

# FRANCE

*in the* AMERICAN REVOLUTION



An Exhibition by  
The Society of the Cincinnati

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Anderson House  
Washington, D.C.

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This catalog has been produced in conjunction with the exhibition *France in the American Revolution* on display from October 19, 2011, to April 13, 2012, at Anderson House, the headquarters, library, and museum of the Society of the Cincinnati in Washington, D.C. The exhibition is the fourteenth and last in a series focusing on the contributions to the American Revolution made by the original thirteen states and France.

Also available:

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*New Hampshire in the American Revolution* (2010)

Text by Emily L. Schulz.

Cover illustration: Detail of *Landung einer Französischen Hülf-Armee in America, zu Rhode Island. am 11ten Julius 1780, [1783]*.

See pages 20-21.

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“NEVER BEFORE  
HAD SUCH A GLORIOUS  
CAUSE ATTRACTED  
THE ATTENTION  
OF MANKIND;  
IT WAS THE  
FINAL STRUGGLE  
OF LIBERTY.”

– Marie-Joseph Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette,  
in his “Memoir of 1779”



Detail of *Carte Militaire des Troupes de France, sur Pied, pour l'Année 1775.*

## INTRODUCTION

Two hundred and thirty years after the British army surrendered to joint French-American forces at Yorktown, the Society of the Cincinnati honors America's French allies with this exhibition. The alliance forged between France and the United States early in the war—and formalized in a treaty in 1778—was one of the defining events of the eighteenth century. French shipments of arms and equipment sustained the Continental Army. French officers provided expertise in engineering, artillery, and fortification. And the French navy was critical to the Yorktown campaign in 1781, which delivered the final blow to Great Britain's hold on the American colonies.

France came to America's aid in an effort to redress the balance of power with Britain and recover the prestige it had lost in the Seven Years' War. The tens of thousands of French soldiers and sailors who served in the American theater had more personal reasons. Some volunteered to gain experience and glory as professional soldiers. Others were motivated by duty to their king. And a small group of Frenchmen, most famously the marquis de Lafayette, were inspired by the Americans' fight for liberty.

France lost more than three thousand men on American battlefields and many more in the war at sea. The effort nearly bankrupted the French treasury. The French commitment to the achievement of American independence has bound the two nations together for more than two centuries. It also helped forge the identity of the Society of the Cincinnati, which, from its founding in 1783, has included a French branch in recognition of those foreign officers who fought for the American cause.



## THE AFTERMATH OF THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

France had been competing with Great Britain—and, to a lesser extent, Spain—for land, population, and profit in North America since the sixteenth century. These tensions erupted into the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), a worldwide conflict between European powers known in the American colonies as the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Strategic miscalculations and the extraordinary success of the British navy resulted in France's defeat. The terms of the Treaty of Paris that ended the war in 1763 forced France to relinquish most of its North American colonies.

Two cousins had a large role in guiding France through the Seven Years' War: Etienne-François, comte de Stainville, duc de Choiseul, who served as naval minister from 1761 to 1766, and César Gabriel, comte de Choiseul, duc de Praslin, who served as minister of foreign affairs during the same time. Near the end of the conflict, they directed preliminary peace negotiations with Great Britain and signed an armistice and provisional peace treaty for France at the royal palace at Fontainebleau in November 1762. In the aftermath of the French defeat, they resolved to rebuild the French military for a war of revenge, which the duc de Choiseul predicted would be sparked by unrest in Britain's American colonies.

*Carte nouvelle des possessions Angloises en Amérique.*

Paris: Chez le Sr. Moithey, ... Et chez Crepy, 1777.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection (see pages 4-5)

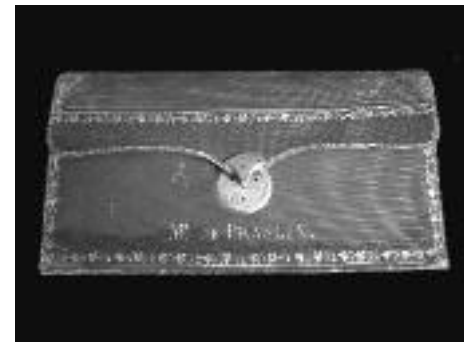
French exploration of the New World began in the early sixteenth century. Two hundred years later, on the eve of the Seven Years' War, France had built a colonial empire that stretched from Canada, through Louisiana, to the Lesser Antilles. The inset chart in the lower right of this map, titled "Carte de l'océan occidental," shows French trade routes across the Atlantic from ports in western Europe—including Brest, Rochefort, Havre, and Nantes—that brought people and goods to North America and the Caribbean.

This map was issued by Maurille Antoine Moithey (1723-ca. 1810), cartographer to the king, based on an earlier English version by Thomas Jeffrys. Published in April 1777, this map predated official French involvement in the Revolutionary War by ten months.

*Etienne-François de Choiseul, duc de Choiseul-Amboise*  
engraved by Etienne Fessard (1714-1777) after Louis-Michel Van Loo (1707-1771). Paris, 1790.

Collection of Raynald, duc de Choiseul Praslin, Société des Cincinnati de France

The duc de Choiseul deserves much of the credit for reforming the French military—particularly the French navy—in the mid-1760s. He dramatically increased the number of French ships, improved shipyards and materials for maintaining the fleet, and issued new naval regulations. These comprehensive reforms even extended to the military's organization, training, uniforms, and weapons.



Portfolio owned by César Gabriel, comte de Choiseul, duc de Praslin. Made in Paris, ca. 1760s.

Collection of Raynald, duc de Choiseul Praslin, Société des Cincinnati de France

In eighteenth-century Europe, ministers of state were said to hold the portfolio of their government department. In the era of the American Revolution, this was often literally the case. This portfolio, with intricate combination locks, was owned by César Gabriel, comte de Choiseul, duc de Praslin (1712-1785), French minister of foreign affairs during the Seven Years' War. The duc de Praslin began his career as ambassador to Austria in 1759 and finished it as minister of naval affairs (1766-1770), after which he and his cousin fell out of royal favor.





## FRENCH VOLUNTEERS

On the eve of the Revolutionary War, the French military had grown to 170,000 infantry troops, 46,000 cavalry, and 52 ships of the line stationed in France and its colonies around the world. At the outbreak of hostilities in America in 1775, France focused on protecting its valuable sugar islands, sending five battalions to reinforce French colonial troops in the West Indies. The French government was hesitant to support the American rebellion in an official capacity, but in April 1776 resolved to send the Continental Army unofficial aid. The steady stream of weapons, uniforms, and other supplies that made their way across the Atlantic over the next two years provided as much as ninety percent of American munitions. French foreign minister Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes coordinated the secret campaign with an unusual ally, the French dramatist Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, whose involvement deflected suspicion from the French government.

Professional French army officers, some with considerable fortunes, also began taking an interest in the American war. Whether seeking experience in battle, prestigious commands, personal glory, or to defend the cause of liberty, French noblemen offered their services to the American army. At least one hundred French officers were granted commissions by the Continental Congress and served under George Washington in the Continental Army. These men included the marquis de Lafayette, Pierre L'Enfant, Johann de Kalb (a German-born officer in the French army), the marquis de La Rouërie, and Louis LeBègue de Presle Duportail. Most were solicited by Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin, American commissioners who arrived in Paris in 1776, charged in part with recruiting "a few good Engineers in the Service of the United States."<sup>1</sup> The French volunteers contributed significant expertise in artillery, fortification, and other military sciences, but initially caused friction with American officers suspicious of their foreign language and culture and resentful of their high ranks.

Nevertheless, scores of French officers proved invaluable to the Continental Army and dedicated themselves to American independence. French engineers worked to strengthen the fortifications defending Philadelphia. Other officers fought with great

distinction at battles such as Monmouth Court House, New Jersey, and Stony Point, New York. And a number of French volunteers endured the Valley Forge winter with their American brothers in arms.

*Marche D'armée que lon a supose être attaquée par un party Ennemy ... / The March of an Army supposed to have been attack'd by a Party of the Enemy ...* engraved by Antoine Benoist (1721-1770).  
London: Publish'd by Francis Vivares ..., 1771.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

French artists chronicled the country's professional, well-trained army and its exploits throughout the eighteenth century. Executed prior to the American Revolution, this view of a French army marching into battle displayed for both French and English audiences the proper form of an army preparing to engage the enemy.

*Carte Militaire des Troupes de France, sur Pied, pour l'Année 1775.* [Paris?], 1775.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

This broadside published the strength of the French army in 1775, counting over two hundred thousand soldiers among its ranks. The chart detailed the names, officers, and colors of 235 regiments of the king's guards, infantry, artillery, cavalry, and dragoons. The hand-colored figure of a soldier near the bottom displays the classic French infantry uniform of the period, with a white coat trimmed in blue and white waistcoat and breeches.



Fusil made by Cassignard, Nantes, France, ca. 1760-1770.  
Walnut, brass, and iron.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of John Sanderson du Mont,  
New York State Society of the Cincinnati, 1994

By the fall of 1776, American troops were desperate for proper firearms, swords, artillery, uniforms, and other equipment. The Continental Congress implored its commissioners in Paris to secure pledges of such aid from France. The vast quantities requested by Congress convey the severity of the Americans' need for weapons. In September 1776, Congress asked for "an immediate Supply of twenty or thirty thousand Muskets and Bayonets, and a large Supply of Ammunition and brass Field Pieces." Just three months later, the American government again looked to France to supply one hundred thousand more small arms.<sup>2</sup>

The fusil was a smoothbore shoulder arm that was lighter and shot a smaller caliber ball than muskets in use by many British and American troops during the Revolutionary War. French fusils were usually purchased privately by officers, but also made their way across the Atlantic with other French arms and equipment. This example was carried in America by Lt. Daniel Allen, an officer who served with the Connecticut Continental Line from 1775 to 1779.



Silhouette of Marie-Joseph Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834). After Charles B. J. F. de Saint-Mémin (1770-1852), ca. 1824. Silk, paper, and ink.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Captain Edward Davis Washburn, Jr., Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati, and Randolph Harrison Washburn, Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Hampshire, 1961

Marie-Joseph Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette was one of the most enthusiastic French volunteers in support of the fight for American liberty. When he first learned of the colonists' rebellion in the summer of 1775, he said his "heart was enlisted, and I thought only of joining the colors." Lafayette dramatically called the American Revolution "the final struggle for liberty" and declared: "Never before had such a glorious cause attracted the attention of mankind."<sup>3</sup> In December 1776, he signed a contract with Silas Deane to serve in the American army as a major general—the rank he was commissioned by the Continental Congress upon his arrival in the United States in July 1777.

Through the course of the Revolutionary War, Lafayette fought in battles such as those at Brandywine, Monmouth Court House, and Newport; commanded Continental and French troops during the allied siege of Yorktown; and paid for arms to outfit his men. This reverse silhouette depicts Lafayette later in life, during his triumphant return visit to the United States in 1824 and 1825. The Frenchman is said to have given this memento to Thomas Jefferson, in whose family the portrait descended.

*Plan de la Bataille de Montmouth où le Gl. Washington Commandait l'Armée Américaine Et le Gl. Clinton l'Armée Anglaise, le 28 Juin 1778. [Brussels, 1782].*

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

Lafayette particularly distinguished himself during the Battle of Monmouth Court House in June 1778, the last major engagement in the North. While following the retreating British army from Philadelphia to New York City, George Washington and



his Continental forces caught up with the enemy in northern New Jersey and attacked from behind. With Gen. Charles Lee in the advanced American units, Lafayette witnessed Lee's disastrous encounter with the British and the retreat that Lee led against his orders. The Frenchman urgently sent for Washington, who rallied the troops and ultimately forced the British to abandon the field.

Based on an original map of the battle drawn by Michel du Chesnoy, an aide to Lafayette during the Monmouth campaign, this is the only contemporaneously published plan of the engagement. The horizontal plan locates "Mont-mouth" towards the right side, with the "Meeting House" in the center and "English-Town" on the left. The text below the plan is comprised of twenty-three numbered descriptions of the progress of the battle.

**Certificate of the service of Louis-Pierre, marquis de Vienne, September 29, 1778.**

The Society of the Cincinnati Archives

Louis-Pierre, marquis de Vienne, a former captain in the French Army, arrived at Valley Forge in the spring of 1778 to join Lafayette as a volunteer with the American army. The Continental Congress conferred on Vienne a brevet commission as colonel in July 1778. He participated in actions at Sandy Hook outside New York, Monmouth Court House, and Newport in 1778. Before returning to France to serve with his own country's army in the war, Vienne secured this certificate of his service signed by George Washington. The commander in chief stated that Vienne served "under my immediate command in character of volunteer," and "his conduct was always such as became an officer and a gentleman, having embraced every occasion his situation offered to give proofs of his zeal and bravery."

*A Plan of the Surprise of Stoney Point, by a Detachment of the American Army, commanded by Brig<sup>l</sup>. Gen<sup>l</sup>. Wayne, on the 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1779. London: Printed for Wm. Faden, 1784.*

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

As part of the ongoing struggle over control of the Hudson River Valley, British forces seized and fortified Stony Point in June 1779. George Washington ordered Gen. Anthony Wayne and his 1,300 men to retake the strategically important position. Stony Point, a rocky outpost on the Hudson River ten miles south of West Point, was further protected by swamps on two sides—features emphasized in this British plan of the battle. Wayne's daring night assault—carried out in silence with only bayonets—retook the fort in less than thirty minutes. The first of his men to surmount the walls of the fort was French engineer François-Louis Teissèdre de Fleury, who also struck the enemy colors.

*Comitia Americana* medal of Louis de Fleury at Stony Point in 1779. Made after the original engraved by Benjamin Duvivier (1728-1819), 19th-20th centuries. Electrotype.

The Society of the Cincinnati Collections

For his part in the American victory at Stony Point, Louis de Fleury was awarded a silver medal by the Continental Congress—the only Frenchman to receive such an honor during the Revolutionary War. The obverse of the medal features Mars standing in the ruins of a fort treading on a British flag, with a Latin inscription acknowledging Fleury's "courage and boldness." The reverse depicts the fort with ships in the river, heralding "Stony Point taken by storm." The original medal was struck in Paris in 1780 under the direction of Benjamin Franklin, who sent it to Fleury three years later.<sup>4</sup>

Fleury had been a captain in the French army before volunteering for service with the American troops in the Revolutionary War. Commissioned a captain in the Continental Army Engineers in May 1777, he was wounded at Brandywine that fall, helped strengthen the defenses at Fort Mifflin, and was appointed by George Washington as liaison to the French naval forces at Newport in 1778. Fleury returned to France in 1779 for the duration of the war and later became an original member of the French branch of the Society of the Cincinnati.

## THE TREATY OF ALLIANCE

Word of the pivotal American victory at Saratoga—after which an army of almost six thousand British soldiers under Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered to Gen. Horatio Gates—reached the French court in December 1777. American commissioners in Paris had been lobbying for a formal French alliance since the second year of the war, and King Louis XVI was now convinced to negotiate the treaty. The formal alliance was signed in Paris on February 6, 1778, by its architects, Conrad-Alexandre Gérard, Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee. It established a defensive military alliance to maintain “the liberty, Sovereignty, and independance absolute and unlimited of the said united States” and pledged the two countries’ mutual support in the war against Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> The British declared war on France a month later.

*Louis Seize, Roi des Français, Restaurateur de la Liberté* engraved by Jean-Guillaume Bervic (1756-1822) after Antoine François Callet (1741-1823). Paris: Felix Hermet, ca. 1880s.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Paul A. Rockwell, 1959

Louis XVI was just twenty years old when he ascended the French throne in 1774. His early support of the American Revolution, both unofficially and with the formal alliance in 1778, inspired George Washington to refer to the king as “our great and beloved Friend and Ally” and declare “the unceasing gratitude and attachment of the United States” to France. Washington’s General Orders of May 5, 1778, given at Valley Forge, celebrated the Treaty of Alliance by setting aside a day for “celebrating the important Event” of gaining “a powerful Friend among the Princes of the Earth to establish our liberty and Independence.”<sup>6</sup>

This likeness of the king in his coronation robes was engraved in 1790 after an oil portrait by French artist Antoine François Callet. French ambassador Jean Baptiste Ternant presented George Washington with a copy the following year. During the later years



of the French Revolution, the engraver broke in half the copper plate and destroyed all his prints made from it in an anti-royalist gesture. The original plate was restored in the late nineteenth century and additional impressions, like this one, taken from it.

## ADMIRAL D'ESTAING'S SQUADRON

Two months after the Treaty of Alliance was signed, Charles Hector, comte d'Estaing sailed for America at the head of a squadron of twelve ships bearing four thousand troops—the first French military operation in North America during the war. During the summer of 1778, d'Estaing attempted to blockade Sandy Hook outside New York City and assisted American forces in a failed attack on Newport. Frustrated by damaged ships and the lack of success, d'Estaing ordered his fleet to sail for the West Indies in November.

D'Estaing saw moderate success in the Caribbean against Britain's sugar islands. His forces prevailed in June 1779, when they took Saint Vincent, and on July 4, 1779, when they were victorious at Grenada. Admiral d'Estaing returned to the American mainland that fall, where his forces fought in the unsuccessful attack on British-held Savannah. He was wounded in the battle, but widely criticized for the costly failure in Georgia. D'Estaing's campaigns created disappointment and resentment among his American allies, who were frustrated by his inept leadership and lack of military success. D'Estaing and his squadron returned to France in early 1780, ending his activities in the American theater of the war.

**Portrait of a French officer, possibly Charles Hector, comte d'Estaing (1729-1794). By Jean Baptiste Le Paon (ca. 1736-1785), ca. 1785. Oil on canvas.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, Museum Acquisitions Fund purchase

D'Estaing's military experience was primarily in the French army rather than as a naval officer. As a sixteen-year-old, he held the rank of colonel and served for more than ten years in the French army before getting a taste of naval service in India during the Seven Years' War. His capture and imprisonment at the hands of the British in the early 1760s instilled in him an even more fervent hatred of England.

Despite having no training as a naval officer, d'Estaing was named one of three vice admirals of France in 1777. The following year,

the order he received to lead the French squadron bound for America was the first command of that size he had ever been given. After the campaign ended in disappointment, d'Estaing remained active in the French navy, leading a French-Spanish fleet against the British in European waters in 1781.

This portrait of a French officer has historically been identified as d'Estaing. The subject wears the undress uniform of a general officer in the French navy, but the artist, Jean Baptiste Le Paon, positioned him on land in front of an army encampment. This juxtaposition could have been a reference to d'Estaing's background in both the French army and navy. The subject wears the insignias of the *Ordre de Saint-Louis* and the Society of the Cincinnati on his uniform.



**Louis XVI's orders for the French squadron under Admiral d'Estaing, April 2, 1778.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 1981

Less than two weeks before d'Estaing's squadron left Toulon for America, Louis XVI issued these expectations for d'Estaing and his men during the campaign, which focused more on their conduct than strategic aims. The king instructed that the orders be



distributed to each ship in the squadron and read to every officer and man on board. Louis XVI also emphasized the great importance of the expedition, as it was the first time since the Seven Years' War that ships of the French navy departed for battle in foreign lands.

The seven-page document was written by French naval minister Antoine J. R. G. Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby (1729-1801) and signed by the king at Versailles. This was d'Estaing's copy, which he signed at sea on June 1, 1778, on board his flagship, the *Languedoc*.



*Claude, chevalier de Chavagnac* (1740-1812).

By an unknown French artist, ca. 1784-1785. Oil on canvas.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

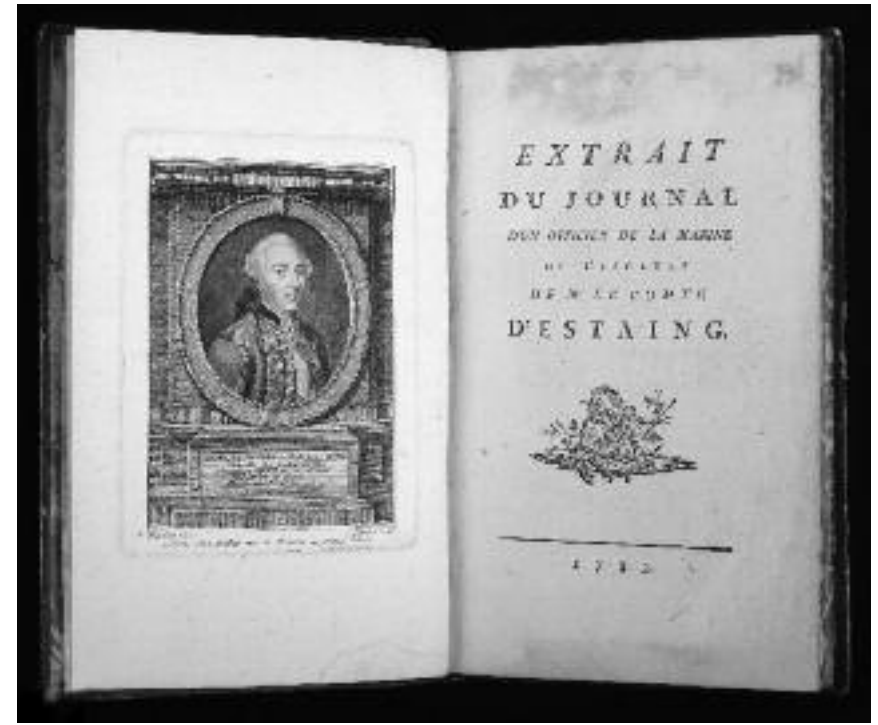
Claude, chevalier de Chavagnac served in Admiral d'Estaing's squadron along the East Coast and in the Caribbean as a *lieutenant de vaisseau* on board the *Guerrier*, *L'Artésien*, and *L'Annibal*. After returning to France in 1779, Chavagnac hoped to sail back to America in 1781 to fight with Admiral de Grasse's fleet in the Yorktown campaign, but his ship failed to leave port in time and headed for the West Indies. Chavagnac finally returned to France in May 1782 and retired from the French navy three years later. In this portrait, he is depicted wearing a full dress naval uniform from the Revolutionary War era with medals of the *Ordre de Saint-Louis* and the Society of the Cincinnati on his chest and the family crest in the upper left.

*La Valeur Récompensée, A la prise de la Grenade le 4 Juillet 1779* engraved by Jean-Louis DeMarne (1744-1829) after his own painting. [Paris, ca. 1781.]

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection



The primary success of d'Estaing's 1778 expedition was the French capture of Grenada on July 4, 1778. This engraving celebrated the victory over British forces under Admiral John Byron, whose fleet abandoned the island two days later. The artist positioned d'Estaing at the center of the scene, which includes French ships firing on the British fortress in the left background and French soldiers charging up a hill to the right. Beneath the engraved scene, a sun, symbolic of the king, rises in the midst of the French text recounting the victory.



*Extrait du journal d'un officier de la marine de l'escadre de M. le comte d'Estaing. 1782.*

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

Admiral d'Estaing's gallant but poorly planned attack on British-held Savannah was the first engagement for French troops on the American mainland during the war. The assault on the city failed and resulted in substantial losses, including more than six hundred French casualties. D'Estaing himself was wounded twice, but his bravery could not overcome his tarnished reputation in America. This published French assault on d'Estaing's conduct during the 1778 American operations reveals the discontent among his own men and contributed to the memory of the admiral as a noble but inept naval commander. The author of the book is unknown.

## ROCHAMBEAU'S EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

In the summer of 1780, a squadron of twelve ships transported the French army under the command of General Rochambeau to Newport, Rhode Island, a base from which the allies intended to attack British-held New York City. A change in strategy delayed the campaign until the following spring, so the French soldiers and sailors inhabited Newport for the next eleven months. The French force remained active during this time, establishing defenses in Newport Harbor, patrolling nearby coastal towns and inlets, and maintaining the artillery pieces and other munitions brought from France.

The allied French-American forces finally launched their campaign against the British in June 1781. The French army under Rochambeau marched from Newport; the Continental forces under George Washington joined them in New York; and the French fleet of François Joseph, comte de Grasse, sailed from the Caribbean—all ultimately bound for Yorktown, Virginia. The British army under Gen. Charles Cornwallis had been ravaging the south and was encamped in Yorktown when the allied forces arrived in September.

*Landung einer Französischen Hülf-Armee in America, zu Rhode Island. am 11ten Julius 1780 engraved by Daniel Chodowiecki (1726-1801). [Berlin, 1783.]*

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

One of the most significant French contributions to the Revolutionary War was the army of nearly six thousand men that arrived in America in July 1780. Under the command of Gen. Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, the French force departed Brest in April 1780 and landed at Newport, Rhode Island, three months later—an occasion depicted in this engraving from a German almanac published just after the war. Jean François, comte de Clermont-Crèvecoeur, a first lieutenant in the Auxonne Regiment of the Royal Corps of Artillery, recorded Rochambeau's first experience ashore on July 11, 1780:

*M. le comte de Rochambeau went ashore immediately, accompanied by several others, and when reached the town was astonished to find hardly a soul. The shops were closed, and the local people, little disposed in our favor, would have preferred at that moment, I think, to see their enemies arrive rather than their allies. We inspired the greatest terror in them. The General had all the difficulty in the world finding lodgings, but finally, with the help of some good Americans, everything turned out for the best.<sup>7</sup>*

**Flintlock musket.**  
Made at the Royal  
Armory, Charleville,  
France, 1766. Walnut,  
iron, and steel.

The Society of the  
Cincinnati, Gift of John  
Sanderson du Mont,  
New York State Society  
of the Cincinnati, 1994



France supplied more than one hundred thousand firearms to the Continental Army after the 1778 Treaty of Alliance, the majority of which were Model 1763 or 1766 muskets manufactured at the royal armory in Charleville. The French government had adopted new firearm models in 1763 and 1766 as part of the improvements made to its military after the Seven Years' War. Lighter, shorter, and easier to wield than older models, these firearms were among the most common weapons used by American and French soldiers during the Revolutionary War.





*Hippolyte-Louis-Antoine, comte de Capellis* (1744-1811). By Henri Nicolas van Gorp (1756-1813), ca. 1785. Oil on canvas.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Simone de Capellis, 1980

While the French ships were in Newport Harbor in 1780 and 1781, Hippolyte-Louis-Antoine, comte de Capellis served as *lieutenant de vaisseau* on board the *Duc de Bourgogne* and as *aide major* to the head of the fleet, Charles-Henri d’Arsac, chevalier de

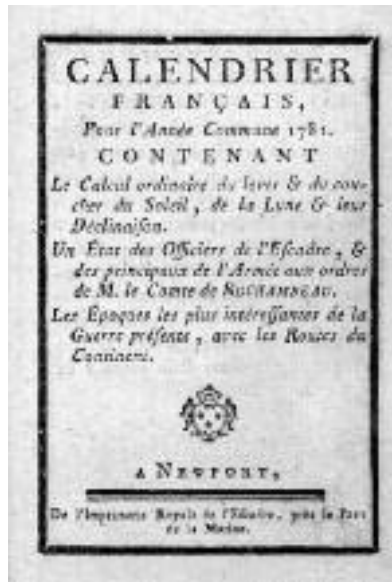
Ternay. After the war, the comte de Capellis became an original member of the French branch of the Society of the Cincinnati.

In this portrait, he wears the Eagle insignia of the Society, along with the medal of the *Ordre de Saint-Louis*.

*Calendrier Français, Pour l’Année Commune 1781.*  
Newport, R.I.: De l’Imprimerie Royale de l’Escadre,  
près le Parc de la Marine, [1781].

The Society of the Cincinnati,  
The Robert Charles Lawrence  
Fergusson Collection

In January 1781, the press of the French fleet, which had set up shop on Water Street in Newport, published an almanac for the upcoming year. This small pamphlet—so rare today that the Society’s copy is the only complete one known to exist—features lists of the ships and officers of the French fleet and regiments and officers of the



French army at Newport. It also includes a timeline of the war in America up to that point, from the closing of the port of Boston in 1774 to British major John André’s capture and hanging as a spy in September and October 1780.

**Receipt for payment relating to services in the American Revolutionary War, January 1, 1781.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

This handwritten receipt documents the service of an unknown French soldier with Rochambeau’s army. The unidentified soldier was paid £2,900 at the rate of £300 per month for his service in America from February 1 to October 1, 1780. The document was signed by Dominique Louis Ethis de Corny, provincial commissioner of war in Newport.

**“Notes Relatives aux Movemens de l’Armée Française en Amérique” by François-Ignace Ervoil d’Oyré, ca. mid-1780s from notes taken July 11, 1780-April 3, 1783.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

At the beginning of the summer of 1781, the French soldiers under Rochambeau finally received orders to leave Newport for a campaign against the British to the south. The initial target was the British force entrenched in New York City, but British general Charles Cornwallis’ alarming success in the South compelled George Washington and Rochambeau to change course to Virginia. The French army’s march of more than seven hundred miles was a remarkable journey that tested the commitment—not to mention logistical skills—of America’s allies. One witness to this historic campaign was François-Ignace Ervoil d’Oyré, a *capitaine* in the Royal Army Corps of Engineers. This manuscript journal of his service in America records his day-to-day observations of the march, including stops at West Point, Princeton, and Mount Vernon.

## THE SIEGE OF YORKTOWN

After several weeks of preparations outside British-held Yorktown, Washington finally gave the order for the allied forces to attack at the end of September 1781. Three weeks earlier, Admiral de Grasse's fleet had defeated the British in the Battle of the Chesapeake, preventing the British navy from reaching Cornwallis. In the first weeks of the Siege of Yorktown, artillery fire directed by French officers quickly silenced British guns, and French engineers laid out a formal system of entrenched approaches on the British lines. On October 14, assaults on crucial portions of the British defenses led by Guillaume, comte de Deux-Ponts and Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton helped break the enemy lines. Cornwallis asked for surrender terms three days later, and the British army formally laid down its arms on October 19.

*Position of the English and French Fleets Immediately previous to the Action on the 5th. Sept. 1781.* London, 1794.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

On September 5, 1781, a British fleet under Admiral Thomas Graves appeared at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, only to find de Grasse's French fleet blocking their path to rescue Cornwallis' army at Yorktown. After several hours of maneuvering, the opposing lines of ships engaged in a fairly evenly matched battle. British ships sustained slightly more damage and remained within sight of the French fleet for two days before withdrawing to New York. While not a resounding tactical victory for the French, the Battle of the Chesapeake provided a major advantage to the allied armies on land by preventing the British fleet from reinforcing or evacuating Cornwallis' blockaded troops. This plan of the naval action off the Virginia coast, also known as the Battle of the Capes, was published in Charles Stedman's *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War*.

*Mathieu Jean Felicité de Montmorency, duc de Montmorency-Laval* (1767-1826). By Jean-Baptiste Isabey (1767-1855), late 18th-early 19th century. Watercolor on ivory.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Museum Acquisitions Fund purchase

Mathieu Jean Felicité de Montmorency, duc de Montmorency-Laval served with his father in the Auvergne Regiment during the Yorktown campaign. Little is known about the younger Montmorency's military service in America, except that he was wounded in naval action off the Chesapeake Bay in 1781. This miniature portrait by the French artist Jean-Baptiste Isabey depicts Montmorency-Laval after the war, perhaps in the 1790s or first decade of the 1800s. The French officer would go on to become a prominent statesmen during the French Revolution and Bourbon Restoration.

*Conclusion de la Campagne de 1781 en Virginie. Le Marquis de La Fayette* engraved by Noël Le Mire (1724-1800) after Jean-Baptiste Le Paon (ca. 1736-1785). Paris: Chez le Mire, [ca. 1789].

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Trafford Partridge Klotz, 1964

In February 1781, Lafayette led a detachment of the Continental Army south to help Gen. Nathanael Greene combat the British army's march towards Virginia.

Throughout the summer, the French general played a game of cat and mouse with Cornwallis, preventing him from making significant progress north. By the end of July, Lafayette's troops corralled the British in Yorktown, where they waited for reinforcements. Lafayette later commanded a



division of the allied army during the siege of the town in October. To celebrate the victory over the British at Yorktown and Lafayette's service in America, Noël Le Mire published an engraving of Lafayette after a painting by Jean-Baptiste Le Paon. It was reissued later in the 1780s when Lafayette became commander of the Paris National Guard during the early years of the French Revolution.



*Épée d'officier* (officer's sword). Made in France, ca. 1767.

Brass and steel.

Collection of James L. Kochan

The marquis de Lafayette procured in France an *épée d'officier*, or officer's sword, for all of his subordinate officers in the Continental Light Infantry. The shipment arrived with Rochambeau's army in Newport in July 1780, the same month Lafayette took command of his new unit. Based on the Model 1767 French infantry officer's sword, the form of these swords was similar to a French small sword, a rather delicate blade that proved to be impractical in battle.

**Marquis de Lafayette to Nathanael Greene, August 25, 1781.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase with funds donated by Harry Edwin Ward, Jr., Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Connecticut, 1965

While awaiting the arrival of the combined French-American force under Washington and Rochambeau, Lafayette wrote this letter from "Camp near Rufin's Ferry" to Gen. Nathanael Greene, the commander of the Continental forces in the South. Lafayette conveyed his orders from Washington to "prevent the enemy from escaping into North Carolina." The Frenchman also

lamented the hardships his troops had endured: "Militia, arms, ammunition, accoutrements, and corn provisions are wanting to a degree which from the measures adopted and the stores provided I had no reason to expect. Our men are naked and barefooted."

**"Extrait de l'ordre du 10 8<sup>bre</sup> 1781," October 20, 1781.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase with funds donated by the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati, 1989

This French copy of George Washington's General Orders, given the day after the British surrender at the conclusion of the Siege of Yorktown, congratulated the allied forces for "the glorious event of yesterday." The commander in chief praised the French fleet and army under de Grasse and Rochambeau, "the generous proofs which his most Christian Majesty has given of his attachment to the cause of America." Washington also expressed his deepest appreciation for "the decisive good consequences of the Alliance," which he thought should "inspire every citizen of these States with sentiments of the most unalterable Gratitude." Lastly, he singled out other officers who showed particular zeal during the action, including Louis LeBègue de Presle Duportail, head of the American engineers, and Col. Guillaume Quérenet de La Combe, who directed the French engineers, for "the Vigor and Knowledge which were conspicuous in their Conduct of the Attacks."<sup>8</sup>



*The British surrendering their Arms to Gen. Washington after their defeat at York Town in Virginia October 1781* engraved by Tanner, Vallance, Kearney & Co. and William Allen after John Francis Renault. 1819.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Frank Mauran, Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1991

This allegorical scene of the British surrender at Yorktown was engraved after a painting by John Francis Renault, who served as assistant secretary to Admiral de Grasse and an engineer in the French army during the Yorktown campaign. This American printing is inscribed “To the defenders of American independence ... by their fellow citizen.” The figures in the foreground include leaders of the surrendering British army on the right, French officers in the center, and Americans on the left.

*Suite du Theatre de la Guerre dans l’Amérique Septentrionale y compris le Golfe du Mexique* drawn by Louis Brion de la Tour (1756-1823). Paris: Chez Esnauts et Rapilly, 1782.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

Commemorations of the French-American victory at Yorktown appeared on a variety of materials, including in the cartouche of this French map of the American colonies south of New Jersey that was published near the end of the war. The scene depicts George Washington receiving Cornwallis’ sword in surrender with a description of the siege below.

## TOWARDS PEACE

In 1782, the main theater of the Revolution shifted to the Caribbean, where France, Great Britain, Spain, and the Netherlands fought over their valuable sugar islands. The decisive Battle of the Saintes in April was an overwhelming victory for the British, as de Grasse’s French forces suffered more than three thousand casualties and lost six ships. French participation in the Revolutionary War came to an official end with the Treaty of Versailles signed September 3, 1783—separate from the Treaty of Paris signed the same day by Great Britain and the United States. France had gained little territory in the war, but delighted in the role it played in Britain’s loss of the American colonies.

**Allegorical portrait of Thomas François Lenormand de Victot (1742-1782).** By Nicolas René Jollain (1732-1804), 1783.

Oil on canvas.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Museum Acquisitions Fund purchase (see pages 30-31)

Thomas François Lenormand de Victot, a *lieutenant de vaisseau* on the French ship *Le Magnifique*, was serving in Admiral de Grasse’s fleet in the Caribbean when he died in April 1782. To memorialize Lenormand’s sacrifice, the artist Nicholas René Jollain painted this scene depicting the fallen French officer’s spirit protecting wounded soldiers, who are receiving their last rites, from being taken by the figure of death. The background shows Fort Royal in Martinique, with de Grasse’s fleet at anchor. This dramatic work celebrates the French sacrifices and patriotism that helped win American independence.



Allegorical portrait of Thomas François Lenormand de Victot (1742-1782) by Nicolas René Jollain, 1783.

*Lettre du Roi a mons l'archevêque de Vienne. Mandement de Monseigneur l'archevêque et Come de Vienne, Pour ordonner des Prières publiques en actions de graces du rétablissement de la Paix. Vienne: de l'imprimerie de la veuve Vedeilhié, 1783.*

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

In late November 1783, Louis XVI issued an announcement, printed in the top half of this large broadside, of the conclusion of the peace treaty with Great Britain and requested that the *Te Deum*, a Catholic prayer used in marking momentous events, be sung in churches in the diocese of the archbishop of Vienne. The second announcement in the lower half of this broadside contains the response of Archbishop Jean-George of Vienne the following month, ordering public prayers.

*Indépendance des États-Unis* engraved by L. Roger after Jean Duplessi-Bertaux. Paris: Chez Blin, 1786.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

Three years after the American Revolution came to an end, this allegorical representation of the cooperation between France and the United States during the war was published in *Portaits des grands hommes, femmes illustres et sujets mémorables de France*. The large column displays portrait busts of Louis XVI, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington crowned by a sphere bearing the fleur-de-lys and topped by a rooster, both symbols of France. Next to the column stands an Indian representing America, who holds a pole with a liberty cap in one hand and tramples a leopard, symbolizing Great Britain. Ships in the background commemorate the participation of the French navy.

## SOCIÉTÉ DES CINCINNATI DE FRANCE

On July 4, 1784, exactly eight years after America declared its independence, the Société des Cincinnati de France was formally established at a meeting in Paris. Work to form the French Society—the fourteenth and last branch of the Society of the Cincinnati to organize—had begun the previous December, when Pierre L'Enfant arrived from Philadelphia with letters from George Washington to the six French officers named in the Institution. The Society's founding document acknowledged “the generous assistance this Country has received from France” and laid the groundwork for the establishment of a French branch of the Society, being “desirous of perpetuating the friendships which have been formed, and so happily subsisted, between the Officers of the Allied Forces in the prosecution of the war.”

One of the first priorities of the early leaders of the French Society—including the marquis de Lafayette, comte de Rochambeau, and comte d'Estaing—was securing King Louis XVI's approval of the Society and permission for his subjects to wear its insignia, which he granted in December 1783. More than two hundred officers who served in the Revolutionary War in the French army or navy or in the Continental Army under commissions granted by Congress ultimately became original members of the French branch of the Society. The French Society went dormant by 1793 or 1794 at the height of the French Revolution, which abolished all royal orders and trappings of nobility, but was revived by descendants of the original members in the 1920s.

*Louis XVI (1754-1793)*. By Sèvres Porcelain Factory, ca. 1820. Porcelain and bronze.

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

As head of state and patron of the Society in France, the king took it upon himself to approve all claims of membership from French officers. On December 23, one week after Louis XVI gave his permission for the French Society to form, the *Gazette de*



France printed the full text of the Society's founding document, the Institution. The king approved the admission of French officers to the Society for the first time in January 1784. He intermittently prohibited any new members from joining the French Society through the rest of the 1780s, but agreed to admit a last group of members in February 1792.

**“Idées Sur l’Association des Cincinnati” by Charles Hector, comte d’Estaing, [July 13, 1784].**

The Society of the Cincinnati Archives

The comte d’Estaing was one of the most active and enthusiastic organizers of the French Society. A week after hosting its first formal meeting at his Paris residence in July 1784, he wrote a lengthy report of the meeting and list of nine proposals to govern the French Society’s activities and sent it to George Washington. Among the proposals were resolutions in support of hereditary membership (which had been under siege in America), the right of some French women to wear the Eagle “because of service rendered by their husbands, or by their Fathers,” and the position of president of the French Society to be held for life. The July 4 meeting seems to have put forth the marquis de Lafayette for this position—as d’Estaing wrote, he had been “the most senior officer in America” and had “the confidence of the President General, General Washington”—but d’Estaing himself is the only known president of the French Society up to the French Revolution.



**Society of the Cincinnati Eagle owned by François Aymar, comte de Monteil. By an unknown French maker, 1784. Gold, enamel, and silk.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, Museum Acquisitions Fund purchase

**Society of the Cincinnati membership certificate of François Aymar, comte de Monteil, ca. 1789.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

Another of Pierre L’Enfant’s missions for his trip to Paris in late 1783 and early 1784 was to have French craftsmen produce the first gold Eagle insignias for Society members. He had designed the badge in the early summer of 1783 as a double-sided figure of a bald eagle with scenes of the Society’s namesake Cincinnatus. After it was approved, L’Enfant began taking orders from American officers who wished to purchase a gold Eagle. But the first to be made were a group of forty-five small Eagles, the majority of which L’Enfant presented to officers at a preliminary meeting of the French Society on January 16. This example was owned by François Aymar, comte de Monteil, a naval officer serving with de Grasse’s fleet during the campaign to Yorktown. It is suspended from a blue and white ribbon, symbolic of the French-American alliance that helped win the Revolutionary War.

L’Enfant also designed the Society’s membership certificate, known as the diploma. The parchment document, printed in Philadelphia from a copper plate made in France, featured patriotic symbols of the achievement of American independence, including the French fleet coming to America’s aid. Before diplomas were sent to each constituent society for distribution, George Washington and Henry Knox signed the blank copies as president general and secretary general. The French Society requested nearly two hundred diplomas for its members in the late 1780s. The comte de Monteil’s was transmitted to his son by Admiral d’Estaing two years after Monteil died.

*Considérations sur l'ordre de Cincinnatus, ou Imitation D'un Pamphlet Anglo-American* by Honoré-Gabriel de Riquetti, comte de Mirabeau. London: Chez J. Johnson, 1784.

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of George C. Homans, Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati, 1972

The establishment of the Society inspired considerable controversy in the United States, where critics accused the group's founders of attempting to create an American aristocracy. A South Carolina lawyer, Aedanus Burke, was among the most outspoken of these critics and leveled his charges in a pamphlet published in 1783. A year later, French historian Honoré-Gabriel de Riquetti, comte de Mirabeau, whose brother became a member of the French Society, issued his own version of Burke's pamphlet, written in French and published in England. This copy is from the first printing of the first edition of Mirabeau's pamphlet.

**Portrait of a French officer. By an unknown French artist, ca. 1791-1796. Watercolor on ivory.**

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

The French Revolution claimed the lives of King Louis XVI and at least ten French Cincinnati members, including d'Estaing. Despite the dangers of associating with orders like the Society during that time, this unidentified member of the French Society had his miniature portrait painted wearing the Eagle on his military uniform.



## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), 816.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 815-816; *Ibid.*, 6:1044.

<sup>3</sup> Marquis de Lafayette, "Memoir of 1779," in *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution: Selected Letters and Papers, 1776-1790*, ed. Stanley J. Idzerda, vol. 1 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 7.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Adams and Anne E. Bentley, *Comitia Americana and Related Medals: Underappreciated Monuments to Our Heritage* (Crestline, Calif.: George Frederick Kolbe, 2007), 77-88.

<sup>5</sup> Treaty of Alliance with France, 1778; International Treaties and Related Records, 1778-1974; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives.

<sup>6</sup> George Washington to Louis XVI of France, October 9, 1789, in *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, vol. 30 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), 431-432; Washington, General Orders, May 5, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, ed. Edward G. Lengel, vol. 15 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2006), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-François-Louis, comte de Clermont Crèvecoeur, "Journal of the war in America during the years 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783," in *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783*, comps. Howard C. Rice, Jr., and Anne S. K. Brown (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 1:17.

<sup>8</sup> George Washington, General Orders, October 20, 1781, in *Writings*, 23:244-247.

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# THE ROBERT CHARLES LAWRENCE FERGUSSON COLLECTION

Established in 1988, the Fergusson Collection honors the memory of Lt. Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson (1943-1967), a member of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Virginia who died of wounds sustained in combat in Vietnam. Lieutenant Fergusson was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Bronze Star Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, and the Purple Heart. The growing collection that bears his name includes rare books, broadsides, manuscripts, maps, works of art, and artifacts pertaining to the military history of the American Revolution and the art of war in the eighteenth century.

