



Above: A re-enactment of the British surrender at Yorktown. British troops with furling flags march between French troops (left) and American troops (right) to the "Surrender Field" where they will lay down their weapons. (Photo courtesy National Park Service, 168020-74, Richard Frear)

"Our" Guardian Angel at Yorktown

by JOHN M. HAFFERT

A double shock awaits visitors at the monumental historical complex erected by our government in Yorktown, Va. to celebrate the bicentennial of the victory of Yorktown, October 19, 1981.

First is the magnificent Visitors' Center. It has perhaps one of the best historical presentations ever arranged by our National Parks Service (including all that was done at Independence Hall in Philadelphia to celebrate the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence just five years ago).

A few years ago all one could see at Yorktown was an historical film shown in a trailer, and the redoubts overlooking the beautiful York River. But on this site, today, in the magnificent Visitors' Center is the recreation of a colonial street, a "colonial" in a printing shop narrating the extraordinary news

from Boston, and then a re-enactment of the major events leading up to the Declaration of Independence in films and three-dimensional presentations, each one as delightful a surprise as the one before it.

A "French" Victory

The second "shock" will be for those who thought that the Americans won the Battle of Yorktown and the independence of the Thirteen Colonies! Instead they learn that Washington had not won any battle for several years, that the morale of the American troops was perhaps at its lowest, and the French sent one of their most capable officers at the head of more than 6,000 trained troops to "win" the war.

Although George Washington was in command, the trained and well equipped French troops were

greater in number than the troops of George Washington at the Battle of Yorktown. But even more, George Washington had wanted to attack New York, and the French General argued that they should go to Virginia. Finally when the French fleet arrived off Yorktown to prevent Cornwallis from being supplied from the sea, Washington agreed. Then in four weeks, the combined Franco-American force (numbering more than 20,000) made the march from New York to Virginia where Cornwallis was caught between the French fleet and the combined American and French army.

When Cornwallis finally surrendered, he did not feel that he was surrendering to American rebels but to a well-trained French army and a seasoned French General—Comte de Rochambeau.

Adding to one's patriotic "shock" at Yorktown is the information that another Frenchman had prepared for this final victory: **Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette.**

One of Washington's Closest Aides

He was a young French soldier who came to America in 1777 during a lull in his own military career in France. He became enamored of the American cause and was made a General by the Continental Congress and served as one of Washington's closest aides. Later assigned by General Washington to the defense of Virginia, he was instrumental in pushing the army of Cornwallis (one of the best British armies of the time) into the Yorktown peninsula, where the British might take off for any point along the coast, or march up from Virginia to New York as the strategy of the Supreme British Commander in New York might decide.

At the moment of surrender, Cornwallis pleaded illness and sent his assistant, General Charles O'Hara, to surrender to Rochambeau. But the great French general refused, indicating General Washington as the Commander of the combined army. Since Cornwallis himself had not come forward to offer the surrender, Washington had his own assistant, General Benjamin Lincoln, accept the surrender.

Important Anniversaries

It was on the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in July of 1976 that ground was broken in Washington, N.J. for our National Shrine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and it was then decided that in October of 1981, bicentennial of the victory of Yorktown, another shrine would be erected in front of the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in honor of the National Guardian Angel of the United States.

Both of these shrines—to the Immaculate (to whom this nation was dedicated at the beginnings of its history by the American Bishops) and to the National Guardian Angel of the United States—**will be lasting memorials of the faith of our nation founded "under God" as a haven of "liberty and justice" for all.**

Special Role of Angels

In the last issue of SOUL was an important article by Fr. Albert Boeddeker, O.F.M. on the importance of the angels, and of the reality of the special Guardian Angel assigned by God to each individual nation.

Can we not believe that "our" Guardian Angel touched the mind of the 19 year old Marquis de Lafayette, who as a boy had been instructed and privately tutored by a famed French priest, l'Abbe Fayon? Can we not believe that "our" Guardian Angel also accompanied the great Comte de Rochambeau, who had originally intended to become a Jesuit priest but who instead entered the military service upon the death of his older brother—in order to fulfill the family tradition of military service?

A "Catholic" Victory

The American colonists were in revolt against a nation in which the King was the declared Head of the Church, and the final victory of American independence was won with the aid of France, known even then as "the first daughter of the Church."

Today, one sees three flags flying side by side over Yorktown: those of France, Britain and the United States. These three nations together formed the United States of America, and subsequently fought side by side in the two greatest wars of history...that men might be free.

The bicentennial commemorations of the victory at Yorktown at the Blue Army's National Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and of our National Guardian Angel emphasize the role of God's Providence in these historic events.

CHRONOLOGY OF YORKTOWN CAMPAIGN

Early 1781: Harassment of British under Cornwallis by Americans under Greene and Lafayette in Virginia force them into Yorktown defenses in August, 1781.

20 August 1781: Admiral Francois de Grasse of French Navy reaches Chesapeake Bay with fleet of 29 combatant ships, and a transport fleet.

26 August 1781: Combined Franco-American army under Washington leaves Peekskill, N.Y. for Virginia. Feint attacks made on Clinton in New York (Manhattan).

5 September 1781: Three thousand French troops join Lafayette and Anthony Wayne at Yorktown. In Battle of the Capes (5-10 September), British relief fleet under Hood and Graves repulsed by French fleet of de Grasse.

10 September 1781: Siege artillery delivered by Adm. Barras.

26 September, 1781: Franco-American army arrives outside of Yorktown and joins combined force under Lafayette and Wayne. French fleet blockades Cornwallis at Yorktown and Gloucester (across James River).

6 October 1781: Siege of Yorktown opened against British with bombardment from First Artillery Parallel; Washington fires first cannon.

10 October 1781: In night attacks with bayonets, 400 French under Guillaume de Deux-Ponts and 400 Americans under Hamilton sieze British Redoubts #9 and 10.

14-15 October 1781: Second Artillery Parallel opened, closing ever tighter on the British behind the lines at Yorktown.

16 October 1781: Attempt at night escape by Cornwallis and his army from Yorktown thwarted by sudden severe storm.

17 October 1781: Signal for parley by drum sounded from British lines. British officer taken under truce into American lines for arrangement of a twenty-four hour truce by Cornwallis to settle terms "for the surrender of the posts of York and Gloucester."

19 October 1781: Surrender terms accepted by British and signed by Washington, Rochambeau and Barras signing them into **flat accompli**. On noon of 19 October, British and Hessian troops march out from Yorktown defenses and surrender, with Gen. Benjamin Lincoln accepting sword of surrender from British Gen. Charles O'Hara. British and Hessian arms are laid down in the "Surrender Field."