than the French and Graves was not in a hurry to fight again. The two fleets stayed in sight for another four days, the British moving away every time the French tried to engage them. On September 9, the English fleet being heavily damaged, Graves gave up the fight permanently and sailed away. De Grasse sailed back to the Chesapeake. He had succeeded in isolating the English army in Yorktown.

Upon his arrival in the Chesapeake on September 11, de Grasse was pleased to see Barras' Fleet, the fleet had arrived from Newport the day before after having successfully escaped Rodney's vigilant blockade. Barras brought to the Chesapeake the French army's siege artillery and equipment. To protect the Chesapeake, de Grasse established a blockade position at the entrance of the Bay. On September 13, Graves came back but did not challenge the French fleet. Cornwallis, could now only Count on himself to escape the siege.



## 20- Convergence of allied forces

On September 13, the French cavalry arrived in Williamsburg. The next day leaving their armies behind, Washington and Rochambeau reached Williamsburg. At four o'clock in the afternoon on September 14, the guns fired a royal salute as the generals approached. The two generals learned of De Grasse's success, and that the British naval force had withdrawn, leaving Cornwallis without immediate support. Then, accompanied by Lafayette the commander of the American forces and the Marquis de Saint-Simon commanding the French, Washington and Rochambeau reviewed the two armies drawn up in battalion parade. It is likely that Jean Stiegel with his comrades of the Despenan Company saw that day the glorious generals passing by as they inspected the troops. US General Butler describes in his journal the gathering of allied officers that followed:

“The French officers then gathered at Saint-Simon's headquarters and were presented to the American commander-in-chief. An elegant supper was served, attended by all the principal officers; American colonels and French marquis mingled together in good fellowship; the French band played selections

from French operas, and at the seemly hour of ten the feast was ended.”<sup>18</sup> Lafayette's dream was at last realized, and he saw the united armies of France and America joined in a common enterprise under the command of Washington. On September 17, the French army that had marched overland arrived at Annapolis and met the American forces who had embarked at Head of Elk and had arrived there 4 days earlier. On September 18, in Annapolis the American and French troops boarded the frigates sent from the squadrons of de Grasse and Barras which would take them to the Williamsburg area. They only left behind the French wagon train, the field artillery horses, and the hussars who continued to march overland. Berthier's papers describes the train as consisting of "1,500 horses, 800 oxen and 220 wagons."

On September 17, Washington and Rochambeau met with an ailing De Grasse aboard his flagship, the *Ville de Paris*. De Grasse never left his ship while in American waters due to illness. On September 22, Cornwallis attempted to force the French naval blockade by releasing small boats on fire that the French ship managed to avoid. Two days later the French and American troops from Annapolis started to disembark in the Williamsburg area. By September 26, the complete allied forces had landed and were concentrated around Williamsburg. The forces amounted to about 16,000 men, which included about 5,000 American regulars, another 4,000 of militia and about 7,000 French soldiers. Cornwallis only had a force of 7,000 but he could Count also on several thousands American loyalists. The next day Washington issued his orders for the advance on Yorktown.

## 21- The Battle of Yorktown

### The allies take position around the British defenses

On September 28, the allies converged toward Yorktown, west of the Bay. The first line of defense was made of light infantry that was forced back by Laval's chasseurs and Baron de Viomenil's division. The following day, the allies positioned themselves into a crescent-shaped line with the American forces moving to the south of the city, while the French directed their forces west and north of the fortress. Since his arrival in Yorktown, Cornwallis had his men and slaves build defenses around the town which included 10 redoubts some of them pointed toward the river, others facing inland. Redoubts 1 to 8 were placed directly around the town perimeter while redoubt 9 and 10 were further out to the south. There was also a horn work to cover the Hampton Road into Yorktown. Finally to the northeast there was a large star-shaped redoubt (later called the Fusilier redoubt) to cover the river road. It would be in front of this redoubt that the Touraine regiment would be entrenched.

On September 30, the allies found some of the outer defenses abandoned and the enemy entrenched behind Yorktown's defenses. The allies seized the works. Lafayette's division took the Hampton Road redoubt while St.Simon's volunteers drove pickets away from the fusilier redoubt losing one dead and three wounded. The allies then began their own work around the town manufacturing 6,000 stakes within a week. Morale was high and desertions among Americans stopped completely when Washington promised summary execution to anyone captured in Yorktown.

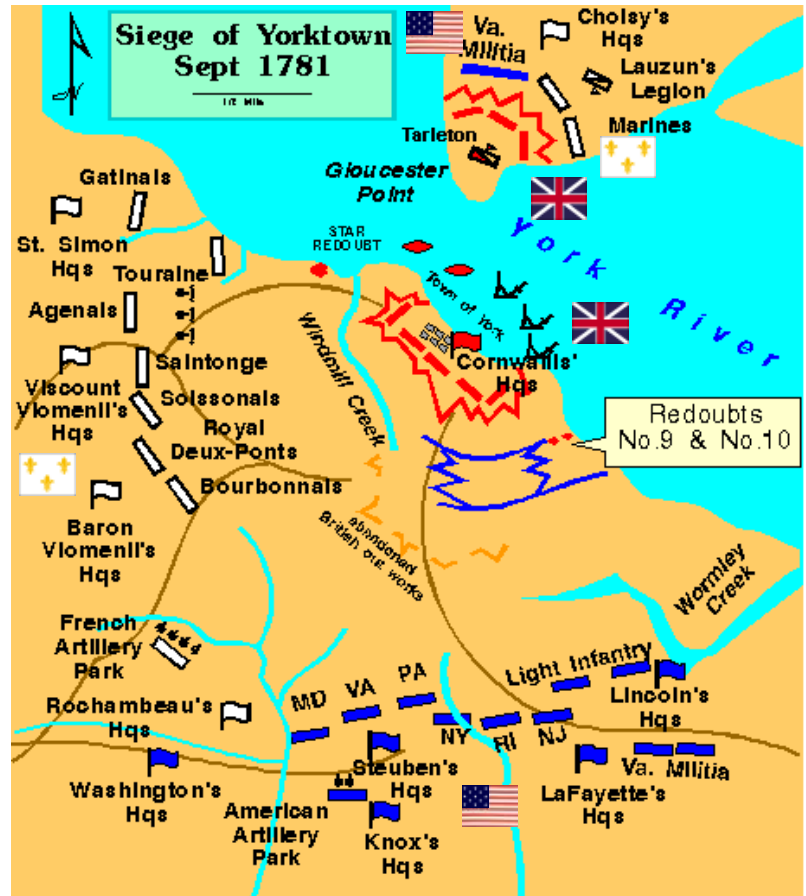


Siege of Yorktown. Engraving by O.M. Fontaine from painting by Conder

Across the river, in Gloucester, Weedon's battalion of Virginia militia was reinforced by Lauzun's legion (cavalry and infantry), and 800 marines from de Grasse's fleet. On October 3, Lauzun attacked Tarleton on his way back from a foraging expedition. Tarleton managed to escape but Lauzun kept the field and now both sides of the river were sealed by the allies.

### Digging in

During the night of October 6, the allies began digging the first parallel which would stretch 2,000 yards from the center of the allied concentration northward to the river, some 600-800 yards from the main British line. At dusk, 4,300 allied troops marched to their designated areas. The French led by Baron de Viomenil were on the north of Hampton Road, the Americans led by Benjamin Lincoln to the South. The regiment of Touraine was detached for special duty to construct a battery of four 12-pounders and six mortars and howitzers 450 yards in front of the British star redoubt (or British Royal Welsh Fusiliers Redoubt) on the extreme left flank of the French army. This field fortification known as 'The French Trench' is now the location of the principal French Memorial at Yorktown. In his journal Ménonville describes it in the following terms:<sup>19</sup>



The French and American troops besiege Yorktown. Touraine is fighting on the northern end of the front by the river.

“At the same time [of the digging of the main trench] there was opened on our left, which joins the upper end of the river, a trench defended by a battalion of the regiment of Touraine, its grenadiers and chasseurs, and a battery was commenced, the purpose of which is to reach the enemy’s ships in the upper part of the river.”

Along the whole parallel as 1,500 men dug, the others fired against British sorties. In the French Trench, Saint-Simon decided to launch a diversion attack against the fusilier redoubt in order to cover the work on the battery. Unfortunately, a deserter alerted the British of a planned assault by the Touraine regiment and the French position was intensely shelled. Yet, Cornwallis did not even know that the main siege operation had begun until after daylight on October 7. By dawn, the parallel was deep enough to protect those digging during daylight. The night had cost the allies 20 killed and wounded, 16 of which in Saint-Simon's 'French Trench'. Yet Ménonville only mentions a few wounded:

“Their shot fired at hazard had no other result than a slight contusion to an officer of Royal Deux Ponts, and one a little more severe to a soldier of his regiment, both of whom were with the workmen. At the Touraine work an officer of artillery was dangerously wounded and six grenadiers, two slightly and a soldier of the regiment of Agénois.”

Jean Stiegel was most probably among those men of 'Touraine' which spent their night digging and attacking the British redoubt under heavy shelling. For the first time of his military career he was in direct contact with the destruction of war.

On October 7, Lafayette's division had the honor of entering the trenches first. By October 9, four redoubts and five batteries had been added, with surprisingly few casualties although fever was widespread, especially among the French. The allies could not understand Cornwallis' passivity but in fact he was unprepared for such a siege and his own sick list already exceeded 1,000.

### The Last Act

At 3:00pm on October 9, the battery of the Touraine position opened fire on the Fusilier Redoubt forcing the Ship Guadeloupe across the river to Gloucester.<sup>20</sup> According to Ménonville this operation resulted in one dead and one wounded.

The first American guns began firing from the battery by the river two hours later. The following day the 'Grand French Battery' on the left of the parallel and the second American battery opened fire. On the night of October 10, British ship Charon and two transports were shelled and sunk by the guns of the Touraine work. By morning 52 allied guns were firing and Cornwallis wrote to Clinton that British casualties amounted 70. Of this intense shelling Flohr writes . "We could see from our redoubt the people flying into the air with outstretched arms," Flohr wrote. "There was a misery and lamenting that was horrible...The houses stood there like lanterns shot through by cannon balls."

On the night of October 11, von Steuben and Baron de Viomenil's divisions started the second parallel to the south just 350 yards from Yorktown.

Ménonville: “To cover the work and conceal it from the enemy, our mortar and howitzer batteries, and that of the Americans, kept up a fire all night and our gun batteries maintained a moderate fire. The



Troops from French regiments Gatinais and Deux Ponts storm redoubt 9.

enemy fired bombs and some cannon shot, but did not interrupt our work, which was finished properly by daybreak, as was also that of the Americans.”

Two days later the trench was almost complete being separated from the river only by British redoubts 9 and 10. Clearly these had to be incorporated and the task of capturing them went to the elite of each army: Lafayette's light infantry and the flank companies of Baron Viomenil regiments. The assault would take place on the night of October 14. The French attack on Redoubt 9 (the larger work which held 120 British and Hessians) involved 400 men from the Deux Ponts and Gatinais Regiments. They stormed the position and after just 30 minutes the British surrendered. The French lost 15 and had 77 wounded while the British lost 18 and had 50 captured, the rest escaped. Ménonville describes the operation in the following fashion:

“The baron de Vioménil, Maréchal de Camp of the French, leading the whole command, debouched with the troops, who moved upon the redoubt in the most thorough order and in perfect silence. The enemy early perceived the column and opened upon it a very sharp musketry fire; the abattis were found to be in much better condition than it was hoped to find it, after the bombardment of this redoubt with a great amount of artillery for several days; notwithstanding the heavy fire of the enemy the pioneers of the regiment opened passages, through which the grenadiers of Gattinois and Deux Ponts entered the ditch, and together with them the same pioneers, who were obliged to cut, besides, some of the palisades in order to open the frieze of the redoubt. The same grenadiers took advantage of these openings to mount the parapet where they formed, which soon compelled such of the enemy as remained to surrender. We took 40 officers and 3 soldiers prisoners and counted 18 dead. The remainder to the number of 170, escaped by flight. Our loss in the attack in men and officers was about 80 killed and wounded.”

For Flohr who participated in the assault "things went very unmercifully that night...One screamed here, the other there, that for the grace of God we should kill him off completely. The whole redoubt was so full of dead and wounded that one had to walk on top of them."

100 yards away 400 American Light Infantrymen moved on Redoubt 10 defended by 70 British troops. Within 10 minutes the redoubt was captured with a loss of 9 dead and 31 wounded. Soon afterwards the two redoubts were incorporated in the ally work. Ménonville adds: “At nightfall the attention of the enemy was drawn to the head of the river also by a feint, which was executed without loss by the regiment of Touraine.



Capture of Yorktown – October 1781  
Lithograph by Turgis.

On October 16, Cornwallis attempted a sortie but he was driven off by some French infantry. As ally batteries resumed their deadly work, Cornwallis attempted one last escape plan. He was prepared to abandon Yorktown by crossing the river with his army over 16 boats sent from Gloucester by Tarleton. 1,000 men managed to cross but a storm erupted and Corwallis had to suspend the attempt. Reluctantly he was forced to call his troops back. At dawn, the French and Americans had resumed the shelling with over 100 guns firing into the town. At 10am Corwallis asked for a truce to discuss his

surrender. Washington gave Cornwallis two hours to accept his terms of surrender. Cornwallis was trying to gain some time and Washington gave order to resume firing. On October 18, at 3pm, the British asked for a second truce and accepted all of Washington's terms. On October 19, at noon, the capitulation documents were signed by Cornwallis, Washington, Rochambeau and Barras (on behalf of de Grasse).

The British came out of their positions at 2:00pm on October 19, 1781, marching between two endless columns made of the French troops on their right and the Americans on their left. As a mark of contempt for the insurgents, the British only acknowledged the colors of the French regiments. Cornwallis who claimed to be ill was not among them and General O'Hara was leading the surrendering troops. He presented Cornwallis' sword to Rochambeau who declined and pointed Washington who in turn indicated his second in command Benjamin Lincoln. The march of the British column led onto a field surrounded by French hussars. There, they dropped their weapons. Many were crying. One English colonel allegedly broke his sword in two before throwing it on the field and walking away with his face in his hands. At the same time, in Gloucester across the river, the troops of Tarleton surrendered to the Duke de Choisy.

The campaign of Yorktown had come to an end and the allies could finally see the damage that the shelling had caused inside the fortress. Flohr describes the scene in the following terms: "The whole ground was so turned up and full of holes...that one could barely walk. Wherever you looked corpses were lying about that had not yet been buried, the majority of which were blacks. The camp of the [English] army in and about the city resembled a veritable scene of destruction."



Surrender of Cornwallis. Painting by John Trumbull.

Cornwallis left behind 24 flags, 214 guns, 8 mortars, more than 7000 weapons and ammunitions, 457 horses, a few small ships and \$11,000 in cash. The English had lost 156, 326 were wounded and 70 were missing. The allies lost 88 (60 French and 28 Americans) and 300 were wounded (193 French and 107 Americans). In fact, these casualties of war were minor in comparison to the damage inflicted by diseases and fever. At the time of the Surrender, the allied armies already had 1400 men sick (most of them French) and as much among the crews of the Fleet. De Grasse himself was badly hit by crises of yellow fever and he never left his admiral ship during his sojourn on the American shore. In the end, many hundreds French soldiers and sailors died during the Yorktown campaign (The French memorial in Yorktown includes 638 names). Following are the names of 39 soldiers of the Touraine regiment who died during this operation and who are inscribed on the French memorial in Yorktown:

ASSELIN Claude - BARCY - BIDOT Jean - BOISSEAU Pierre - COLAR André - COSTAIL Sidet - COSTE Vidal - COURBET Antoine - DAUCAN Guillaume - DEVAISE Joseph - DIDIERRE Nicolas - DREUILHET Dominique - EDMON Maurice - ELIE Claude - FABRE Paul - FROMENT Pierre - HERMAIN Jean - JAMAIS Sebastian - LAMBERT Blaise - LAURENT Daniel - LE BRUN Edme - LE ROUX Jean - LEFEVRE Joseph - LERSNE Augustin - LORMIER Augustin - MAGNAN François - MASSAL Jean - MION Pierre - MIOT Pierre - MONART Nicolas - MONGIN

Jean - MOUGAL Nicolas - MOULINS Antoine - NEUVEAU Edme - PARIEL Leonard - PINET  
Jean - PRADHOUT Jean - SAVOIX Martiel - VIVANSON Bernard

## 22- Back to the West Indies

The surrender of Yorktown was not the end of de Grasse's worries. He was still anchored at the entrance of the Chesapeake Bay and he expected any day the arrival of the regrouped British fleet. General Washington was fully aware of the importance of the French fleet in the surrender of Yorktown and tried everything he could to keep de Grasse on the American shore. De Grasse declined the offer. He had to sail back to the West Indies where Louis XVI expected him to help the Spanish seize Jamaica from the British. De Grasse told Washington that he would stay only for the time necessary for Washington to secure his army and ward off the British fleet in the event of its arrival.

On October 28, the very day that the Congress of the United States addressed an official message of Gratitude to the French admiral, the British fleet of Graves carrying 7,000 troops arrived at the entrance of the Chesapeake. By then de Grasse still had a lot of men on shore and hastily rushed the boarding of sailors and soldiers. While the army of Rochambeau was to stay in Virginia with Washington, the army of Saint-Simon boarded the warships of de Grasse since this army was to participate in the planned operations in the West Indies. Jean Stiegel, foot soldier in the company of Captain Despenan along with the Touraine regiment was leaving America for good. Their task had been completed. Jean Stiegel was assigned to the warship Bourgogne commanded by Sir de Charitte, whom we have already mentioned. It is likely that as he boarded the ship and said goodbye to the New World, Stiegel was already badly weakened by one of the diseases that had claimed so many casualties.

To de Grasse's surprise Graves did not attack. The field had already been lost and by then the British admiral could hope for little more than inflicting a symbolic defeat on the French fleet. De Grasse accelerated the boarding of his troops, warning the crews to be ready for battle. Yet, on October 30, Graves weighed anchor and sailed back north in the direction of New York. Graves was leaving the stage for good. On November 4, 1781, as the boarding was finally complete, de Grasse finally left the American shore with his 28 ships of the line and the 7 ships of admiral Barras. Not long after he had left, a rider arrived on the empty shore; in his bag was the last message of General Washington. In this letter Washington thanked the French Admiral for his brilliant victory in the high seas surrounding the Chesapeake and hoped for his near return to America to achieve the ally final victory.

On November 13, 1781, the fleet was about half way to Martinique, their destination (a few ships left the convoy to sail back to St.Domingue to escort merchant ships back to France), when suddenly the wind rose and turned into a frightening storm. That night at around 8pm the fleet found itself in the middle of a cyclone. Jean-Jacques Antier, author of a biography on Admiral de Grasse provides a lively account of these moments:<sup>21</sup>

“Under thunderous storms of water pouring down on them, the exhausted sailors who operated in 30 minutes shifts tried to keep the ships afloat. The masts threatened to fall at any moment and the hulls were under incredible pressure. The ships were scattered on the ocean and the visibility was nil. To keep the cohesion of the fleet the admiral ordered to fire the guns but no one could hear them in this storm. Still, the sailors fought against the wind and the falling water to keep the ships from sinking. Those manning the masts, 50 to 100 feet above the deck, tied themselves to the ship. In the incredible rolling of the waves, they could see the large open chasm of the ocean ready to swallow them in one

gulp. Each new wave which crashed on the decks threatened to dismember the ships, as it sipped through the joints into the hulls. Inside the ship, the spectacle was one of despicable desolation. In almost complete darkness, as an appalling smell drifted in the overcrowded compartments, some men held on anything they could, others were tossed about the floor along with the garbage scattered all around by the storm, and were ricocheted back and forth between the batteries. The soldiers especially were harshly shaken and greatly weakened by the seasickness that would not end. Many thought that their last hour had arrived. Yet on November 14, the weather cleared and the storm moved away in the direction of the north.”

The fleet had lost no ship but the frigate Richmond which had been struck by the lightning had lost two men and three were wounded. Aboard the Bourgoigne, Stiegel had survived this incredible storm, probably the first of that magnitude he had ever experienced while at sea. Yet, it is likely that this storm left him in a very exhausted state. He had probably suffered from fever for a while and he survived only for another ten days. On November 24, 1781, just one day before the fleet reached the port of Fort de France in Martinique, Jean Stiegel, foot soldier of the King, native of the small Alsatian town of Kertzfeld passed away aboard the warship La Bourgoigne under the command of Sir de Charitte. He had given his life for the King, for France and for the Freedom of America.

## EPILOGUE

In the West Indies, the fighting continued for some time and the Touraine regiment was at the heart of it. In early 1782, the regiment was back in Le Cap, St. Domingue, where it was stationed. It was there that on June 1, 1782, Major de Ménonville, officer of the Touraine regiment and himself a veteran of the Yorktown campaign wrote a copy of Jean Stiegel's death certificate that would be sent back to Stiegel's home town of Kertzfeld. Following is the translation of the certificate:

### "Death Certificate

Administrative region of Strasbourg, Jurisdiction of Benfeld.

Touraine Regiment

Abstract from the roll of the Despenan company. Jean Stiegel, son of Jean and late Marie Anne Eckenfelder, born in Kertzfeld, jurisdiction of Benfeld, administrative region of Strasbourg in 1762, height of 5 feet 3 inches 3 lines (old French system), blond hair and eyebrows, gray eyes, small nose, large mouth, round chin, long face, died aboard the ship La Bourgoigne, on 24 November 1781.

Certified authentic and identical to the original by me, Major of the above regiment who signed the present document and had the seal of the regiment stamped hereon.

Produced in Le Cap, on 1 June 1782.

Ménonville."

The roll of the company of Captain Despenan of the Touraine Regiment which is kept in the military archives in Paris confirms indeed that Jean Stiegel "died aboard his majesty's ship 'La Bourgoigne' on November 24, 1781."

In November 1782, 5 months after it was written by Ménonville, and one year after Stiegel had passed away, the death certificate arrived in the small parish of Kertzfeld. Abbot Matton, who eight years

before had buried Jean's mother Anne Marie Eckenfelder, now had to announce to the old shepherd the loss of his younger son. Unfortunately there would be no corpse to bury in the family grave. The body of Jean Stiegel probably ended at the bottom of the Caribbean sea or perhaps in the dirt of Martinique. On November 13, 1782, Matton copied Stiegel's military death certificate in French in the Kertzfeld parish book along with the following comment in Latin:

"Hodie decimâ tertiâ die novembris [1782] per litteras mihi induatum fuit mortuum fui(e Joannem Stigel filium Joannis Stigel pastoris pecorum hujus loci et defuncta Anna Maria Eckenfelder coniugum olim in hoc loco commorantium, littera hujus tenoris sunt"

In hujus fidem propria manu subscripsi

Matton parochus"<sup>22</sup>

Translation:

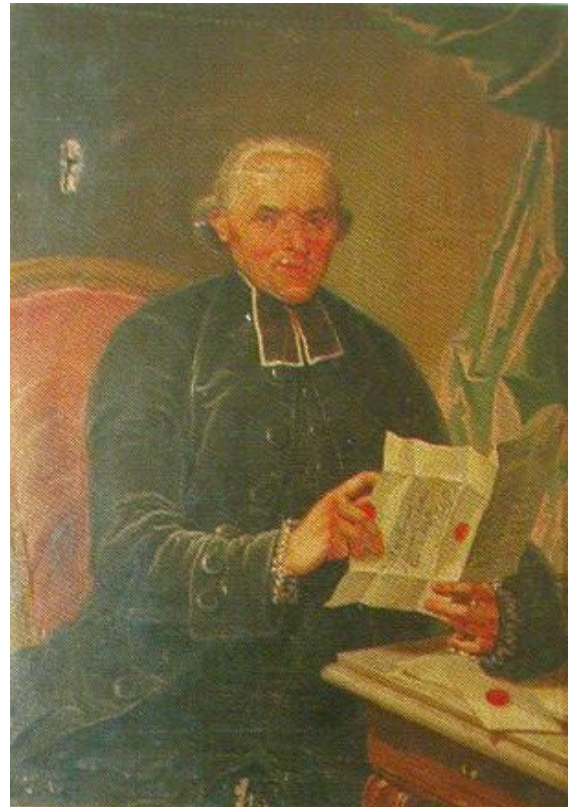
"Today 13 November 1782, according to the letter that was sent to me, informing me of the death of Jean Stiegel, son of Jean Stiegel, shepherd in this town and deceased Anna Maria Eckenfelder, his wife buried in this place, the content of which letter is the following:

[military certificate in French]

Reproduced by hand in good faith.

Abbot Matton"

Thus ended in complete anonymity the life of Jean Stiegel, soldier of the King who had contributed to the Franco-American victory of Yorktown.

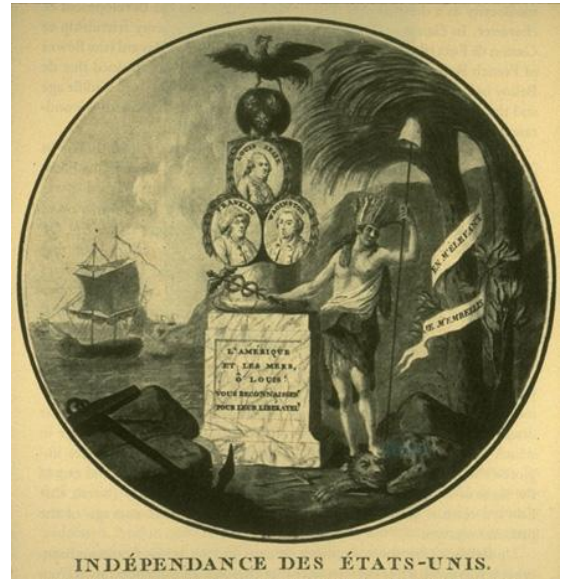


1779 Painting from F.J Stoeber and believed to represent Abbot Matton. It is exposed in Kertzfeld's rectory.

Beyond the military achievement of this campaign, Yorktown was to symbolize far more. It was the last battle on American soil, since after this crushing defeat the British had lost the will to fight for America. The peace between England and the allies was finally sealed by the treaty of Paris in 1783. In addition, Yorktown confirmed on the ground and in the blood, the alliance between France and America that had been drafted on paper two years before. In spite of France's heavy contribution of men, ships, weapons, supplies and money to the war for American independence, it got little for itself from the piece treaty except perhaps America's gratitude.

Seven days before the Yorktown capitulation Washington wrote to congress: "I cannot but acknowledge the infinite obligations I am under to his Excellency, the Count de Rochambeau, the Marquis de Saint-Simon, commanding the troops from the West Indies, the other general officers, and indeed the officers of every denomination in the French army, for the assistance which they afford me. The experience of many of those gentlemen in the business before us is of the utmost advantage in the present operation.... The greatest harmony prevails between the two armies. They seem actuated by one spirit, that of supporting the honor of the allied armies."

This acknowledgment of the French effort by the most respected of the American generals was followed by many other testimonies of gratitude from American officials to the French officers who had made Yorktown's surrender possible. The Congress sent to de Grasse four guns taken in Yorktown with a message of gratitude inscribed on them in French. Yet, not all of the Yorktown participants were honored with such gratitude. The large mass of the foot soldiers and sailors were barely mentioned by officials as if only the officers' deeds were worthy of acknowledgment even though so many of the "racaille" died without even a decent grave to bury their bones. In 1783, Washington created the Cincinnati, Order of the Sons of the American Revolution comprised of the eldest heirs of the officers who had fought in the American Revolution. This order would have a French chapter as well. To Washington's wish only the heirs of officers would be admitted in this close circle, therefore proving that to Washington too, the "racaille", the anonymous mass of foot soldiers were of little importance and definitely not worthy of posterity's acknowledgment.



“The Independence of America –ca1782. The inscription on the pedestal reads “America and the Seas acknowledge you, O Louis, as their Liberator.” From *Portrait des Grands hommes Illustres*.

Through Jean Stiegel, this account is dedicated to the mass of anonymous American and French soldiers who fought and gave their lives for a Country they loved and for a glory that did not survive them an instant. May they rest in peace.

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Special thanks to Christian Broutin from the Entraide Généalogique for his critical help in researching the Beauce and Touraine regiment records at the Military Archives in Paris.

<sup>1</sup> The roll of the Beauce Regiments is kept in the Military Archives (S.H.A.T) in Vincennes, near Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Words in italic are misspelled in the original record.

<sup>3</sup> - Bernhard H. Kroener " L'État moderne et la société militaire au XVIIIe siècle "

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<sup>4</sup> Lafayette to Vergennes, June 10, 1779; Doniol, iv, 291.

<sup>5</sup> “Isle Of Wight Shipwrecks: 'Royal George'” Research paper posted on the BBC website

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<sup>7</sup> “The French Army in the American War of Independence” René Chatrand, Osprey Publishing

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- <sup>8</sup> Jean Jules Jusserand (1855–1932). “With Americans of Past and Present Days.” 1916. “I. Rochambeau and the French in America - From Unpublished Documents”
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- <sup>18</sup> Butler’s Journal; Historical Magazine, March, 1864,106.
- <sup>19</sup> “Journal of the siege of York” by M. de Ménonville, Aide Major Général. Translated for The Magazine of American History.
- <sup>20</sup> ibid
- <sup>21</sup> Jean-Jacques Antier " L'amiral de Grasse, vainqueur de la Chesapeake " translated by Bertrand Jost
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