Prelude to Yorktown
The War Comes to Virginia – 1781

September 10, 2009

Fairfax Resolves Chapter
Virginia Society
Sons of the American Revolution
How does one learn about this period in the war? It’s Hard! There are few accurate sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 4, 1777</td>
<td>Battle of Germantown - Americans retreat</td>
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<td>December 19, 1777</td>
<td>Encampment at Valley Forge for the Winter.</td>
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<td>February 6, 1778</td>
<td>Ben Franklin incourages France to sign an alliance with the United States</td>
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<td>June 19, 1778</td>
<td>Evacuation of Valley Forge Winter Quarters.</td>
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<td>June 28, 1778</td>
<td>Battle of Monmouth</td>
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<td>December 29, 1778</td>
<td>Savannah taken by the British</td>
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<td>1779</td>
<td>Lafayette goes to France to plead for help</td>
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<td>September 1779</td>
<td>John Paul Jones's <em>Bonhomme Richard</em> captures the British <em>Serapis</em></td>
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<td>May 12, 1780</td>
<td>Charlestown, SC taken by the British</td>
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<td>August 16, 1780</td>
<td>Gates defeated by Cornwallis near Camden, South Carolina.</td>
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<td>September 23, 1780</td>
<td>Benedict Arnold's plot to surrender West Point frustrated.</td>
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<td>October 7, 1780</td>
<td>King's Mountain - British defeated</td>
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<td>1780</td>
<td>Rochambeau arrives in America with 5,500 men.</td>
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<td>1781</td>
<td>Powerful French fleet under deGrasse arrives - Block British naval force in Chesapeake Bay</td>
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<td>January 17, 1781</td>
<td>Cowpens - British defeated</td>
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<td>March 15, 1781</td>
<td>Guilford Court House - Americans defeated</td>
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<td>1781</td>
<td>Greene clears interior of South Carolina and Georgia of the enemy</td>
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<td><strong>October 19, 1781</strong></td>
<td>Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown</td>
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<td>November 30, 1782</td>
<td>Provisional Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 3, 1783</td>
<td>Treaty of Peace of Paris</td>
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From this map one would not learn anything of the great duel between Lafayette and Cornwallis in the spring and summer of 1781.
The War in the South

1778-1781

The British decided to focus their attention to the South as loyalists support was strong in many areas there.

December 29, 1778
Clinton's troops captured Savannah, Georgia.

May 1780
Clinton's troops took Charlestown, South Carolina.

August 1780
British were victorious at Camdan, South Carolina.

October 1780
Patriots captured 1000 loyalist troops at border of North and South Carolina.

January 1781
Patriots won at Cowpens, North Carolina.

March 1781
Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina - British forced to retreat to Yorktown as casualties got so great.

A very detailed map of the action in the Carolinas, but almost nothing about the fighting Virginia. And Lafayette's presence is not shown.
Gen. Morgan’s sciatica is more important than Lafayette's duel with Cornwallis in this timeline.
Much is wrong here!

1. Lafayette arrived in Virginia months before Jefferson’s escape.

Chapter Three
Victory and Independence (13/14)

In July 1780 France's Louis XVI had sent to America an expeditionary force of 6,000 men under the Comte Jean de Rochambeau. In addition, the French fleet harassed British shipping and prevented reinforcement and resupply of British forces in Virginia by a British fleet sailing from New York City. French and American armies and navies, totaling 18,000 men, parried with Cornwallis all through the summer and into the fall. Finally, on October 19, 1781, after being trapped at Yorktown near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, Cornwallis surrendered his army of 8,000 British soldiers.

Although Cornwallis's defeat did not immediately end the war — which would drag on inconclusively for almost two more years — a new British government decided to pursue peace negotiations in Paris in early 1782, with the American side represented by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and John Jay. On April 15, 1783, Congress approved the final treaty, and Great Britain and its former colonies signed it on September 3. Known as the Treaty of Paris, the peace settlement acknowledged the independence, freedom and sovereignty of the 13 former colonies, now states, to which Great Britain granted the territory west to the Mississippi River, north to Canada and south to Florida, which was returned to Spain. The fledgling colonies that Richard Henry Lee had spoken of more than seven years before, had finally become "free and independent states." The task of knitting together a nation yet remained.

This summary does not tell us very much and misses the real story.
In March 1781, in response to the threat of Cornwallis, General Washington had dispatched Marquis de Lafayette to defend Virginia. The young Frenchman had 3,200 men at his command, but British troops in the state now totalled 7,200.[36] Lafayette skirmished with Cornwallis, avoiding a decisive battle while gathering reinforcements. It was during this period that Cornwallis received orders from Clinton to choose a position on the Virginia Peninsula - referred to in contemporary letters as the "Williamsburg Neck" - and construct a fortified naval post to shelter ships of the line.[37] In complying with this order, Cornwallis put himself in a position where it would be easy to become trapped. With the arrival of the French fleet under the Comte de Grasse and Washington's combined French-American army, Cornwallis found himself cut off. After the Royal Navy fleet under Admiral Thomas Graves was defeated by the French at the Battle of the Chesapeake, and the French siege train arrived from Newport, Rhode Island, his position became untenable. He surrendered to Washington and the French commander the Comte de Rochambeau on October 19th, 1781.
What really happened?
Gen. Lord Charles Cornwallis
Dec. 3, 1738 - Oct. 5, 1805
43 years old in 1781

“The boy cannot escape me”
Cornwallis to Gen. Clinton, Spring 1781
Marquis de Lafayette
Sept. 6, 1757 – May 20, 1834
24 years old in 1781

“Were I to fight a battle I should be cut to pieces, the militia dispersed, and the arms lost. Were I to decline fighting, the county would think itself given up. I am therefore determined to skirmish, but not to engage too far, and particularly to take care against their immense and excellent body of horse, which the militia fear as they would wild beasts.

I am not strong enough to be beaten”.

14 March 1781 – Lafayette, with a small escort, arrives at Yorktown
15 March – Lafayette joins with Steuben, with a small militia force, in Williamsburg. 16-20 March – Additional British troops arrive under Gen. Phillips. The French navy is repulsed at the “First battle of the Virginia Capes”.
25 March – Disappointed, Lafayette returns to Annapolis. He then leads his forces back north.

26 March – Fresh British troops arrive, bringing total to over 3,000
8 April – Lafayette arrives at Elkton, Maryland and receives orders from Washington to return to Virginia. On 12 April he re-crosses the Susquehanna River. His troops mutiny.

18 April – British troops raid up the James River, wrecking havoc. A force goes up the Potomac and occupies Alexandria, which surrenders. Mt. Vernon saved by a servant.
18 April – Phillips leads his troops up the James River. Fights the Battle of Petersburg on 25 April.

19-29 April – Lafayette leaves Baltimore and after a forced march arrives in Richmond with 1,200 troops. On 30 April Lafayette and von Steuben have a ‘grand review” of their forces.
7 May – Phillips is returning to Portsmouth when he gets orders to meet Cornwallis at Petersburg. On 13 May Gen. Phillips dies of fever.
After the “Crossing of the Dan” Cornwallis and the British Army move north into Virginia.
May - The Convention Army of over 3,000 British prisoners from the Battle of Saratoga is moved from Charlottesville to Pennsylvania to avoid being rescued by Cornwallis. The Virginia site is remembered today by the name “Barracks’ Road”.
20 May – Cornwallis joins British forces at Petersburg, bringing British strength to 7,200. Lafayette reorganizes his troops, that now total 1,000 to 3,000 Continentals and militia.
28 May – Steuben is sent to Point of Rock to defend military supplies.

Lafayette falls back as Cornwallis moves across the James River to Hanover CH.
1 June – Cornwallis decides to stop chasing Lafayette and British forces turn south. Lafayette shadows his move.
3-4 June – Tarleton with his dragoons raid Charlottesville attempting to capture the Virginia legislature. Jack Jowett rides through the night and warns Jefferson at Monticello.

5-6 June – Cornwallis moves to Point of Rocks. Stuben retreats towards North Carolina.
Gen. Sir Banastre Tarleton
“Tarleton’s Quarter”
10 June - Wayne crosses the Rapidan at Raccoon Ford and joins Lafayette. The Continental and British strengths are now nearly equal.
12 June – Lafayette’s forces improve an old back road – “the Marquis Road” - and they get around the British.
12 – 25 June – Cornwallis decides not to attack the strengthened American forces and returns to Richmond and then Williamsburg. Lafayette and his troops follow.
9-24 July – Tarleton and his British dragons ride over 400 miles. “Francisco’s Fight”
“Francisco’s Fight” – At Ward’s Tavern, wounded militiaman Peter Francisco fights off 11 British Dragoons. When they ask for his silver buckles Francisco steals one of their sabers. He kills 3 and wounds 6. He then scares off Tarleton by pretending a large American force is nearby. Francisco takes the horses that were left behind and sells them in Richmond. He keeps the best horse, which he names “Tarleton”.
5 July – Cornwallis moves some troops across the James but sets a trap for the following American forces at The Battle of Green Springs. The ruse almost works.

8-17 July – The British forces are fully across the James and move to Portsmouth.
20 July – Gen. Clinton orders Cornwallis to Yorktown, which he occupies on 1 August. Lafayette is confused by the British movements and stays nearby.

2-3 Sept – 3,100 French forces, which arrived on 30 Aug, meet Lafayette at Jamestown.

Allied armies move south and march through Philadelphia.
26 Sept – The Allied army completes its arrival at Williamsburg. Lafayette’s forces join them. The stage is set for the last act.
The “Marquis Road” today
The Revolutionary War in Central Virginia celebrated today
The Revolutionary War in Central Virginia celebrated today
Suggested Reading:

*The Revolution in Virginia 1775-1783*
John E. Shelby, 1988

*Angel in the Whirlwind*
Benson Bobbrick, 1997

*The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies*
David Lee Rissell, 2000