

## AMERICA MEETS FRANCE OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY

### 8.1 The March of the French Forces to Philipsburg, July 2-6, 1781

As they were getting closer to New York, Rochambeau re-organized his troops into brigades. Bourbonnais and Royal Deux-Ponts formed the First Brigade, the Soissonnais and Saintonge the Second. On July 1, his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday, Rochambeau set out with the First Brigade for Ridgebury via Danbury, a village of maybe 80 houses. Here he received a letter from Washington dated June 30, 1781, asking him "to put your First Brigade under march tomorrow Morning (i.e., July 1), the remaining Troops to follow as quick as possible, and endeavor to reach Bedford by the evening of the 2d. of July."<sup>230</sup>

Washington's letter indicated a change of venue on the part of the American general, which occasioned a change of routes as well. Until now, King's Ferry had been the destination of the French forces; at this time Philipsburg became the new gathering point. The move southward removed any doubts, if there were any, as to the objective of the campaign: the political and military center of British power in America, Sir Henry Clinton's headquarters in New York, had been targeted for an attack. But since Quarter-Master de Beville and his aides had prepared neither maps nor itineraries for this eleventh day of march from Newport, there is no official source to indicate which route was taken.<sup>231</sup> As Rochambeau redirected his Brigade to Mount Kisco, (known as North Castle after 1722 and as New Castle after 1791) the following day, his troops marched south on Ridgebury Road to Tacoma Trail. Next they took CT SR 33 on to Ridgefield, where they turned east onto SR 35 and soon crossed into Westchester County and New York. At Mill River Road they turned south again until they reached NY-SR 172 near Poundridge Town Hall whence they turned east to Bedford Village -- or rather what little there was left of it. But a single house had survived the fire Banastre Tarleton's men had set during a raid on the morning of Sunday, 11 July 1779.<sup>232</sup> Clermont-Crèvecoeur recorded on July 2, 1781, that Bedford "had already suffered much damage and, in fact, hardly any houses left standing. This settlement is very small and denuded of every resource."<sup>233</sup> The men of Rochambeau's First Brigade set up their first camp in the State of New York and their 12<sup>th</sup> camp since Newport, in the early afternoon of July 1, 1781, near the lake in the triangle formed by Seminary, Court, and Poundridge Roads.<sup>234</sup> (SITE 1)

The order to form brigades reached the Fourth Division around 10:00 p.m. on July 1, 1781, as it was resting in Newtown. "Without stopping here to rest, my (i.e., the Fourth) Division joined that of the comte de Vioménil (i.e., the Third) to form a brigade

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<sup>230</sup> Quoted in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 31, n. 31. In eighteenth-century military parlance, *brigade* usually denotes a tactical unit composed of infantry, cavalry, and artillery of varying size, though usually larger than one regiment, while *division* is often used for regimental size tactical units of multiple components, though the use of either term was flexible.

<sup>231</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns* Vol. 2, p. 33, note 49.

<sup>232</sup> Dorothy H. Hinitt and Frances R. Duncombe, *The Burning of Bedford July 1779* (Bedford, 1974)

<sup>233</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns* Vol. 1, p. 32.

<sup>234</sup> The route described here is consistent with that of Richard G. Lucid, "Rochambeau in Westchester." *The Westchester Historian of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 35 No. 3, (July 1959), pp. 63- 65.

commanded by the latter and led by M. Collot." The next day "the Second Brigade left Newtown and marched 15 miles to Ridgebury, where it arrived at eleven o'clock (i.e., a.m.). It was preceded on its march to the camp by an advance detachment of grenadiers and chasseurs. I was ordered to lead them and to choose a good position for them a mile ahead of the brigade on the road to New York, where they camped after stationing sentries at all points leading in from enemy territory. Here we received a change of itinerary."<sup>(4)</sup> The main body of troops camped close to the Congregational Church along the road to Danbury, the advance guard about one mile south at the intersection of Old Stagecoach Road and Ridgebury Road. At midnight July 2/3, the Second Brigade received orders to proceed to North Castle, 22 miles away. Three hours later the troops were on their way.

Since it marched to North Castle directly from Ridgebury rather than via Ridgefield, its route was different from that of the First Brigade. After leaving Ridgebury on Ridgebury Road, the men turned east onto Mopus Bridge Road, which becomes Wallace Road in the State of New York, to North Salem, where they entered NY State Route 116. Here they continued on SR 116 (Titicus Road) to SR 121, south on SR 121 to Grant Corner and Hawley Road to the Old Post Road (Mead Street) past Lake Waccabuc. Continuing on the Old Post Road they turned east again (SR 35/124), crossed the Cross River on a wooden bridge now covered by the Cross River Reservoir, and continued on SR 121 to Bedford Village. Near Camp 1 of the First Brigade (**SITE 1**) in Bedford Village, the routes of the First and Second Brigades merged again. The Second Brigade did not stop but continued on Guard Hill Road to Baldwin Road and on to SR 172 (South Bedford Road) to Bedford Four Corners and Mount Kisco. Having covered the 22/24 - mile march in just about 8 hours time, the Second Brigade arrived at the edge of Leonard Park and the grounds of the Northern Westchester Hospital Center (junction of Routes 117 and 172) in Mount Kisco around 13:00 on July 3. According to Lauberdière, North Castle was a village of "no more than four or five houses situated close to a very extensive pond. It is not [a] natural [pond] and the water does not flow into it but via dykes."<sup>235</sup> Here the First Brigade, just arrived after an easy march from near-by Bedford on the same route as that the Second Brigade had taken, had set up Camp 13 to await the arrival of the Second Brigade and of Lauzun's Legion.<sup>236</sup> (**SITE 2**)

In Mount Kisco, Berthier recorded that "the grenadiers and chasseurs camped on a height to the left of the New York Road in front of a pond that adjoins the North Castle Meeting House. The rest of the army was encamped on high ground in back of the pond and the little North Castle River [Kisco River], with their left at the meeting-house and their right resting on a wood." The town itself, so Berthier, "has few houses, and they are widely separated. The headquarters was very poorly housed -- just how poorly you will understand when I tell you that the assistant quarter-masters general were obliged to sleep in the open on piles of straw, which was, to boot, rather too green." North Castle Meeting House was St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church founded in 1761, (demolished in 1819, resurrected as St. Mark's Protestant Episcopal Church from 1851-1911), which

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<sup>235</sup> Lauberdière, *Journal*, fol. 72 .

<sup>236</sup> See Richard G. Lucid and Arthur I. Nernhard, "Northcastle Camp." *The Westchester Historian* Vol. 35 No. 1, (January 1959), pp. 3-8.

stood at the intersection of East Main Street/Corner of St. Mark's Place in Mount Kisco, just a few hundred feet from the site of the French camp.<sup>237</sup> (SITE 3)

They did not have to wait long for Lauzun. In the evening of June 30, while enjoying a ball in Monroe/New Stratford, the *duc* had received orders from Washington via his aide Lieutenant-Colonel David Cobb to march immediately to Bedford via Ridgefield where Washington expected him in the evening of July 2, for an attack at Morrisania.<sup>238</sup> Early in the morning of July 1, Lauzun broke camp in New Stratford and headed for Ridgefield on CT-SR 102.<sup>239</sup> Lauzun and his men encamped in the Scotland district of Ridgefield "along the ridge east of the North Salem Road" some 9 miles south of the main army.<sup>240</sup>

On July 2, Lauzun's Legion joined Rochambeau and his First Brigade on the march to Bedford Village, where Lauzun's troops rested briefly with Rochambeau's infantry near the lake that forms part of the triangle created by Seminary, Court, and Poundridge Roads. (SITE 1) As the infantry was making camp, Lauzun set out on a night march to meet up with American General Benjamin Lincoln. Following SR 22, the Old Post Road, past Wampus Pond through Armonk south to the Kensico Reservoir, (south of which it becomes White Plains Roads) through East Chester and West Chester, Lauzun's troops were late in reaching Morrisania at the juncture of the Harlem and East Rivers in the morning of July 3. Morrisania was the estate of General Lewis Morris and occupied by the loyalists of James De Lancey. Lauzun, Fersen and de Vauban, two of Rochambeau's aides who had permission to accompany the duke, could not prevent the failure of the two-pronged surprise attack on British posts, once the enemy had become aware of Lincoln's movements.<sup>241</sup> Following a brief encounter with De Lancey's Loyalists, Lauzun withdrew in the evening of July 3 to Valentine's Hill and camped on the East Chester Road. The next day, July 4, his men marched to Wampus Pond where they joined Rochambeau's infantry on its march to Philipsburg on the 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Herbert B. Howe, "'St. Georges' - The Old Northcastle Church." *Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 5 No. 2, (April 1929), pp. 37- 39.

<sup>238</sup> The correspondence surrounding the Morrisania raid is in Washington, *Writings*, Vol. 22, pp. 291-331.

<sup>239</sup> See Silvio Bedini, *Ridgefield in Review* (Ridgefield, 1958), pp. 133-139, and George L. Rockwell, *The History of Ridgefield, Connecticut* (Ridgefield, 1927) p. 135.

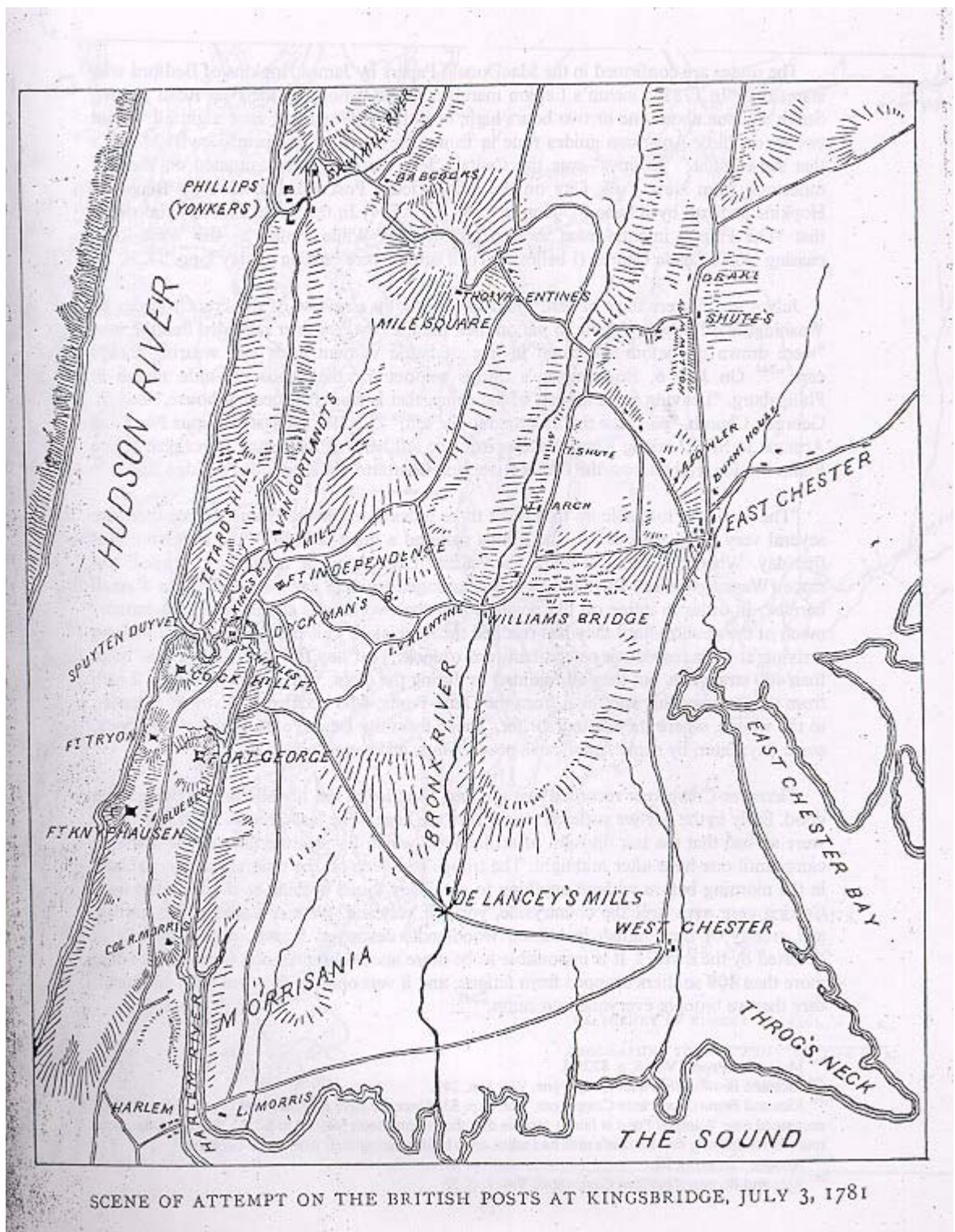
<sup>240</sup> Bedini, *Ridgefield*, p.136.

<sup>241</sup> Both sides gave different reasons for the failure of the attack, each side blaming the other. A good brief overview is found in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 32, note 33. See also Acomb, *Closen*, p. 89; Washington *Diaries*, Vol. 1, pp. 297-299, and Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle* (Hallowell, ME, 1830; repr. Boston, 1962), pp. 214-218. An older analysis is John Austin Stevens, "The Attempt upon the British Posts at Kingsbridge" in his "The Operations of the Allied Armies before New York, 1781" *Magazine of American History* Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1880), pp. 4-9 and 34-41. See also Lloyd Ultan, *Legacy of the Revolution. The Valentine-Varian House*. (New York, 1983), pp. 50-53.

<sup>242</sup> On July 6, "our generals found the Lauzun Legion on the road." Acomb, *Closen*, p. 90. Lauberdière wrote that Lauzun "camped four miles from G[ener]al Washington on the left bank of the Bronx." On the 6<sup>th</sup> it "left the position it had taken after the march to Morrisania and went to camp at the left flank of the French camp." This is confirmed in the McDonald Papers Vol. 5, p. 738, by Josiah Quinby of Newcastle, aged 85, on 25 October 1847: "The French once lay south-east of Wampus Pond on lands belonging to Job Coxe and Marston Brundage where they built ovens. I think the French were there a week or two." They stayed only three days, but there seem to have been ovens there: see Josham Carpenter of North Castle, on 30 October 1847, in Vol. 5, p. 771. "The French army built two very large ovens about 40 rods north of Sand's Mills where they baked five hundred loaves at a time in the two." (1 rod=5.5 yards) Sand's Mills, where John André's captors had handed their prisoner over to Lt.-Col. Jameson in September 1780, was north of Armonk on SR 128 near the A.L. Ehrmann Park. It was demolished early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.







The routes are confirmed in the MacDonald Papers by James Hopkins of Bedford who states that "In 1781, Lauzun's Legion marched from Bedford by the Post Road passing Smith's at sun about one or two hours high, or rather I should say, near nightfall. About twenty or thirty American guides rode in front. They went to (General Lewis) Morris's that same night." "Smith's" was the Captain John Smith Tavern, situated on the 37<sup>th</sup> milestone from New York City on the old Danbury Post Road, owned by Benjamin

Hopkins and run by Ichabod Ogden in 1781. (SITE 4) In the same interview he stated that "The French infantry next day passed towards White Plains by the West Road passing North Castle Church (I believe). Their drums were beating all day long."<sup>243</sup>

July 4 and 5 were days of rest, interrupted only by a review of the French forces by Washington on July 5. Unable to put on their parade best, Berthier recorded that the men "were drawn up before the camp in line of battle without arms and wearing forage caps."<sup>244</sup> On July 6, Rochambeau's troops set out for the almost 20-mile march to Philipsburg. "Leaving from the left of the camp, that is from the meeting house," i.e., St. George's Church, "you take the first road to the left," i.e., SR 128 past Wampus Pond and Armonk to SR 22, along Kensico Reservoir, the left bank of the Bronx River past White Plains Station, right across the Bronx River and Chatterton Hill, to today's Ridge Road."<sup>245</sup>

"The road was tolerable up to a point three miles from White Plains, where there are several very steep mountains. The troops suffered a great deal from the excessive heat that day. When our generals found the Lauzun Legion on the road, they stopped; and since (Washington and Rochambeau) had arranged to meet each other there in a small barrack, in order to agree on the position that the two armies should take, we scoured much of the country until they had reached their decision. This prevented the troops from arriving at their respective camps before 6 o'clock. That day the army left behind more than 400 stragglers, but they all rejoined us during the night, with the exception of 2 men from the Bourbonnais and three from the Deux-Ponts, who decided in favor of deserting to the woods, where they found shelter. Those from the Deux-Ponts were brought back, some days later, by some Americans, *good Whigs*, and were flogged."<sup>246</sup>

Clermont-Crèvecœur recorded that the first 14 miles of the 17-mile march "were quite good. Early in the day we suffered much from the heat." The last three miles of "the roads were so bad that the last division of artillery, to which I was attached, did not arrive in camp until one hour after midnight. The troops had been on the road since three o'clock in the morning before without anything to eat. They found nothing to drink on the way. Casting your eyes over the countryside, you felt very sad, for it revealed all the horrors and cruelty of the English in burned woodlands, destroyed houses, and fallow fields deserted by the owners. It is impossible to be more uncomfortable than we were that day; more than 400 soldiers dropped from fatigue, and it was only by frequent halts and much care that we brought everyone into camp."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 6, p. 822/23.

<sup>244</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 249.

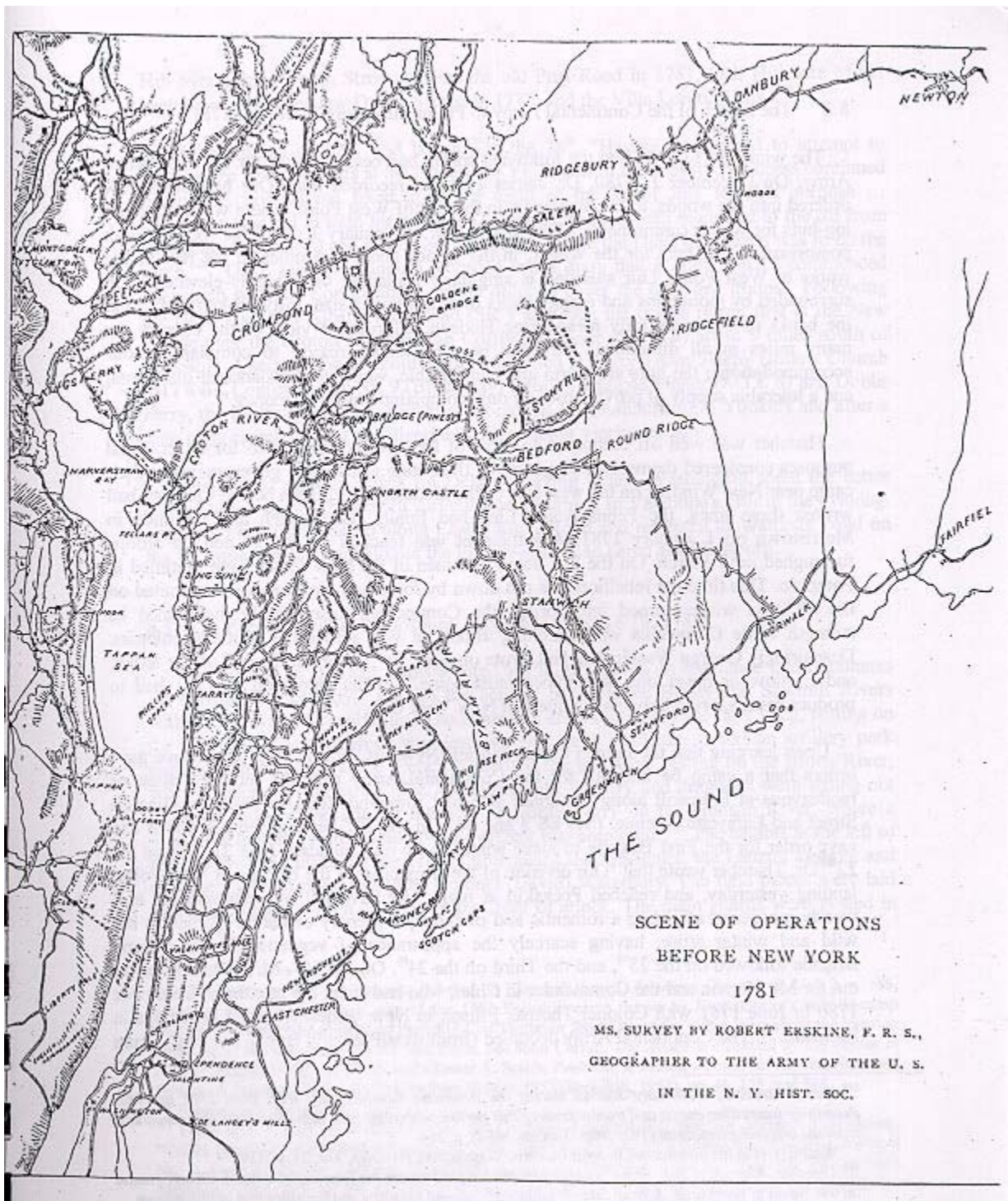
<sup>245</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 2, p. 33. Since we have evidence that Lauzun's Legion was encamped near Wampus Pond is fair to assume that the infantry took SR 128 to SR 22, following the same route to Philipsburg that Lauzun's men had taken once before during their march to Morrisania.

<sup>246</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, p. 90.

<sup>247</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 32.







## 8.2 The March of the Continental Army to Philipsburg, July 2 - July 4, 1781

The winter of 1780/81 and the following spring had been difficult for the Continental Army. On December 1, 1780, Dr. James Thatcher recorded that "Our brigade is now ordered into the woods, in the highlands, in the rear of West Point, where we are to build log-huts for winter cantonments." Five weeks later, on January 3, 1781, his "brigade took possession of our huts for the winter, in the woods about two miles in the rear of the works at West Point. Our situation is singularly romantic, on a highly-elevated spot,

surrounded by mountains and craggy rocks of a prodigious size, lofty broken clefts, and the banks of the beautifully meandering Hudson, affording a view of the country for many miles in all directions. We have now no longer reason to complain of our accommodations; the huts are warm and comfortable, wood in abundance at our doors, and a tolerable supply of provisions. Our only complaint is want of money."<sup>248</sup>

Thatcher was well off compared to most of the enlisted men, who for all practical purposes considered themselves forgotten by their state and federal governments in their camp near New Windsor on the west side of the Hudson River. Even before Thatcher had written these lines, the Pennsylvania Line had finally had enough and mutinied in Morristown on 1 January 1781. A settlement was reached on the 9<sup>th</sup> and the troops furloughed until March. On the 20<sup>th</sup> about 200 men of the New Jersey Line mutinied in Pompton. This time the rebellion was put down by force and two men were executed on the 27<sup>th</sup>. As winter turned into spring, the Continental Army barely maintained its strength while Cornwallis was marching almost at will across the southern colonies. Despairingly George Washington had wrote on April 9: "We are at the end of our tether, and ... now or never our deliverance must come."<sup>249</sup> The campaign of 1781 had to produce results, preferably the conquest of New York City.

Upon learning that the French troops had left Newport, Washington on 16 June gave orders that a camp be laid out for the Continental Army near the intended place of rendezvous at Peekskill along the south side of Crompond Road between Washington Street and Lafayette Avenue. (SITES 5 and 40) On the 18<sup>th</sup> he brigaded his troops and gave order for the First Brigade to leave winter camp on Thursday, June 21, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dr. Thatcher wrote that "Our division of the army crossed the Hudson at West Point-landing yesterday, and reached Peekskill at night. We have left our cantonments in a woody mountain, affording a romantic and picturesque scenery of nature clothed in her wild and winter attire, having scarcely the appearance of vegetation." The Second Brigade followed on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and the Third on the 24<sup>th</sup>. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Mrs Washington set out for Mt. Vernon and the Commander in Chief, who had spent the months of December 1780 to June 1781 with Colonel Thomas Ellison in New Windsor, joined his troops in Peekskill.<sup>250</sup> The Continental Army occupied (from west/Peekskill Bay to the East) Drum Hill overlooking South Street, part of the old Post Road in 1781, Oak Hill, site of the hanging of convicted spy Daniel Strang in 1777, and the Villa Loretto Hills.<sup>251</sup>

The campaign of 1781 had begun. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, "Having determined to attempt to surprize the Enemies Posts at the No. end of Yk. Island, if the prospt. of success continued

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<sup>248</sup> James Thatcher, *A Military Journal during the American Revolutionary War, from 1775 to 1783, describing interesting events and transactions of this period; with numerous historical facts and anecdotes, from the original manuscript* (1823, repr. Boston, 1854), p. 264.

<sup>249</sup> Washington in his instructions to John Laurens. Washington, *Writings*, Vol. 21, p. 439.

<sup>250</sup> Thatcher, *Journal*, p. 264. There is a commemorative plaque near the location of Colonel Ellison's home on 9W South in Newburgh. A week later Washington changed his plans and the allies met in Philipsburg.

<sup>251</sup> The identification of the campsite is based on Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 2, p. 186, based on a note written on a map of the 1782 Peekskill camp drawn by Rochambeau's aide-de-camp Cromot du Bourg. I am grateful to Peekskill City Historian John Curran for information about the location of the camp and the images on the Site Form. See John Curran, *The Attack at Peekskill by the British in 1777* (Peekskill, 1998), pp. 91-93, and Chester A. Smith, *Peekskill, A Friendly Town: Its Historic Sites and Shrines: A Pictorial History of the City from 1654 to 1952* (Peekskill, 1952), pp. 46, 125, and 148.

favourable, and having fixed upon the night of the 2d of July for this purpose ... everything was put in train for it and the Count de Rochambeau requested to file off from Ridgebury to Bedford and hasten his Mar (ch) -- while the Duke de Lauzen was to do the same."<sup>252</sup> On 2 July, Washington recorded in his diary that at 3:00 a.m. "I commenced my march with the Continental Army in order to cover the detached troops." Following the New York and Albany Post Road (SR 9 and 9A), the troops rested first at the New Bridge over the Croton near the Van Cortlandt Manor (**SITE 6**) about 9 miles south of Peekskill. A second rest of about 2 hours followed at Tarry Town/Sleepy Hollow Church (**SITE 7**). Continuing on SR 9 (Broadway) through Philipse Manor (**SITE 8**) and Dobbs Ferry, the Continental Army turned east onto SR 9A (Ashburton) in Yonkers and after a long night march arrived at Valentine's Hill at about sunrise on July 3.

The planned surprise attack on Delancy having failed, Washington spent the better part of July 3 on an impromptu surveillance, returning to Valentine's Hill in the evening. Lauzun's Legion bivouaced along East Chester Road and retreated to Wampus Pond on the 4<sup>th</sup> while Washington laid out the Franco-American camp at Philipsburg.

### 8.3 The Encampment at Philipsburg, July 4/6-August 18/19, 1781

"The camp," so Berthier, "was located at Philipsburg on an eminence that dominates the surrounding country," i.e., on the heights between the Bronx and Sawmill Rivers within the town of Greenburgh. "The American army composed the right wing, resting on the Saw Mill River to which you descend by a steep bluff; the American artillery park occupied the center; and the French composed the left wing, resting on the Bronx River, whose banks are very steep. The American light infantry and dragoons were strung out from the right of the line all the way to Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson River, where a battery of four 12-pounders and two howitzers was emplaced."<sup>253</sup> The heights at the left of the line were occupied by the French grenadiers and chasseurs, the Lauzun Legion, and an American unit commanded by Colonel (David) Waterbury. The field pieces were laid before the camp at each opening in the front of attack. The main guards were posted in advance on the most strategic heights, guarding all points at which the enemy could approach the camp."<sup>254</sup>

Lauberdière described White Plains, "a name deduced, I believe, from the color of the flowers which cover the ground during the pretty season" as "covered with bunches (or pockets) of trees, of ravines, and of heights. Closen, who had been sent ahead to Philipsburg with Cobb on the 4<sup>th</sup>, described Philipsburg as "a certain district containing only some hills and wasteland, almost uninhabited and full of heather and thorns."<sup>255</sup> The "French were encamped one quarter of a mile from the left wing of the American camp,

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<sup>252</sup> Washington, *Diaries*, Vol. 2, p. 231.

<sup>253</sup> For a brief history of Dobbs Ferry in the American Revolutionary War see William S. Hadaway, "'Dobbs Ferry' in the Revolution" *Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 8 No. 3, (July 1932), pp. 114-121. For a brief history see Margaret J. Lane, "They say 'Dobbs Ain't Melodius.'" *Ibid.*, Vol. 49 No. 4, (Fall 1973), pp. 77-81, and Alice Munro Haagensen, "The Blockhouse defending Dobbs Ferry in Rockland." *Ibid.*, Vol. 19 No. 4, (October 1975), pp. 10-17.

<sup>254</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 249.

<sup>255</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, pp. 89-91.

from which they were separated by a small stream, on which several communications posts were established. To the right of the American camp, three miles away, was Dobbs Ferry, on the North River (or Hudson), and to the left of the French camp, half a mile away, was the little Bronx River, which could be forded in several places; the mounted patrols relieved each other continually along this river, and several small posts were established on both banks." These mounted patrols were provided by Lauzun's hussars encamped on Chatterton Hill. On 17 July the hussars moved about 2 miles to the north-east toward Silver Lake and the grenadiers and chasseurs of the Second Brigade (i.e., the Soissonnais and Saintonge) took over their camp on Chatterton Hill.<sup>256</sup>

In an interview with McDonald in 1847, Dr. Nehemiah U. Tompkins remembered that "In 1781, some of the French lay at Chatterton Hill. But the main body encamped on my uncle Isaac Tompkins's farm. The French park of Cannon were on a smooth piece of ground west of my uncle's old house and towards Col. Odell's."<sup>257</sup> John Tompkins of Greenburgh told McDonald on 7 September 1846 that "The French cannon were placed in the smooth field west of my house and of the old house, and where a ridge commences which runs towards Colonel Odell's. The main body of the French was also encamped west of our houses. Some of them were encamped on Underhill's ridge four or five hundred yards south or southwest of our house." *Underhill's ridge* is today's Sunningdale Country Club on Underhill Road,<sup>258</sup> (SITE 9), the *smooth piece of ground* is the site of the former Henry Gaisman Estate, part of the property purchased by John Tompkins in 1737 and now Hart's Brook Nature Preserve & Arboretum on Ridge Road leading west to Dobbs Ferry. On the ridge overlooking Central Park Avenue where the artillery was placed stands today a religious facility of the archdiocese of New York.<sup>259</sup> (SITE 10)

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<sup>256</sup> Some time before August 1, the Legion "returned to its first camp on the other side of the Bronx; the battalion of grenadiers and chasseurs commanded by M. de La Valette (of the Saintonge) occupied the camp abandoned by Lauzun." Acomb, *Closen*, p. 103.

<sup>257</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 4, p. 480. Vol. 4, page 493.

<sup>258</sup> A marker listed in Historical Area Markers of New York State (New York, 1970) describing the 139 large Historical Area Markers put up at rest areas along state roads in the 1960s and on the web under [www.nysm.nysed.gov/srv/largemarkers/index.html](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/srv/largemarkers/index.html) with this inscription could not be located:

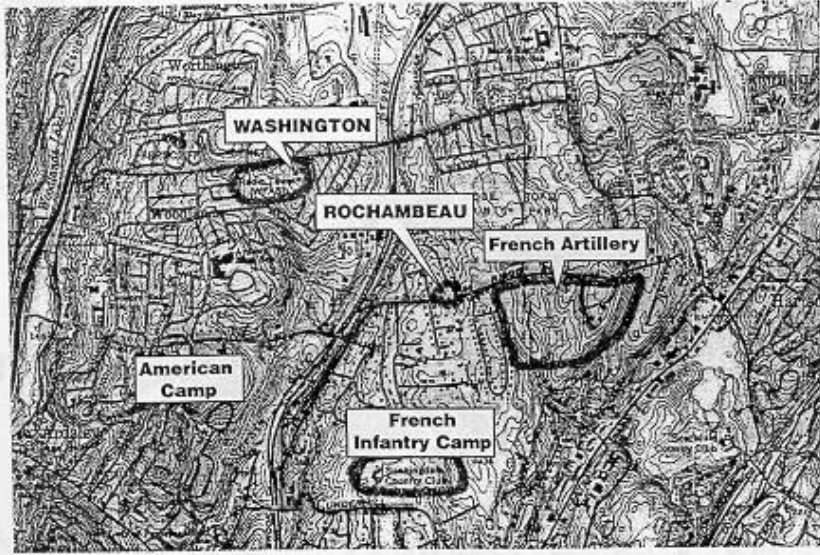
FRENCH CAMP

HEREABOUTS, FRENCH TROOPS,  
UNDER COUNT DE ROCHAMBEAU,  
SENT TO ASSIST WASHINGTON  
MADE THEIR CAMP JULY 6,  
TO AUGUST 19, 1781.

Location: UNDERHILL RD. & CLAYTON ST., E. OF ARDSLEY

<sup>259</sup> Today the hillside is covered with tall trees, offering no view whatsoever. In Closen's days it was but a "wasteland, almost uninhabited and full of heather and thorns," i.e., low-growth shrubbery. For an example of changing landscape see the images of Fort Lafayette taken in 1904 attached to site forms 23 and 28!



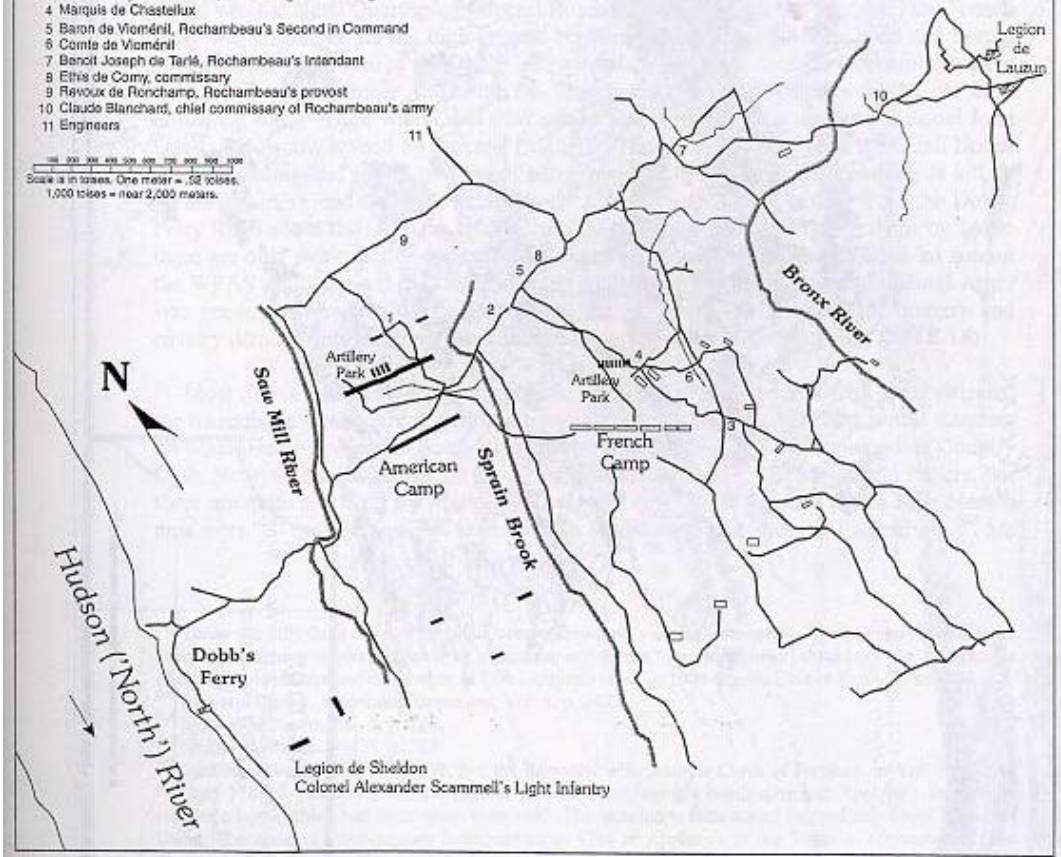


41 LODGINGS OF STAFF HEADQUARTERS [PHILIPSBURG CAMP]

### Logements of the General Staff

- 1 George Washington
- 2 Comte de Rochambeau
- 3 Pierre François de Berville, Maréchal général de logis
- 4 Marquis de Chastellux
- 5 Baron de Vioménil, Rochambeau's Second in Command
- 6 Comte de Vioménil
- 7 Benoît Joseph de Tilly, Rochambeau's Intendant
- 8 Ethis de Corry, commissary
- 9 Révoux de Ronchamp, Rochambeau's provost
- 10 Claude Blanchard, chief commissary of Rochambeau's army
- 11 Engineers

Scale in toises. One toise = 52 1/2 feet.  
1,000 toises = near 2,500 meters.







"The headquarters," so Berthier, "was set up behind the camp in several widely separated houses."<sup>260</sup> Widow Sarah Bates was Rochambeau's hostess; Colonel John Odell after whom the house is named today, had been one of the guides of the Continental Army. His son Jackson Odell was still alive and living in the house in the 1840s. Interviewed by McDonald on September 12, 1845, he declared that "Rochambeau's Head Quarters were at Colonel John Odell's house then owned by one Bates and now by Jackson Odell."<sup>261</sup> (SITES 11 and 12) References to the headquarters of both generals are frequent in the McDonald interviews and leave no doubt as to their location. On Friday, 3 October 1845, a "Mrs. Churchill, born Taylor, living on the Tuckeyhoe Road near Hart's corner," told McDonald that she "was a girl 15 or 16 years of age in 1781 when the French army lay south of the Bates House now occupied by Jackson Odell. This house was the Head Quarters of General Rochambeau during all the time (sic) the French army was encamped on the high ground between the [Ikendahl] Allaire road and Sprain Brook on the south side of the Dobbs Ferry Road. While there General Rochambeau gave four or five large dinner parties to the French and American officers in the old barn northwest of the house which was then owned by Mr. Bates, afterwards by Colonel John Odell, and is now owned by Jackson Odell."<sup>262</sup> Though the barn is gone the Odell House is still standing and in the process of being restored by the SAR. But nothing is left of "Washington's Head Quarters ... at Joseph Appleby's about half a mile from the Dobbs

<sup>260</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 249

<sup>261</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 138.

<sup>262</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 187.

Ferry Road about the same (as much) from the Saw mill river."<sup>263</sup> Of the Appleby house there are only stone fences and cellar holes left from the farm on the wooded lot behind the WFAS radio station. (SITE 13) Facing south toward Ardsley, the Continental Army was encamped between Sprain Brook and the Saw Mill River with light infantry and cavalry detachments covering the front and the approaches to Dobbs Ferry. (SITE 14)

Most of Washington's and Rochambeau's officers were quartered with local citizens; the marquis de Chastellux stayed at a house on John Tompkins' land that is still standing on South Healy Avenue in Scarsdale near the eastern border of the Sunningdale Country Club. No eyewitness account of Chastellux could be found in the McDonald Papers, but there are quite a few on the duc de Lauzun, who "resided at a house where John Norton now lives,"<sup>264</sup> i.e., the home of Captain John Falconer on Broadway in Philipsburg.<sup>265</sup> Ms Davis remembered "the Duke de Luzerne" as "very polite, had a handsome person, wore moustaches, was liberal with money." Handsome, polite, liberal with money: these are all attributes fitting for Lauzun. But a mustache? Grenadiers and chasseurs wore them as signs of their elite status with a line regiment, and so did Lauzun's hussars. No portrait of a mustachioed *duc*, a highly unusual facial ornamentation in eighteenth-century America or France, has come to light, but other eyewitnesses confirm Mrs Davis. On 5 November 1845, William Griffen of Mamaroneck quoted Lauzun as saying "The women of this country don't like my whiskers. I can't get along with them -- but I can't cut them off."<sup>266</sup>

John Tompkins of Greenburgh told McDonald how his father "Isaac Tompkins was a young married man in July and August 1781, when the French army encamped on our farm, and lived then in a log house, a little north of my grand-father's John Tompkins. In that same month of July my mother had her first child. A French general (or officer) was about taking possession of our house for his quarters, but hearing of my mother's situation relinquished his intention and erected his marquée near the rocks north of the house and very close to it. This officer was very kind to my mother during her confinement, frequently sending her presents of wines and other delicacies (Dumas? Lamothe? &c?). A French general (I don't remember his name) – it might have been de Beville – took my grandfather's house, which was a little southwest of my father's, for his quarters and occupied it during the time they remained encamped at Greenburgh."<sup>267</sup>

On both counts Tompkins' memory did not fail him. The "French general ... at Gilbert Underhill's about 400 yards south of our house," was de Beville, whose headquarters were located near the junction of present-day Central Park Avenue and Underhill Road.

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<sup>263</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 138. See the interview with Andrew Corsa of Fordham in Vol. 5, p. 690: "In July 1781, I was up for several days at General Washington's headquarters at Appleby's in order to reclaim a horse which had been taken from me." The location is determined beyond any doubt by James Owen, "Location of Washington's headquarters in 1781 at Appleby's in the Town of Greenburgh." *The Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 8 No. 3, (July 1932), pp. 101-108. Owen already suggested in his article almost 75 years ago that a marker be placed on or near this site. See also Morgan H. Seacord, "Site of the Appleby House." *Ibid.*, Vol. 10 No. 1, (January 1934), pp. 8-13.

<sup>264</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 263. Interview with Zipporah Davis, wife of Abraham Davis.

<sup>265</sup> The image of Falconer's home is taken from Elizabeth G.H.Coles, "Washington in White Plains and Vicinity." *Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 8 No. 1, (January 1931), pp. 1-18, p. 8.

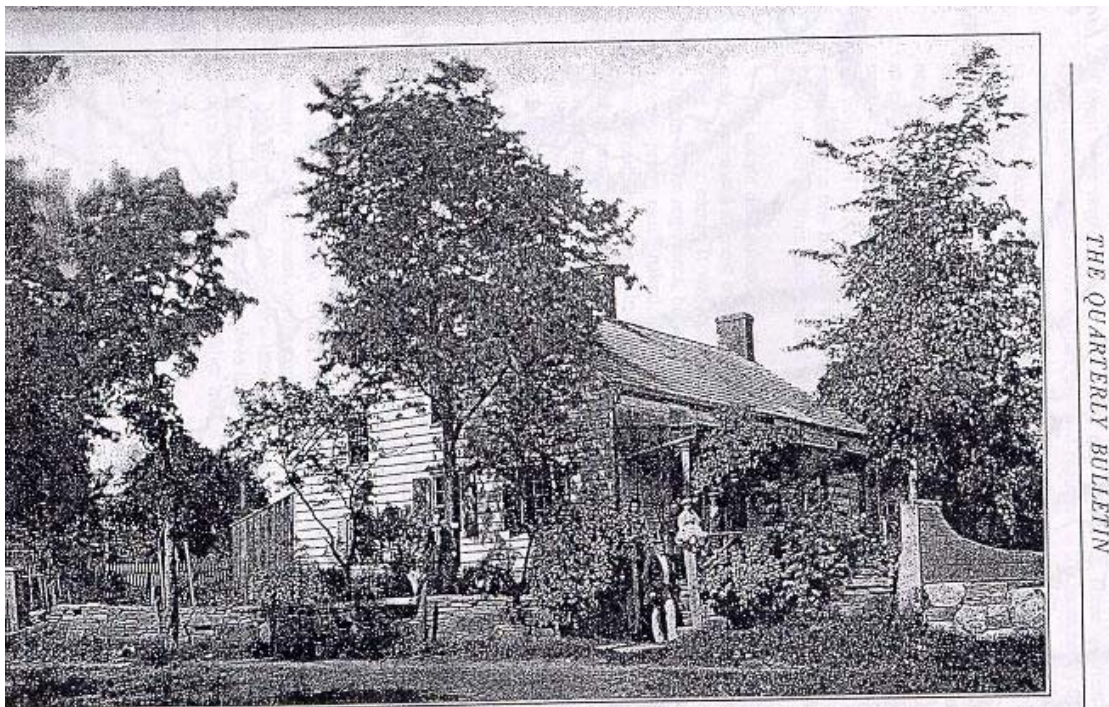
<sup>266</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 3, p. 403.

<sup>267</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 4, p. 493, on 7 September 1846.



The officers who relinquished his father's house were most likely Charles de Lameth, who together with fellow assistant quarter masters general and aides-de-camp Mathieu Dumas and Alexandre Berthier had been assigned a house which they found too far away from that of their commanding officer de Beville. Instead they built themselves a marquee made of six soldier's tents complete with an English bulldog to warn them of approaching strangers. In their journals, Dumas, Berthier, and Lameth give detailed descriptions of the pastoral life, the "six weeks of perfect happiness," they led in the "marquee". Even General Washington came to visit.<sup>268</sup>

Following informal visits on the 7<sup>th</sup>, Washington reviewed the French forces on the 8<sup>th</sup>. "We hadn't had more than a day to repair the disorder of the march, but our troops nevertheless appeared in the grandest parade uniform. M. de Rochambeau took his place in front of the white flag of his oldest regiment and saluted General Washington. ... Our general received the greatest compliments for the beauty of his troops. It is true that without doubt those that we have with us were superb at our departure from France."<sup>269</sup>



From John Rosch Collection

JOHN FALCONER HOUSE

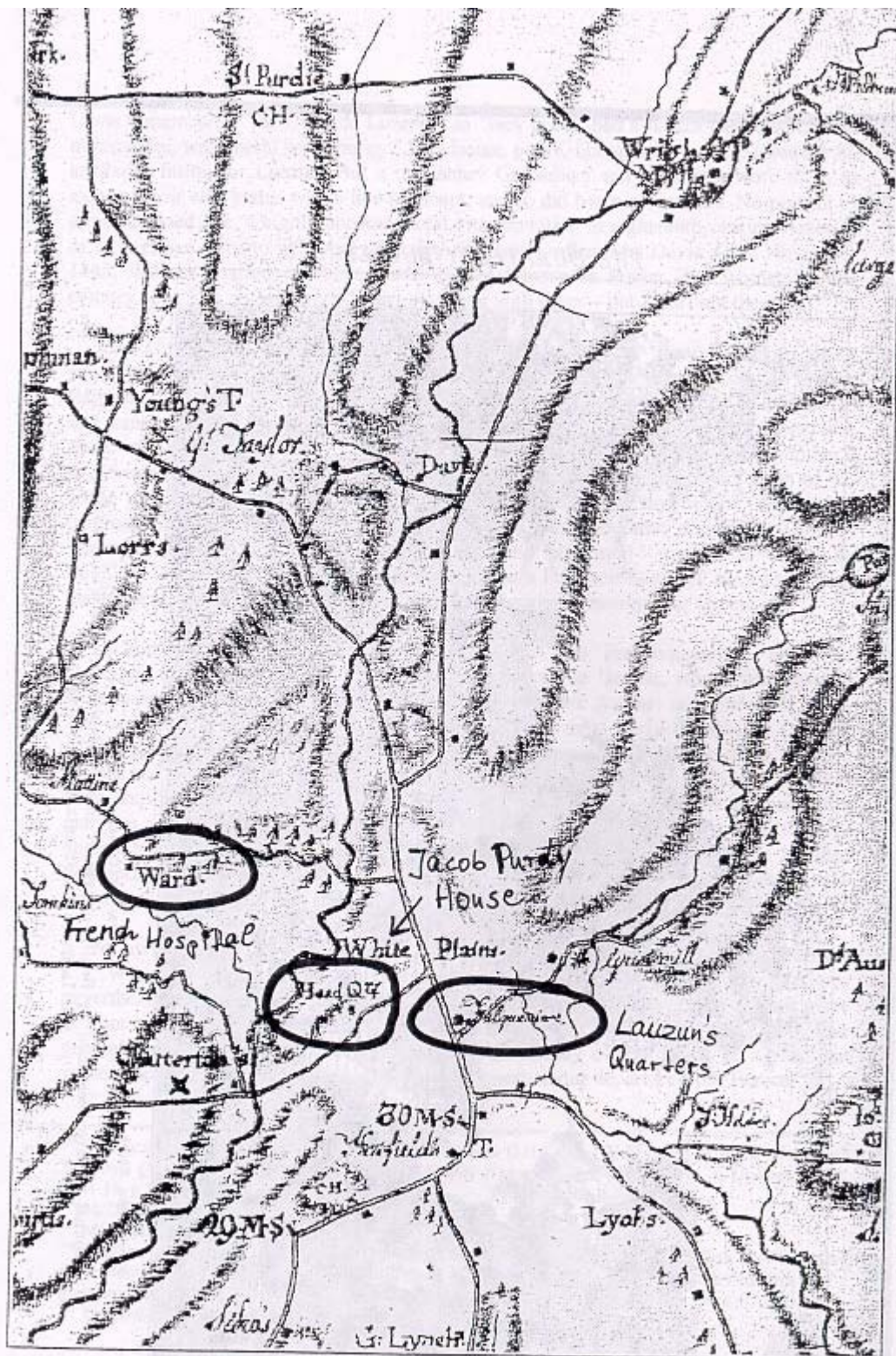
Reputed to have been used by British officers at time of Battle of White Plains and by Duc de Lauzun in 1781 as a headquarters.

<sup>268</sup> Berthier as quoted in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 250. Here also the other descriptions. John Tomkins remembered that "The French general whose tent was near my father's gave a great entertainment while there, erecting a bower for the purpose on the large flat rock there. (Dumas?)"

<sup>269</sup> Lauberdière, *Journal*, fol. 74v.







The next day "all the American army presented arms; General Washington invited our headquarters staff to come to see it." Baron Cloisen was in for a surprise. "I had a chance to see the American army, man for man. It was really painful to see these brave men, almost naked with only some trousers and little linen jackets, most of them without

stockings, but, would you believe it? Very cheerful and healthy in appearance. A quarter of them were negroes, merry, confident, and sturdy. ... Three quarters of the Rhode Island regiment consists of negroes, and that regiment is the most neatly dressed, the best under arms, and the most precise in its manoeuvres (sic)."<sup>270</sup> Clermont-Crèvecoeur "went to the American camp, which contained approximately 4,000 men. In beholding this army I was struck, not by its smart appearance, but by its destitution: the men were without uniforms and covered with rags; most of them were barefoot. They were of all sizes, down to children who could not have been over fourteen. There were many negroes, mulattoes, etc. "<sup>271</sup> To Cromot du Bourg, the Continental Army seemed "to be in as good order as possible for an army composed of men without uniforms and with narrow resources." He too, like all observers, singled out the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island Regiment for praise: "The Rhode Island Regiment, among others, is extremely fine," though it provided but a few hundred of the "great number of negroes in the army," whose strength he estimated at "four thousand and some hundred men at the most."

The comte de Lauberdière gave probably the most detailed observations. The whole army "consisted at most of 4000 men. We found them lined up in the order of battle in front of their camp. It was not a very pleasant sight not because of the attire and the uniform of the regiments, because at present, and ever since they have been in the war, they are pretty much naked. But I remember their great accomplishments and I can not see without a certain admiration that it was with these same men that General Washington had so gloriously defended his country. The officers were in the uniform of their regiment; they are armed and salute with the spontoon." What also bothered Lauberdière was that the Americans "lined up in the ranks according to seniority. This method infinitely hurts the eye and the beautiful appearance of the troops because it often places a tall man between two short ones and a short one between two tall ones." What a difference to the French line, which was "well lined up, of an equal height, well dressed."

Viewing the American camp, Lauberdière noticed how "The Americans are camped in the English manner in two parallel rows of tents, under arms they are aligned in two lines according to height."<sup>272</sup> When the weather is fine they stack their arms in front of their tents on an easel (or towel horse, a *chevalet*) and retrieve them at night or when it rains. This arrangement is subject to many inconveniences." Comparing equipment, Lauberdière noticed how "Our soldiers were overloaded and too warmly dressed for the summer. The Americans, on the contrary, have nothing but a kind of shirt or jacket and a big pair of trousers. Right now their coat is worn only at three-quarter length; they have no shoes. They trouble themselves little with provisions: actually they are given just a bit of corn meal of which each soldier makes his own bread. Each man is also provided a small woolen blanket which he always carries with him. This method is good in a country where the cold of the night follows quickly the searing heat. Since the havresack of the American soldier is not burdened any further this provides light and quick cover, something that we can not give our troops for fear of augmenting a load that is already

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<sup>270</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, pp. 90/92.

<sup>271</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, pp. 33/34.

<sup>272</sup> Baron Closen observed this as well: "The American army is always drawn up in two lines" but added significantly: "a custom which we have also adopted." Acomb, *Closen*, p. 92. Rochambeau had ordered to line up in two, rather than the three, rows as prescribed by the ordonnance of 1776, during the crossing on board the *Duc de Bourgogne* and had the order entered in the *livre d'ordre*.

too heavy." Abbé Robin too noted with surprise and approval the differences in French and American uniform and equipment. "Neither do these troops in general wear regular uniforms. ... Several regiments have small white frocks, with fringes, which look well enough; also linen over-alls, large and full, which are very convenient in hot weather and do not at all hinder the free use of the limbs in marching. ... This advantage in dress, I believe, has not been sufficiently considered in France. We are apt to consult the gratification of the eye too far, and forget that the troops were designed to act, and not merely to show themselves and their finery."<sup>273</sup> He was also "astonished to find, that their whole travelling equipage and furniture would not weigh forty pounds" as opposed to the almost 60 pounds plus musket carried by the French.<sup>274</sup>

"The regiments which should have been 600 men strong had barely 250. Many officers were also missing who had not yet rejoined since the army had marched and quit its (winter) quarters. Marriage is the normal condition (*un état*) in America; celibates are little esteemed here. Almost all the officers of the army are married and they often demand permission to return home. ... in that they differ much with our officers and even our soldiers." This often caused officers and men alike to request frequent home leaves and to return late, but Lauberdière thought that "In general our allies are slow (*paresseux*) and they don't inconvenience themselves (*gener*)" more than absolutely necessary.

After the review Washington invited the French officers to his headquarters "where there is always a table set with glasses and many bottles, of wine, rum ... (sic) for the refreshment of those who need it and of which there is always a great number. On meeting someone it is their custom to give each other the right hand and to shake it, and I have often admired the patience and goodness of General Washington who had the courtesy to do this all day long 80 or 100 times for people who presented themselves to him. Such is, it is true, the state of a republic where everyone has his voice."

It is difficult to ascertain how much contact there was between the two armies. Lauberdière wrote that Rochambeau "always had with him and at his table a very great number of American officers. General Washington also had many French (officers)."<sup>275</sup> Washington's secretary Jonathan Trumbull wrote to Colonel Richard Varick on July 13: "The Junction of the two armies is formed at this Place, & has commenced with high seeming Cordiality & Affection, demonstrated by constant Acts of Conviviality & social Harmony. A very fine Body of Troops compose the French Army, which seems anxious to give some Marks of Heroism, to distinguish their Attachment & Military Pride."<sup>276</sup> That same day Dr. Thatcher "received an invitation, with a number of officers of our regiment, to dine with a party of French officers in their camp. We were politely received under an elegant marquee: our entertainment consisted of excellent soup, roast-beef &c., served in French style. The gentlemen appear desirous of cultivating an acquaintance with our officers, but being ignorant of each others' language, we can enjoy but little conversation. The French army exhibit their martial array to the greatest advantage. In the officers we recognize the accomplished gentlemen, free and affable in their manners.

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<sup>273</sup> Abbé Robin, *New Travels through North America* (Philadelphia, 1783), p. 35, in a letter dated Philipsburg, August 4, 1781.

<sup>274</sup> Robin, *Travels*, p. 36

<sup>275</sup> Lauberdière, *Journal*, fol. 75.

<sup>276</sup> Quoted in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 34, note 37.

Their military dress and side-arms are elegant; the troops are under the strictest discipline, and are amply provided with arms and accoutrements, which are kept in the neatest order; they are in complete uniform, coats of white broadcloth, trimmed with green, and white under-dress, and on their heads they wear a singular kind of hat or chapeau. It is unlike our cocked hats in having but two corners instead of three, which gives them a very novel appearance. It has been remarked, to their honor, that during their march from Newport to join our army, their course has been marked with the most exemplary order and regularity, committing no depredations, but conducting towards the inhabitants on their route with great civility and propriety. We now greet them as friends and allies, and they manifest a zealous determination to act in unison with us against the common enemy. This conduct must have a happy tendency to eradicate from the minds of the Americans their ancient prejudices against the French people. They punctually paid their expenses in hard money, which made them acceptable guests wherever they passed; and, in fact, the large quantity of solid coin which they brought into the United States, is to be considered as of infinite importance at the present period of our affairs."<sup>277</sup>

Clermont-Crèvecœur on the other hand wrote that the American artillery officers "were the only ones with whom we occasionally lived."<sup>278</sup> Baron Gallatin finally wrote that "we never had a lot of contact with them. It was rare to see us in their camp and them in ours."<sup>279</sup> One of the reasons for this lack of contact was a lack of money. On August 2, Colonel Ebenezer Huntington wrote his brother Andrew: "We are serving with the French Army where the officers dine in luxury and give us frequent invitations to their tables, we can't go to them, because we can not return the compliment."<sup>280</sup>

Among the enlisted men there was hardly any contact at all, if nothing else because Rochambeau had forbidden it. "No French personnel, including officers, could leave camp without a pass signed by a major general. ... The commanders of the guard were 'to allow no Foreigners, be they Americans or deserters, to enter the precincts [*l'intérieur*] of the army."<sup>281</sup> Private Plumb does not record having met a French soldiers, and neither Privates Flohr of the Deux-Ponts, Amblard of the Soissonnais, or the anonymous soldier in the Bourbonnais admitted ever meeting an American. And though they are contained in the diary of an Englishmen, the observations of Frederick Mackenzie contain more than a grain of truth in them. Under August 9, Mackenzie recorded: "Seven Continental deserters came in this morning. ... They say the common talk in the army is, that New York is to be besieged as soon as the French fleet appears, which is daily expected. By their accounts the Army consists of 4000 Rebels, and 5000 French. The former are very ill supplied with provisions, having lately received only 2 1/2 lb of flour in 8 days, altho' at the same time the French troops were furnished with the 1 1/2 lb of bread pr day, and numbers of them came into the Continental camp, and offered to sell their loaves, which weigh 3 lb for half a Dollar, in Cash, as no other money is circulating. This has given great offence to the Continental Soldiers and Militia, who abuse the French, and say that

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<sup>277</sup> Thatcher, *Journal*, p. 265.

<sup>278</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 34.

<sup>279</sup> Warrington Dawson, ed., "Un Garde-Suisse de Louis XVI au Service de l'Amérique: Le Baron Gaspard de Gallatin." *Le Correspondent* 324 No. 1655 (September 10, 1931), pp. 672-692, p. 676.

<sup>280</sup> Quoted in Scott, *Yorktown*, p. 57. Here and in Kennett, *French Forces*, p. 118, are additional examples for tensions between the two allies.

<sup>281</sup> *Livre d'orde* for July 13 and August 9, quoted in Scott, *Yorktown*, p. 56.

they who have never done any service to the Country are well paid, fed, and clothed, while themselves, who have been fighting for the Country are almost destitute of every thing. The French Soldiers are frequently knocked down, and their loaves taken from them. The French will not suffer the rebel Soldiers to come into their encampment."<sup>282</sup>

But if there was not much (friendly) inter-action between the two armies, the French soldiers still came into contact with a local population anxious to sell its wares for hard money rather than the worthless Continentals with which their own troops were paid. On 10 July, Washington issued a proclamation establishing two markets at Philipsburg: one just behind his house in the American camp, and the other near Rochambeau's headquarters. Provided they had a certificate "signed by two civil Magistrates" showing "their attachment to the American Cause and Interest," they could sell their wares "without Molestation or Imposition."<sup>283</sup> The beneficiaries were of course the French, who paid in bullion. John Tompkins told McDonald how "The French camp formed a good market where everything was paid for in hard money at the highest rate." Many of the interviewees remembered into their old age that the presence of the French was synonymous with money: Mary Beagle of Somers told McDonald in October 1847 that they were "paying liberally for everything they bought or took in hard money."<sup>284</sup> And Abraham Weeks, 82, also of Somers, told McDonald the same month that "They paid for everything in hard money and cut crown and dollars in 1/4<sup>th</sup> and 1/8<sup>th</sup> for change."<sup>285</sup> This led Joseph Rouse, a soldier in a Connecticut Regiment, to complain that "They look much better than our lousey army who have Neither money nor close God Bless the State of Connecticut you noes what I mean."<sup>286</sup>

As a matter of fact, the French seemed to have so much money that sometimes they even lost track of it. "Old Mr (Joseph [Travis] in margin) of Peekskill who owned the upper part of the land where the present village of Peekskill stands, and who owned what was then called the upper dock, used to tell a story of his having, for several days, had possession of a barrel of specie part of the French military chest. The story was this: going out early one morning upon his wharf, he found lying there a strong iron bound cask containing something apparently very heavy. After enquiry in vain for the owner he directed it to be taken for safe keeping to his storehouse. Nearly a week had elapsed when an American officer at the head of a guard of men came to Peekskill describing the cask in question and making anxious enquiry respecting it. On surrendering it Mr. Travers was informed that it contained specie belonging to the French army which had been forwarded from some place above by water and landed by some mistake in the night time, at the wrong spot, by persons ignorant alike of the owners and contents."<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> *Diary of Frederick Mackenzie* 2 Vol., (Cambridge, 1932), Vol. 2, p. 583. Bread rations in the French army in mid-July were 1/4 of a pound per day though by the time Mackenzie wrote his entries rations were up to 1 pound of bread, 8 ounces of corn, and 1 1/2 pounds of fresh beef daily. Scott, *Yorktown*, p. 56.

<sup>283</sup> Washington, *Writings*, vol. 22, p. 351.

<sup>284</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 5, p. 722.

<sup>285</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 5, p. 722. None of the currencies mentioned here are American or French: the crown is a British coin, the Dollar the Spanish Piece of Eight.

<sup>286</sup> Though the letter was published in Rivington's *Loyalist Gazette* on 14 August and may have been contrived by Rivington it did express feelings shared by officers and enlisted men alike.

<sup>287</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 6, p. 937.



Such abundance coupled with carelessness in turn invited thieves, or better, would-be thieves, viz. the interview with General Nathaniel Montross shows: "When the French lay at White Plains four iron chests of specie were sent from Crompond to pay off the French troops. The stopped at night a short distance from North Castle Church at the home of one Thomas or Joseph Green. The specie was suffered to remain in the covered wagon in which it had been transported and a soldier was posted to guard it. Two white men named Carpenter, a free negro and a negro slave formed a plan to get possession of one or more of the boxes." One of the black men was to be on the look-out, the other was to overpower the guard, while the two whites were to carry the cash away. Stark naked, the free African-American crawled up to the guard and overpowered the soldier. But just as the two whites are about to untie the tarpaulin over the money chests, something is moving on the wagon. Afraid that there might be a second guard hidden on the wagon, the two men let go of the cover and bolt, followed by the black man. Later it turned out that there had been but a dog sleeping on the wagon, and with a bit more courage the heist just might have worked out. "This attempt made some noise at the time but the plot was never known until after the conclusion of the war," so General Montross.<sup>288</sup>

A few days later, on August 10, Mackenzie recorded another well-established fact, i.e., the tendency of German soldiers to desert in America. "Four French Hussars came in yesterday afternoon, with their horses and appointments: Two more came in this Morning. There is no doubt but if the Armies were in the Field, and nearer each other, the desertion from the French troops would be very great. Many of them being Germans, particularly Duponts, and the Legion, wish to come in when they have an opportunity."<sup>289</sup> Not all deserters made it: on August 17, 33-year-old Corporal Jean Pierre Verdier of the Bourbonnais was hanged for desertion despite 15 years of service in the regiment.<sup>290</sup>

The strict discipline enforced by Rochambeau kept tensions with the locals to a minimum. Margaret, the daughter of Caleb Paulding, told McDonald that "When the French army lay at White Plains, a French Major had his quarters at my father's house. This major was extremely kind to us children, making pictures for us, and amusing us in various ways."<sup>291</sup> John Tompkins was full of praise for the discipline of the French

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<sup>288</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 5, p. 716.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., pp. 584-585. Entries listing French deserters can be found almost daily, e.g., two deserters on 11 July, five on 30 July, four farriers from the Legion on 1 August, "several" on 7 August, four from Saintonge on 16 August, etc. It must be pointed out, however, that the British forces in New York suffered their share of desertions. Baurmeister also reported the arrival of French deserters to Baron Jungkenn: 14 hussars, 11 grenadiers, 9 fusiliers and 5 artillerymen by August 19. Baurmeister, *Letters*, p. 459.

Besides these contacts there were others which show how much the spirit of *noblesse oblige* was still alive in the eighteenth century. On August 4 "an English packet arrived from Falmouth. It brought open letters addressed to French officers in Rhode Island and sent in care of Count Rochambeau. Captain Marquard, who at present is with his Excellency General von Lossberg, took charge of them and was treated very kindly at the French outpost. A courteous reply came back for General Clinton." Ibid., pp. 459-460.

Eventually the sending of flags became so frequent in mid-August and was so obviously abused for spying on the French and Americans that Rochambeau informed Clinton that flags would no longer be admitted in camp. Examples of spying can be found at "Spy Letters of the American Revolution from the Collections of the Clements Library" at <http://www.clements.umich.edu/spies/index.html>.

<sup>290</sup> Scott, *Yorktown*, p. 57.

<sup>291</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 325.



troops: "The springs about our place supplied the whole French army with pure water,<sup>292</sup> and the watered their horses at the Bronx. The strictest discipline was kept up among the French soldiery. Squads were posted on all sides for the protection of property so that the soldiers could not steal or destroy had they been so disposed. ... When they came, they advanced from the northwest and cut a road through our wheat fields of which they were very careful, posting sentries all around for its protection. When they retired they marched the same way, - that is, by their right through the wheat field, and in the direction of Colonel Odell's, or a little west."<sup>293</sup>

John Tompkins' reminiscences are a good example of selective memory and of the dangers of oral history. Baron Gallatin wrote that "the plain where they had us camp was covered with the most beautiful wheat, close to being ready for harvesting: it happened faster than the owner could have guessed. Within half an hour there was not a single ear of wheat standing." The soldiers cut the wheat for their horses, oxen, and for other uses, and "it was in vain that the farmer, tears in his eyes, begged that his field be spared."<sup>294</sup>

When there were troubles the guilty party was not often easily identified. Nehemiah U. Tompkins remembered how "The French soldiers made use of my father's horses which so provoked him that he seized and shook one of them who screamed for assistance. His comrades came to his aide and my father threw them about and knocked some of them down. More came and the French soldiers, now very much excited, raised the cry of 'Refugee! Refugee!'" Tompkins was taken to Rochambeau, who "after a short confinement discharged him, first however making him promise never again to attack the French army."<sup>295</sup> Nehemiah's brother John remembered the story as well. "The farm of James Tompkins was near to and a little south of the French camp. He was an uncommonly strong man and of a very irritable disposition. One day he found a French soldier riding a mare, which belonged to him in company with others to the watering place, and ordered him to dismount. The Frenchman refused. He immediately seized the horse and dragged the rider off. The soldiers attempted to regain the horse, but he knocked or threw down everyone that approached him. They then made a great outcry calling out "Refugee! Refugee! And multitudes of comrades soon came to their assistance and surrounded James Tompkins, who drew a stake from the fence and for a long time defended himself - beating and knocking down all within his reach. Closing up on all sides the soldiers at last took him prisoner, and conducting him to the headquarters called upon General Rochambeau to punish him. Extremely exasperated the soldiers were very desirous he should be hanged. To gratify them Rochambeau kept him for some time under guard, and when he was released said to him: "You little man must never attack the French army again." He solemnly promised he would not."<sup>296</sup> That settled the fight but left open the question as to why the soldier was riding Tompkins' mare in the first place!

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<sup>292</sup> J. Leonard leViness, "Taxes! Ever Irksome!" *The Westchester Historian* Vol. 46 No. 4, (Fall 1970), pp. 85-87, p. 86, tells "that my great, great grandmother Tompkins one June morning in 1781, went out to the spring for a pail of water and found two French soldiers in bright blue uniforms standing guard beside it. They politely bailed the water for her." The two soldiers would have been men of the Royal Deux-Ponts.

<sup>293</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 4, p. 493.

<sup>294</sup> Gallatin, "Garde-Suisse," pp. 675-676.

<sup>295</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 4, p. 480.

<sup>296</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 4, p. 493.

Not all encounters ended amicably; some Americans had quite different experiences with their French allies. Being at the edge of the "Neutral Ground" where irregular units such as De Lancey's and Andreas Emmerich's Loyalists called "Refugees," "Skinners," or "Cowboys" by contemporaries, as well as regular light troops such as the Hessian *Jäger*, plied their trade, meant constant reconnaissance and patrols. Especially along the "little Bronx River ... the mounted patrols relieved each other continually," so Closen. But this also meant that one could never be certain who was friend and who was foe. Here was exactly the situation why Rochambeau had wanted Light infantry and cavalry in his command. Lauzun's hussars began performing their duties immediately, at times without differentiating too carefully whom they visited during their *creative* foraging expeditions. In an interview on 5 November 1845, William Griffen of Mamaroneck remembered a visit by a "friendly" party of hussars to his father's house. "His men took cider, - three or four barrels from us without paying,\* and my father then went to the Plains and complained to the Duke who immediately sent an officer to us and paid liberally. (sic) The officer was angry because my father complained to the Duke. ... My father invited the Duke's officers (sic), who paid us, to dinner -- treated them to some "cider Royal" (sic) when they forgot their pique about his complaint to the Duke, and got very merry. I think some of the Duke's legion - officers and men - were Dutch or German." There is a "\*" at "without paying" and a footnote: "They brought a cart with them from White Plains and threatened to kill my father if he hindered them."<sup>297</sup>

Some encounters ended in bloodshed and even death. On July 7, the day after the arrival of the French forces, was spent, so Closen, "in more extensive reconnaissance of the neighborhood." The next day, July 8, the hussars apparently set out to make their presence known in the neighborhood. Joseph Odell (\*1766) of Greenburgh was one of many interviewees who remembered what happened that Sunday morning: "Elijah Vincent was from near East Chester Village and he had a brother who was a blacksmith and had his shop, in the Revolutionary War, near where Armstrong's tavern was afterwards built. Soon after the French Army came to West Chester County, a detachment of Lauzun's cavalry called at his Smithy and requested him to shoe some horses. He refused because it was Sunday. Some altercation ensued which ended in a fight and Vincent was killed. Elijah Vincent vowed revenge and watched the French patrol with a party of men for some time till he fell in with the scout whose Captain he killed. He took from the Frenchman's pockets an elegant gold watch and some coin."<sup>298</sup>

Daniel Odell of Yonkers told McDonald on 20 October 1845, that "A detachment of French Cavalry stopped at Vincent's smithy in east Chester and requested him to shoe some horses which he refused saying he had iron in the fire for other work upon which he was engaged. Some altercation ensued which ended in a quarrel. A French officer (?) drew his sword and cut Vincent down leaving him for dead but at length he recovered. His brother Elijah Vincent on being informed of it vowed revenge and waylaid the French horse. The Vincents were born and brought up on the place (at East Chester) of their father which was afterwards owned by Colonel William S. Smith, son in law of President John Adams."<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 3, p. 403.

<sup>298</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 193.

<sup>299</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 215. The property, later known as the Vincent-Halsey House, was situated on Provost Avenue in the Bronx between the original Boston Post Road and Coles Road.

And John Williams of Peekskill, aged 90, told McDonald that the blacksmith killed by French was called Gilbert Vincent who lived about ¼ of a mile from East Chester. He had told the French hussars that he had no coal when he refused to shoe the horses, but the French had not believed him. In revenge his brother shot a French officer “near Scarsdale despoiling him of all his arms which he afterwards showed me and which I saw consisting of a sword, dagger, pistol, epaulettes, scarf, belt etc all extremely elegant.”<sup>300</sup>

The truth of these stories is confirmed in Mackenzie's *Diary*, where Elijah is identified as an ensign in the "West Chester Refugees." Planning to "surprize some French Officers quartered at a house in the front of their camp" with seven men of his corps, "on their way there they fell in with a patrole of 6 Hussars of The legion de Lausun, which was followed by an Officer and 25 Dragoons." Vincent shot the officer and "brought off the Officers Cap, Sword, &c."<sup>301</sup> If Gilbert Vincent was killed on Sunday, July 8, Elijah did not waste any time. The personnel file of 25-year-old *sous-lieutenant* Pichon, adjutant of Lauzun's Legion, records: *Tué en patrouille*, killed while on patrol, on 10 July 1781.<sup>302</sup>

But the *Refugees* could play this game of random killing, of murder and revenge, as well, especially when French personnel was careless enough to venture out in small groups.<sup>303</sup> At the very beginning of the McDonald papers the reader finds the cryptic remark by Samuel Oakley, dated October 1844: "Shube [Merrit of Rye] killed the French commissary in or near King Street, and took 150 Louis d'ors from him, in 1781."<sup>304</sup> "Lydia (a colored woman)" had witnessed the whole scene and told McDonald this on 24 October 1844: "In 1781, a French sutler and three men came to my master's (Andrew Lyon of King Street), and made a purchase of some cider for the French army at White Plains. Mr. Lyon and his men were in the cellar getting out the cider and the sutler on the fence by the door when Shube Merrit [Neb Merrit and Tim Saxton] came upon them. Shube shot the Frenchman dead, and, searching him, found a belt around his body filled with gold – one hundred Louis d'ors 'tis said. This was divided among three of them. (?) The next day a detachment of French came over from White Plains to enquire into the matter. They (Merritt and party?) took one Frenchman prisoner and the rest got off."<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Vol. 6, p. 823. See also Frederick Rich, age 80, of Mile Square in Vol. 4, p. 506, in September 1846: "Elijah Vincent ambushed the French because they killed his brother, a smith of East Chester, who refused to shoe the horses of the French dragoons." Vol. 4, p. 510, contains an interview with Philemon Fowler of East Chester in September 1846. "Vincent was a blacksmith, and killed because he would not shoe a horse for them (a party of French) in consequence of which Elijah Vincent vowed revenge and soon after shot a French Captain." The only dissenting voice is found in Vol. 1, p. 196, in a note written 8 October 1845. "Mr Jackson Odell tells me he has ascertained from Mr (blank) that Vincent's brother lived though cut to pieces, and that this barbarity was practiced not by the French but by Americans."

<sup>301</sup> Mackenzie, *Diary*, p. 568. Mackenzie gives the date of the incident as July 17.

<sup>302</sup> Bodinier, *Dictionnaire*, p. 380.

<sup>303</sup> For harrowing examples of intra-American violence, retaliation, kidnapping, and murder even by American soldiers see the letter by General Selleck Silliman to Governor Trumbull of February 5, 1781 in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Seventh Series* Vol. 3, (Boston, 1902), pp. 192-198. See also Catherine S. Crary, "Guerilla Activities of James DeLancey's Cowboys in Westchester County." In: Robert A. East and Jacob Judd, eds., *The Loyalist Americans: A Focus on Greater New York* (Tarrytown, 1975), pp. 14-24.

<sup>304</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 30. I have been unable to identify the French commissary mentioned here. Robin, *Travels*, p. 40, in a letter dated September 1, 1780, reports that the Refugees "have lately hanged a Secretary belonging to one of our Commissaries, and assassinated an officer of the legion of Lauzun."

<sup>305</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 53.

Nehemiah Brown of King Street in Portchester remembered how "In July 1781, a sutler, attached to the French army, and two other Frenchmen were at Andrew Lyon's, near Portchester, where Mr. Bush now lives, eating dinner. They had come from White Plains with a team or wagon to buy cider. Shube Merritt with Neh. Merritt and Tim Saxton heard of it and came to attack them. These refugees looked in at the window (windows and doors being open), and the Frenchmen ran. Tim. Saxton, pursuing, rested his gun upon the bars of the fence and shot the sutler dead. Shube Merritt, being active, sprang over the fence and stripped the Frenchman of a belt he wore around his waist, which contained two or three hundred "French guineas." (sic) These the robbers divided - Shube retaining the largest portion. Another Frenchman was (previously?) overtaken, and surrendered himself (to Shube Merritt?) a prisoner. The third ran north, towards Samuel Brown's (the next house) for his life, pursued by Neb. Merritt with his loaded gun. The Frenchman, hard pressed by Neb. Merritt, took up a large stone and faced him. He pointed his gun. The Frenchman hurled the stone, and running round Samuel Brown's house, jumped in at the window and got under a table followed by Neb. Who could not find him. Neb. Then left the room in search of him, and Mrs. Brown concealed him first in a closet or pantry, but he was so incautious as to (look) stick his head out the moment Neb. Left the room. Mrs. Brown then concealed him in the cellar. Neb. Insisted Mr. Brown should tell him where the Frenchman was. Brown did not know that the Frenchman was in the house - not having yet seen him, and denied him to Neb. Declaring he was not in the house. Neb. at length went away. Sometime afterwards, a detachment of Continentals with an officer, being informed &c. came to Brown's and inquired for the Frenchman in the cellar. Brown at first denied him, because several neighbors, loyalists, were present. He managed to acquaint the officer of this who ordered the Tories off, and then he brought out the Frenchman who was conducted to camp. The Refugees took the Frenchmen's horses and left the wagon. The wagon was taken into camp by the American party."<sup>306</sup>

#### 8.4 The Grand Reconnaissance, July 21-23, 1781

Since New York had been agreed on at Wethersfield as the target of the '81 campaign, Washington and Rochambeau did not want to waste time before probing for weak spots in the British defense perimeter. The raid on Morrisania on July 2/3 had failed. A week later, on July 10, the *Romulus* and three French frigates from Newport entered the Sound between Long Island and the mainland in an attempt to capture Fort Lloyd (or Fort Franklin near Huntington, Long Island). This enterprise too failed and the little French fleet was back in Newport on the 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>307</sup> On July 12, the two generals inspected the defenses at Dobbs Ferry,<sup>308</sup> and on July 13, Washington issued orders for 2,000 Americans and 2,000 Frenchmen to be ready by 8:00 p.m. for a reconnaissance in force toward Manhattan Island. Heavy rain forced the postponement that night and a series of

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<sup>306</sup> McDonald Papers Vol. 1, p. 68. Gallatin tells how Lieutenants Joseph von Berg and Gaspar de Custine of his regiment brought one of the Refugees into the American camp. Washington ordered the man hanged immediately. Warrington Dawson, ed., "Un Garde-Suisse de Louis XVI au Service de l'Amérique: Le Baron Gaspard de Gallatin." *Le Correspondent* 324 No. 1655 (September 10, 1931), pp. 672-692, p. 679.

<sup>307</sup> See the account by Lieutenant Verger in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, pp. 130-132.

<sup>308</sup> See Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, p. 34, note 39, in the Clermont-Crèvecoeur journal.

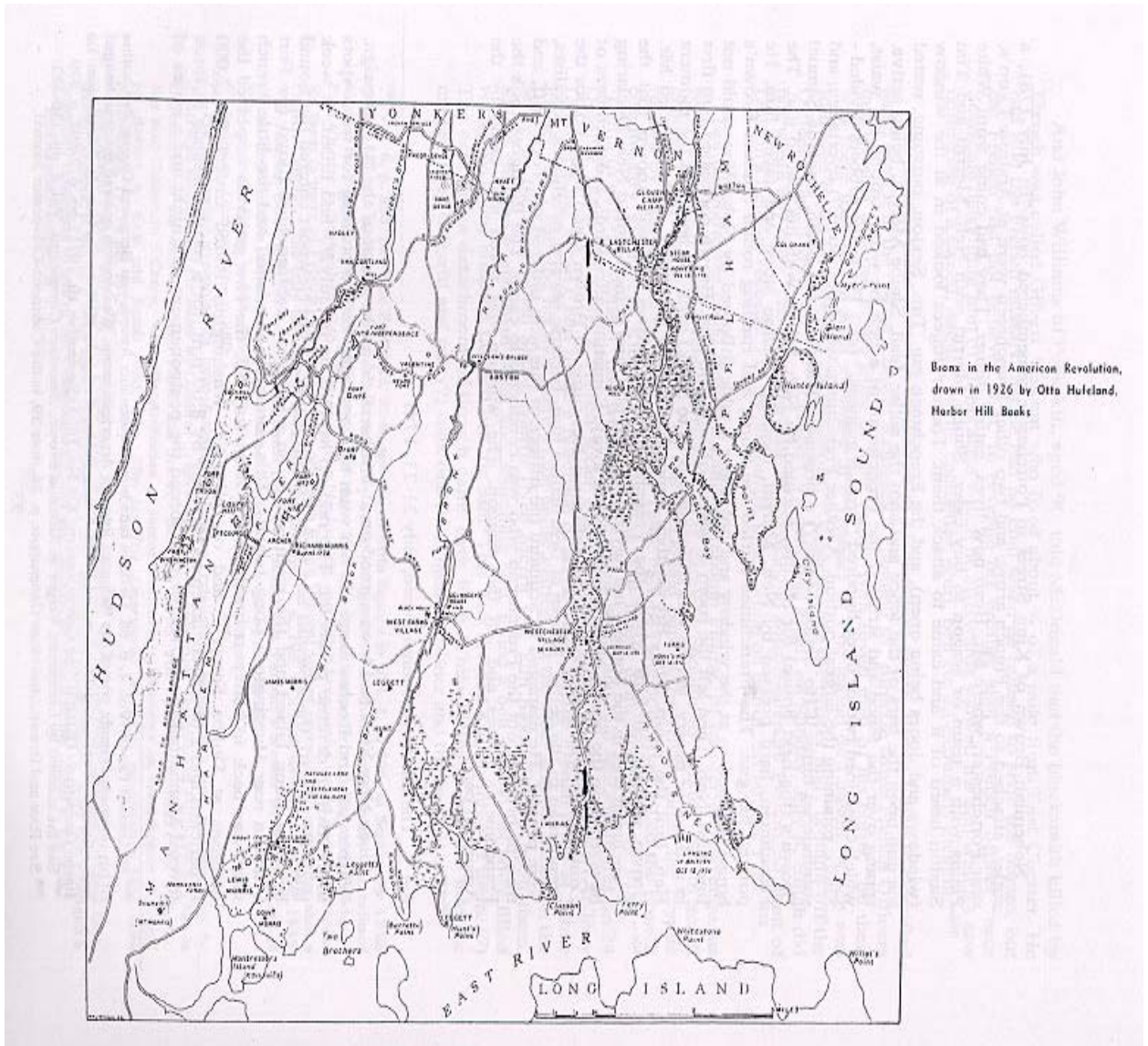
first false, and then real, alarms the following nights and days kept Washington from carrying out his intentions. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, a British raiding party sailed up the Hudson to Tarrytown and had to be covered until it returned to New York in the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>309</sup> (SITE 22) Concurrently on the night of July 17/18, a patrol of six hussars and 10 infantry of Lauzun's Legion, which was by now quartered at "Red House" about 2 miles north-east of Chatterton Hill, ran into an ambush set by De Lancey dragoons. The French suffered their first combat related casualty when *sous-lieutenant* Jacques Hartmann was killed in the early morning hours of the 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> See Acomb, *Closen*, p. 95.

<sup>310</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, p. 96, Cromot du Bourg, "Diary," p. 301, and Bodinier, *Dictionnaire*, p. 241. Hartmann's riderless horse galloped back toward the French lines and was shot moments later when a sentry received no answer to his call. Lieutenant-Colonel Etienne Hugau of the Legion accused one of his own officers, Major Jean Ladislav Pollerescky, of having fleeced the corpse of their dead comrade and of stealing Hartmann's possessions. See Massoni, *Détails*, p. 75. On Pollerescky, who was forced to resign from the Legion by his fellow officers in the spring of 1782, see Joseph Cincik, "Major John L. Pollerecký fought for America's Independence" *Slovakia* (September/December 1957), pp. 83-87, and George J. Krajsa, "Major Jan L. Polerecky: An Officer of Slovak Heritage in the American Revolution" *Jednota Annual Furdek* Vol. 18 (1979), pp. 223-232. Pollerescky's services as told in these articles is pure fantasy.





At daybreak on the 18<sup>th</sup>, Washington, Presle du Portail, Washington's French-born chief engineer, Rochambeau, Quarter-Master General de Beville and his chief engineer Desandrouins, accompanied by 100 dragoons, crossed the North River to reconnoiter the west side of Staten Island but returned at night. Following their return from the Jersey shore, Rochambeau, who did not favor an attack on New York, probed Washington one last time for a "plan définitif" before the long-delayed reconnaissance began.<sup>311</sup> Following the pattern established at Hartford and at Wethersfield, he posed Washington on July 19 a series of written questions. When he asked whether preparations for a march southward should not be made, Washington responded that unless certain conditions were met, "the enterprise against New York and its environs has to be our principal object."<sup>312</sup>

<sup>311</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, p. 96. See also Washington, *Diaries*, Vol. 2, p. 237-239, where he indicates that 150 mounted troops accompanied them, and Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 35, note 44.

<sup>312</sup> For a full discussion of Franco-American strategy in July and August 1781 see below.

At last the stage was set for the "Grand Reconnaissance."<sup>313</sup> By 7:00 p.m. on July 21, Rochambeau's First Brigade as well as the grenadiers and chasseurs of the Second, some 2,200 men plus their 175 or so officers, assembled for a night march, and were on their way by 8:00 p.m. So were about 2,000 Americans under Major Generals Lincoln and Howe, who formed the right column, marching, in modern terms, roughly by the Saw Mill River Road. On their right flank marched Connecticut troops under Major General Samuel Holden Parsons and 25 of Sheldon's dragoons. The center column was lead by a battalion of French grenadiers and chasseurs with four artillery pieces marching down Sprain Brook Parkway to Central Park Avenue. Behind them came the First Brigade with four artillery pieces and two 12-pounders. Washington and Rochambeau were both in this column. The left column, commanded by Chastellux and composed of the grenadier and chasseur companies of the Second Brigade and Lauzun's Legion, marched with its four artillery pieces down the Bronx River parallel on SR 22 (the old east Chester Road) to Tuckahoe Road. Rather than turn left at Hunt's Bridge to cross the Bronx and continue on to Williams Bridge, Chastellux turned right and joined the other two columns at the place of rendezvous on Valentine Hill, eight miles from the encampment in Philipsburg and four miles from Kingsbridge. The Legion was quickly rerouted.<sup>314</sup> (SITE 15)

It was already 1:00 a.m.<sup>315</sup> on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, a Sunday, when Valentine Hill was reached. Andrew Corsa of Fordham, age 89, one of the guides who led Rochambeau and Washington, provided this eyewitness account on October 7, 1848. "In July 1781, I was up for several days at general Washington's headquarters at Appleby's in order to reclaim a horse which had been taken from me. - I became acquainted with many of the American guides. Soon after the French and American armies came down to reconnoitre. Cornelius Oakley and Isaac Webbers then came for me on a Sunday morning to accompany them in the capacity of a guide to Morrisania, and I went."<sup>316</sup> We found Generals Washington and Rochambeau and the Duke de Lauzun waiting for us, opposite the gate that now leads to Dr. Powell's at Fordham. In conducting the force to Morrisania we followed the old road along the Bronx till we came to Graham's point and then turned to the right and advanced to Morrisania.<sup>317</sup> (SITE 16) "The moment we approached upon the Ridge or high ground," around 5:00 a.m., according to Clermont-Crèveccœur, "the British batteries opened upon us from Randall's Island, Snake Hill, Harlem and from the ships of war. We (the guides) stopped at the Ridge, not liking the cannonade, which

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<sup>313</sup> The Great Reconnaissance is described frequently; e.g., by Berthier in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, pp. 251-253, Clermont-Crèveccœur in *ibid.*, pp. 36-38, by Baron Closen in Acomb, *Closen*, pp. 97-102, and by the comte de Lauberdrière in his *Journal* fols. 77-84. Rochambeau's report is printed in Doniol, *Histoire*, Vol. 5, pp. 518-19. See also Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 36, note 45. On the American side see Washington's instructions printed in Washington, *Writings*, Vol. 22, pp. 370-372, and his account in *Diaries*, Vol. 2, pp. 241-245. A brief account can be found in Hufeland, *Westchester County*, p. 400 and in Ultan, *Legacy of the Revolution*, pp. 53-54, with a list of primary sources. For British accounts see especially Mackenzie, *Diary*, Vol. 2, p. 570, and *John Peebles' American War. The Diary of a Scottish Grenadier, 1776-1782*. Ira D. Gruber, ed., (New York, 1998), pp. 460-461.

<sup>314</sup> Hufeland, *Westchester County*, pp. 397-398.

<sup>315</sup> Berthier in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 251.

<sup>316</sup> The six main American guides John Odell, Cornelius Oakley, Abraham Dyckman, Michael Dyckman, Isaac or Uck Odell, cousin of John, and John Pine received the pay of captains. See "Andrew Corsa" *The Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 8 No. 2, (April 1932), pp. 55-58.

<sup>317</sup> I am grateful to Drs. Allan Gilbert, Associate professor of Anthropology, and Roger Wines, Professor of History at Fordham University, for pointing this site out to me and for providing the information attached to the site form.



was very furious, but Washington and the French commanders moved forward as though nothing had occurred. We returned in the afternoon and the army encamped for the night near my father's I think, but am not certain, a little north of our house.<sup>318</sup> The next day (Monday, July 23) we went down again but this time advanced no further than the Mill. Both times we returned in a pretty direct line across the fields of Fordham. The last time the army (as I heard) encamped for the night somewhere towards Valentine's Hill."

A few days later, on October 19, Corsa added that "It was just before sunrise on Sunday the 22d. of July 1781 that I was awakened in my bed (in my father's house where the Roman Catholic College now stands,<sup>319</sup>) by the guides Cornelius and John (*Isaac* written above John) Oakley and James Williams, and requested to accompany the combined French and American armies as a guide to Morrisania." This I had agreed to do when I was up at Appleby's, General Washington's Headquarters some days previously. I dressed in haste and followed the Oakley's and Webbers to where a gate led to an adjacent farm house. This very spot is now designated by the gate which conducts to Dr. Powell's house and buildings. Here we found Washington, Rochambeau, the Duke of the French horse and other officers setting abreast on horseback and facing the the (sic) highway. General Washington spoke kindly and directed them to furnish me with a horse.

The guides enquired if there were any Refugees in the neighbourhood. I told them of two, vizt: Sergeant Hilliard and James Travis\* (\*there is a star behind the name and in the margins is written: "Sometimes written Travers.) who were to be found on the route we should take to West Farms, but added that Hilliard must be surprised before he got on horseback, for if once in his saddle they would not overtake him. They were very anxious to capture Hilliard and his horse, and asked and obtained permission." The chase ended with Hilliard getting away and Washington and Rochambeau continued their route toward West Farms past Major Bearmore's old headquarters and onto "the Fordham road leading to Delancy's Mills" past the homes of Cornelius Leggett Robert Hunt into West Farms Village. "About a mile and a half or so below Delancy's bridge ... we turned west and arrived at a spot which commanded a full view of part of Long Island Sound." Next they retraced there steps about half a mile and followed the road to Morrisania coming

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<sup>318</sup> Washington's troops camped some three miles south of Corsa's home in Van Cortland Park.

<sup>319</sup> i.e., St. Joseph Seminary on Seminary Ave/Valentine Street near Tibbett's Brook Park. See Samuel B. Hawley, "General Washington's Headquarters on Valentine's Hill, Yonkers." *The Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 7 No. 1, (January 1931), p. 33; the picture of the marker attached to the site form is reproduced *ibid.*, No. 4, p. 117.

See also the article by Dudley F. Valentine, a great-great-grandson of Thomas, "Valentine Hill." *The Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society* Vol. 5 No. 4, (October 1929), pp. 97-99.

I could not locate this marker from the New York State website:

CAMPING GROUND

FOR AMERICAN AND BRITISH  
FORCES DURING THE REVOLUTION.  
WASHINGTON USED NEARBY  
VALENTINE HOMESTEAD FOR  
HEADQUARTERS FREQUENTLY.

Location: SEMINARY AVE.& MILE SQUARE RD.

from the East by Governor Morris' house. "The moment we attained these grounds and came in sight of the enemy, the British opened fire upon us from their Forts at Montresors Island, Harlem, and Snake Hill and from their vessels of war at anchor in Harlem river. The fire was very heavy and was renewed when we approached Mill Brook."

Baron Closen, who accompanied Rochambeau, recorded that while Lauzun's Legion veered east to Williamsbridge at Valentine's Hill, the rest marched on to Kingsbridge close to the destroyed Ft. Independence on Tedard's Hill, just east of Kingsbridge. In the afternoon, Washington and Rochambeau took a closer look at Morrisania.<sup>320</sup> That night the French troops encamped between the ruins of Fort Independence (**SITE 17**) along Giles Place in the Bronx and the Bronx River. The center of their camp was located on the summit of Gun Hill at the intersection of Gun Hill Road and Bainbridge Avenue.<sup>321</sup> It was 9:00 p.m. when Rochambeau and his aides finally had a quick dinner in "a wretched house" before they settled down to sleep, "clad as we were, on the ground."<sup>322</sup> The "wretched house" was the home of Isaac Valentine, today's Valentine-Varian House on Bainbridge Avenue and 208<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>323</sup> (**SITE 18**)

It was but 4:00 a.m. on the 23<sup>rd</sup> when the aides were in the saddle again and "went to call for General Washington." By 6:00 a.m. the two generals set out for Frog's Neck and the second day's reconnaissance. Just where Rochambeau's aides "went to call for" Washington, i.e., where he had spent the night, is unclear. In a letter of 2 September 2000 to me, Mr. Ultan wrote: "Washington stayed with his troops, encamped along the ridge that forms the Riverdale neighborhood today, and in Van Cortlandt Park. He slept in the Van Cortlandt House."<sup>324</sup> (**SITES 19 and 20**) Some time during the 1960s there was indeed a plaque<sup>325</sup> placed in front of the Van Cortlandt House with this inscription:

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<sup>320</sup> The northern end of Manhattan Island was fortified by a line of eight redoubts, beginning with No. 1 on Spuyten Duyvill Hill to No. 8 on University Heights. Forts 1, 2, and 3 on Spuyten Duyvill Hill overlooking the Kings Bridge and into upper Manhattan and Fort Washington were already abandoned. There is still a good view from Fort No. 1, Henry Hudson park. Fort No. 2 also still exists, unoccupied (for now) but surrounded by private homes. The site of No. 3 is occupied by private homes. Fort No. 4 on Kingsbridge Heights is protected by a NYC park. Forts 5, 6, and 7, were also abandoned already in 1781. Only No. 8 was operational and occupied by British troops at the time of the Grand Reconnaissance.

<sup>321</sup> This marker listed on [www.nysm.nysed.gov/srv/largemarkers/index.html](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/srv/largemarkers/index.html) could not be found. It reads:

FORT INDEPENDENCE  
ONE OF FORTS BUILT IN 1776  
BY AMERICANS TO COMMAND THE  
VALLEY BELOW. GENERAL  
RICHARD MONTGOMERY HAD A  
FARM NEARBY, IN 1772.

Location: CLAFLIN TERRACE ON WALK EAST OF RESERVOIR OPPOSITE FORT INDEPENDENCE AVE.

<sup>322</sup> Acomb, *Closen*, p. 100.

<sup>323</sup> The history of the Valentine-Varian house is described in loving detail in Lloyd Ultan, *Legacy of the Revolution. The Valentine-Varian House*. (New York, 1983).

<sup>324</sup> I am grateful to Mr. Lloyd Ultan, The Bronx Borough Historian, for this advice. In a phone conversation on 4 May 2001, Mr. Ultan confirmed this information though he could not provide proof just then. Since it is beyond any doubt that the Continental Army camped in the vicinity of the Van Cortlandt House that

VAN CORTLANDT MANSION  
BUILT IN 1748 BY FREDERICK VAN CORTLANDT.  
HESSIAN HEADQUARTERS IN REVOLUTION.  
WASHINGTON AND ROCHAMBEAU WERE HERE.

Mr Judd Levin, who has spent years trying to locate Washington during the night of 22-23 July 1781, and who generously shared his research files with me, has collected an extensive a collection of primary and secondary sources on this subject, but none of them place Washington at Van Cortlandt on July 22. Neither do any of the unpublished sources I have used. This, of course does not mean that he did not spend the night there, and it would have made perfect sense for him to be as close to his troops as possible, but until additional information comes to light the question needs to be left open.

By nightfall the reconnaissance was over and the camp at Philipsburg was reached around midnight. Having lost but a single man, a dragoon of Washington's bodyguard,<sup>326</sup> Washington and Rochambeau had achieved their objective.<sup>327</sup> Closen's comment: "I admire the American troops tremendously! It is incredible that soldiers composed of men of every age, even of children of fifteen, of whites and blacks, almost naked, unpaid, and rather poorly fed, can march so well and withstand fire so steadfastly."

But Closen told only part of the truth. Lauzun's men together with Waterbury's Connecticut State Troops had orders to "scour the Necks of Morrisania and Frogs" for Refugees, and scour they did! Encouraged by the bad example set by American troops,<sup>328</sup> French troops, especially Lauzun's hussars, engaged in disreputable practices. Brissot de Barneville recorded that the house of de Lancey, "where no one but his mistress was at home at the time, was pillaged as well as several other houses around Morrisania, especially by the mounted troops," i.e., the hussars.<sup>329</sup> The Abbe Robin reported how "These Americans, so soft, so pacific and benevolent by nature, are here transformed into monsters, implacable, bloody and ravenous."<sup>330</sup> Blanchard accused his fellow countrymen of "having pillaged a great deal and committed some disorders of which, up

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night, and since it would be perfectly logical for Washington to have stayed at the house, I have decided to include it as a site in this report.

<sup>325</sup> The plaque inscription and location is again taken from *Historical Area Markers of New York State* (New York, 1970) listed on the web under [www.nysm.nysed.gov/srv/largemarkers/index.html](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/srv/largemarkers/index.html). It could not be located during a visit to the mansion. I am grateful to Ms Laura Correa, Director of the Van Cortlandt House Museum, for her kind assistance during my visit there.

<sup>326</sup> Clermont-Crèvecoeur in Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 37

<sup>327</sup> The only casualty on the French side seems to have been the horse of comte de Damas, which was shot under him by a cannon ball as he tried to ford a stream. William Derbyshire, born 1770, of Philipsburg, who lived in British-occupied New York on July 22, 1781, was watching Washington and Rochambeau when "a French officer's horse was shot. The officer, dismounting in the water, coolly took off the saddle, bridle, and holster and waded back, all the time under fire." McDonald Papers Vol. 6, p. 997, and Acomb, Closen, p. 100. There could easily have been another casualty in the person of Baron Closen who lost his hat during that same encounter with Refugees near Morrisania in the afternoon of July 22 and retrieved it under a hail of bullets. Acomb, *Closen*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>328</sup> Washington, *Writings*, Vol. 22, pp. 416-17.

<sup>329</sup> Barneville, "Journal," p. 268.

<sup>330</sup> Gallatin, "Garde-Suisse," p. 681.

to this time, there had not been the least example."<sup>331</sup> Gaspard de Gallatin thought the Legion guilty of "a rapine and a pillage ordinary in troops not restrained by severe discipline."<sup>332</sup> The comte de Charlus, in command of the Second Battalion of grenadiers and chasseurs stationed at DeLancey's Mill to maintain contact with Lauzun's Legion at Williamsbridge, wrote his father: "The American army set a cruel example for our grenadiers; if I had not had a hundred blows with the flat of the sabre meted out in my battalion, if I had not placed sentinels every twenty-five paces and had the roll called every half-hour, I don't think I could have managed. ... I had no idea war was waged this way. The English have unfortunately adopted it and the Americans make reprisals; but we hope by the force of our discipline to prevent it from happening with us."<sup>333</sup>

With the Grand Reconnaissance over, activities in the Franco-American camp quieted down considerably; both armies confined themselves to foraging, reconnaissance, and to gathering supplies. "These foraging expeditions," so Berthier, covered an area between the camp and Long Island Sound extending from Rye, Mamaroneck, east Chester, and Chester to a point as close as possible to King's Bridge ( ... and) were always supported by a detachment of 1,500 men and a troops of hussars."<sup>334</sup> Much of the bread consumed at Philipsburg came from ovens at Sands Mills and from those in the camp. Quoting Robert Bolton's *The history of the several towns, manors, and patents of the county of Westchester, from its first settlement to the present time* (New York, C.F. Roper, 1881) LeViness wrote that on "the fields east of the Odell house the remains of seven huge ovens used by Rochambeau's men while encamped there could clearly be discerned. These were about six feet long and two and one-half feet wide, built mostly underground and made of cobblestone. They were destroyed when the Sunningdale golf course was laid out."<sup>335</sup> But much bread was still transported overland from Hartford, and most of the cattle slaughtered at Philipsburg came from Connecticut as well: between July 5 and August 11, the Champion brother alone delivered 927 oxen and 356 sheep to Philipsburg!<sup>336</sup> John Tompkins remembered that "They slaughtered their cattle at a place between our house and the road in front, near which, and close to, the lane which now leads from our house to the road they built a round house of stone which has recently been removed by me. I don't know for what purpose they used it." The "round house" may have been a storage house for some of the grain, flour, and even hay for the cattle shipped from Connecticut as well.<sup>337</sup> Mostly, however, they were waiting as to what their leadership would decide when the attack on New York would begin.

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<sup>331</sup> Blanchard, *Guerre*, p. 84; Deux-Ponts, Cromot du Bourg, and Lauberdière all report similar incidents.

<sup>332</sup> Quoted in Kennett, *French Forces*, p. 120.

<sup>333</sup> Charlus letter of 29 July 1781 as quoted in Kennett, *French Forces*, p. 120.

<sup>334</sup> Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 249. For other examples of such foraging expeditions in force see Rice and Brown, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 38, note 52.

<sup>335</sup> J. Leonard LeViness, "Hartsdale in the Revolution." *The Westchester Historian* Vol. 47 No. 3, (Summer 1971), pp. 65-68, p. 68.

<sup>336</sup> Chester M. Destler, *Connecticut: The Provisions State*. (Chester, 1973), p. 55.

<sup>337</sup> For a bill of loading kindly provided by Eugene Frechette of Plainfield, CT, see the attached photocopy. The copies of bills of exchange drawn on the French forces were found in the microfilm edition of the Papers of Henry Knox, reel 6.

SHIPPED by the Grace of GOD, in good Order and Condition, by *Col. James*  
*Madwin* to the *Company of Trade*  
in and upon the good Ship called the *Hats* whereof is Master, under GOD,  
for this present Voyage, *John Hall* and now riding at Anchor in the Port of  
*London* and by GOD'S Grace bound for *St. Vincent* and *the*  
to *be* seven hundred & eighty eight bushels of *Wheat* and four  
hundred and twenty three bushels of *Indian Corn*

The Property of her Most Christian Majesty  
and of her *Grace*

*788 Rye*  
*423 Corn*

*Shipped by Col. Madwin to*  
*the Company of Trade*  
*at St. Vincent*

being mark'd and number'd as in the Margin, and are to be delivered in like good Order and Condition,  
at the aforesaid Port of *St. Vincent* (the Danger of the Seas and Enemy excepted)  
unto *John Carter* or his Assigns, or to *William* or his Assigns, or to *St. Vincent*  
or to his Assigns, he or they paying Freight for the said Goods and Customary

In Witness whereof the Master or Putter of the said Ship hath affirmed to 3 Bills of Lading, all of  
this Tenor or Date, the one of which, 2 Bills being accomplished, the other 2 to stand void. And  
so GOD send the good Ship to her desired Port in safety. AMEN. Dated in *London*  
*August 2 1781*

*John Hall*



N<sup>o</sup> 85

SECONDE

1787

Escadre commandée par M. le Comte de BARRAS.

VI-17

A Newport le 2 juillet 1787, pour la somme de 22600<sup>00</sup> tournois.

Monsieur

(1768)

à trente jours de vue, il vous plaira payer sur cette seconde de change, la première, troisième & quatrième ne l'étant, à M<sup>r</sup> Jonathan Winthrop ou ordre, la somme de deux mille six cent soixante tournois valeur reçue dudit sieur en Fournitures & Remplacemens faits à l'Escadre du Roi commandée par M. le Comte de BARRAS, pendant la relâche qu'elle a fait à Newport ainsi qu'il est constaté par les Marchés, États & Reçus, signés & visés de qui de droit; & déposés entre les mains de

Vu

*Barras*

A Monsieur  
Monsieur BOUTIN, Trésorier  
général de la Marine.

A PARIS.

Votre très-humble & très-obéissant  
serviteur *W. Gaudin* Major de l'Escadre.

1784  
Guerre Département d'Amvague Pour 2560<sup>l</sup> 58<sup>l</sup>

Exercice 1781 (1781)

N. 1193.

A Newtown Le 29 juin 1781

Ensemble  
Jan n. 181  
Dunghy

Monsieur vous eûtes trois mille sept cent cinquante livres  
à M<sup>rs</sup> Wadsworth et Caraco  
ou Ordre la somme de deux mille cinq cents cinquante livres  
Valeur reçue de M<sup>rs</sup> Wadsworth et Caraco  
de la quelle je vous rendray compte sur les dépenses de la Guerre  
de ce Département en m'y remettant la présente acquittée  
Pour la dite Somme de deux mille cinq cents cinquante livres.

par tromme  
P. Baillet

A Monsieur  
Monsieur de Serilly,  
Trésorier Payeur Général des  
Dépenses de la Guerre.  
Paris.

Je prie M  
Trésorier de la Guerre à  
d'acquiescer la Présente.

