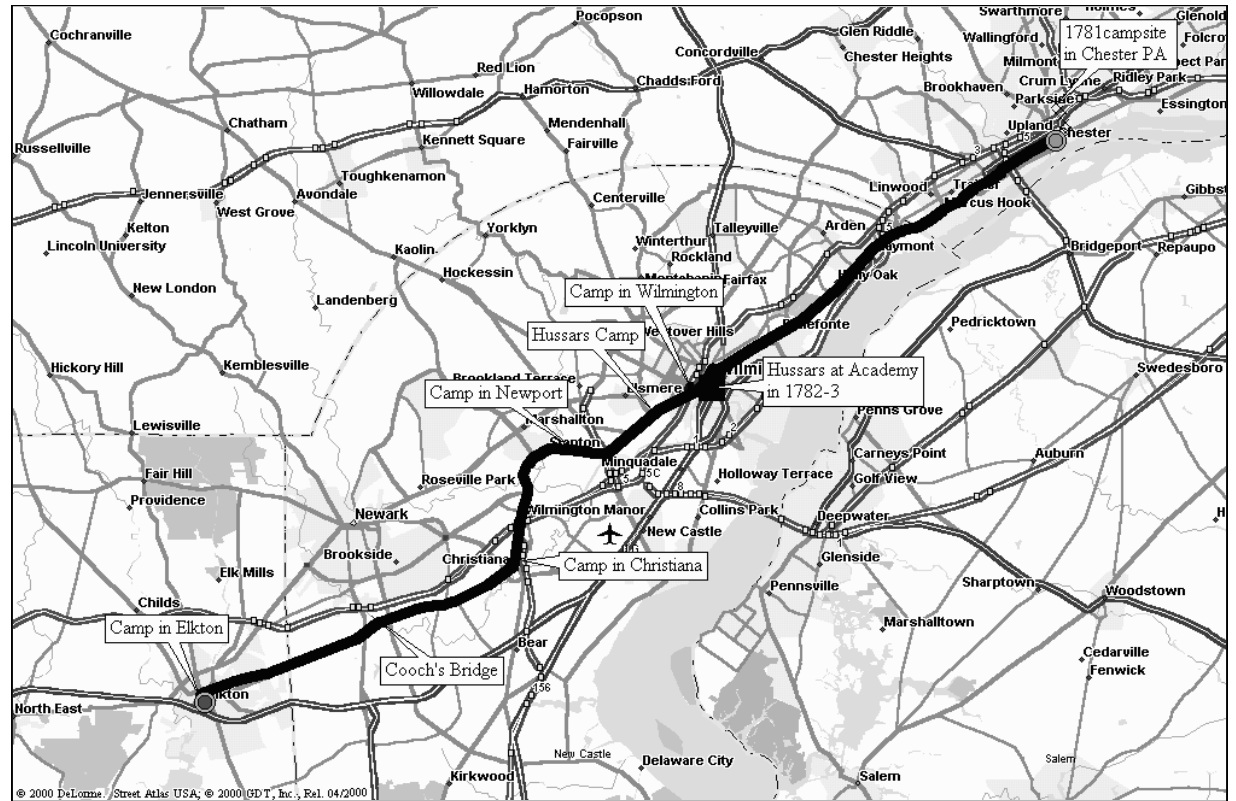


By 1780 Spain and Holland were also at war with Britain, and significant land and sea battles had taken place from Africa to the Caribbean to India, significantly impairing Britain's ability to supply troops in the U.S. theater of operations.

In July 1780 France sent both land and naval forces to help dislodge the British from the U.S. General Rochambeau led the French Expeditionary Force, which consisted of about 5,500 experienced troops, along with their supporting baggage train, siege guns, and transport ships. They landed in Newport, Rhode Island, stayed there for the winter, then marched toward New York City and joined Washington's Continental Army to test the defenses there.

When (American) Gen. Lafayette with Continentals and militia forces cornered a large British force under Gen. Cornwallis on the Yorktown Peninsula in Virginia, Washington and Rochambeau recognized an opportunity to trap and defeat the British force. The U.S. and French armies made a rapid march south, passing through Delaware via the towns of Claymont, Wilmington, Newport, and Christiana.

The Army Marches through Delaware: On September 6, 1781 the First Brigade of the French Expeditionary Force -- comprised of about 2,500 troops and their baggage train -- marched 11.5 miles from Chester, Pennsylvania, along the King's Highway (now called Philadelphia Pike, Business Route 13, and Market Street as you near Wilmington) to Wilmington. After crossing the Brandywine River they marched down West Street (which at that time connected to Philadelphia Pike), turned right onto 5th St. and then left onto Pasture Street (now called Washington St.), stopping at Front St. (now Lancaster Ave.). They camped in the area roughly bounded by Adams St., 5th St, Washington St, and Lancaster Ave. The hussars camped a bit farther on toward Newport.



The next day the First Brigade followed Maryland Ave (Route 4, Newport Pike) to Newport, across the Red and White Clay Creeks, then took the Stanton-Christians Road (Route 7) to Christiana, then followed old Baltimore Pike to Elkton. This route passed over Cooch's Bridge, where the Continental Army had harassed the lead units of the British forces after their landing at Elkton in August of 1777. In revenge the British then burned Thomas Cooch's barn, and Gen. Cornwallis used Cooch's home as his headquarters for several weeks.

On September 7, 1781 the Second Brigade of the French Expeditionary Force, also about 2,500 strong, marched from Chester 15.5 miles to Newport via the same route, but instead of camping in Wilmington

went five more miles to camp in the flood plain beyond Newport. The next day they marched on to Elkton MD.

Most of the 2,000 American troops (along with their artillery) did not march from Philadelphia but were taken by boat to Christiana, where they camped before marching on to Elkton. Because the British navy patrolled the seas it was not possible to travel to Yorktown by following the Atlantic coast of Delaware.

The Encampments Affect Delawareans: While it came without much advance notice, the movement of such a large body of troops through the state was a cause for widespread excitement. Here was a well-dressed and well-equipped European army -- against

which many residents had fought only twenty years previously in the French and Indian War - - marching through town on the way to a likely victory and the end to a long war.

This army of several thousand men (and the people and animals associated with the baggage train) had to purchase large quantities of food, drink, and other supplies from local farmers and merchants. Since the allied army had twice the population of the Christiana Hundred -- which at that time included Wilmington -- these purchases had a significant economic impact.

Since many Huguenots, Moravians and German Friends had fled religious persecution in Europe to settle in Delaware during the past hundred years many local people could speak with the French and German troops in this army (a large fraction of the French force came from German states). The Continental Congress was full of men of British descent. This visible symbol of French support for the U.S. gave those who were not of British descent hope that they would become full partners in governance of the U.S.

Continuing on to Yorktown: Some of the troops boarded transports at Elkton; the rest marched on and boarded transports at Annapolis. These took them to Williamsburg VA, from which they marched to Yorktown. After a brief siege with several minor battles the British surrendered. There were no major battles on U.S. soil after this, but the British continued to hold New York City until the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783.

After the Surrender: General Washington and the U.S. forces returned to the New York City area almost immediately to prevent a breakout by the British forces there. The French fleet soon left for the Caribbean and further action there. The French

Army remained in Yorktown for about six months with the British prisoners and the captured equipment. During their return from Yorktown in 1782 both divisions of the French army camped in Newport DE. Rather than returning to Newport RI they marched to Boston MA, where they boarded ships bound for the Caribbean and further fighting.

Tales from the Hussars' Stay in Wilmington: About 300 hussars (light cavalry) and 200 infantry from Lauzun's Legion remained in Wilmington to guard against a possible British invasion up the Delaware River. For four months in the winter of 1782-1783 they stayed in the Wilmington Academy (located where the Wilmington Grand Opera House now stands). They bought food and hay and rented rooms. Lauzun's officers participated in local meetings of Masonic groups. The Legion's treasure chest was stolen by local thieves with aid from the landlord. About forty soldiers completed their enlistments or deserted, choosing to live here rather than return to Europe. Many of their descendents are now citizens of Delaware. The French Expeditionary Force had significant and long-lasting effects here.

What is the W3R-DE?

Prompted by the need to properly celebrate the 225th anniversary of these events, the **Washington - - Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Historical Trail Association of Delaware** was founded to promote historical research, lectures, commemorative markers, educational brochures, and historic tours related to the W3R. Representatives from the DAR, SAR, city and state agencies, and other groups guide W3R-DE policy. For more information, call Kim Burdick at (302) 477-1854. For more details of the route through all states along the route, with a list of books, see

www.AmRevandFrance.com

--- flyer updated 2003 Aug 20

When the French Army Came to Town

The French Expeditionary Force in Delaware in 1781-83

by Ralph D. Nelson, Jr., Historian
Delaware Society, SAR



A French Hussar (mounted infantry)

France Enters the War: The victory of U.S. forces over the British at Saratoga in 1777 showed that the fight for independence might succeed, so the French (who had been supplying covert aid for some time) agreed to openly support the U.S. in its battle against England. Soon large amounts of French clothing, muskets, powder, and expert military advisors were on their way to America.