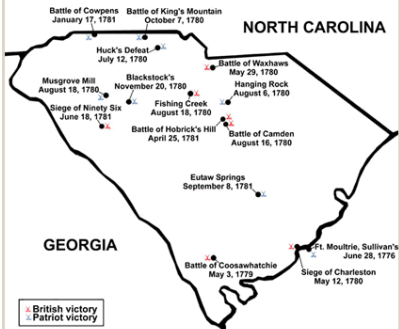
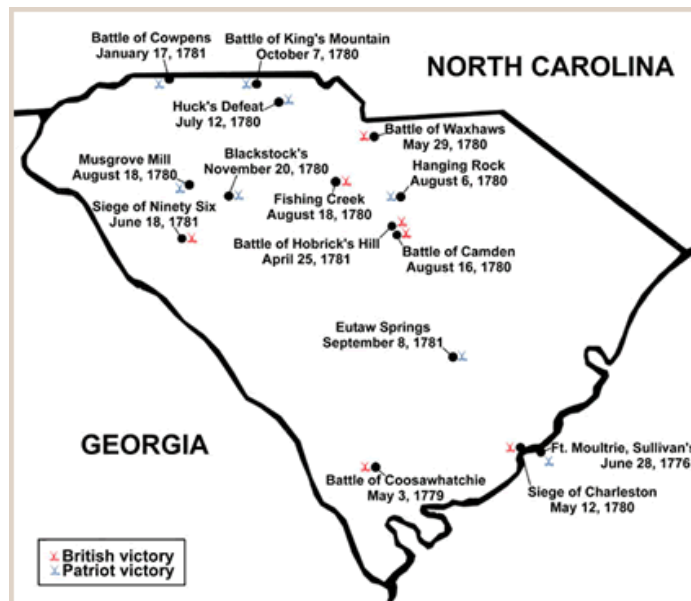


Chapter 10 -- The French Help America Win Its War With Britain

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|  | <p>Dates: 1779-1783</p> | <p>Sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Britain's "Southern Strategy" Succeeds Then Stalls • The Three Year Old American-French Alliance Takes Hold In 1781 • The Endgame At Yorktown • The Treaty Of Paris Officially Ends The Revolutionary War |
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Time: 1779-1781

Britain's "Southern Strategy" Succeeds Then Stalls



Revolutionary War Battles Rage Across South and North Carolina in 1779-81

To succeed with their new efforts in the South, the British need a strong supply base similar to their position in New York City. They already hold Savannah, Georgia, after a failed American siege in the Fall of 1797. But they want a more central location, and they decide that the port city of Charleston, South Carolina, is their best bet.

On December 26, 1779, Clinton and Cornwallis leave New York harbor with 8,500 men, weaponry and supplies, for what proves to be a six week, stop and start voyage through winter storms, ending on February 11, 1780, just to the south of their objective.

What follows is a siege of Charleston, lasting through the Spring, and finally forcing the surrender on May 12 of General Benjamin Lincoln's entire 5,500 man army, trapped in the city.

At this stage, Clinton turns command of his southern forces over to Cornwallis and his second, Lt. Colonel Banastre Tarleton, who quickly earns a "no quarters" reputation on the battlefield.

After Charleston, the American's are left with only local militia to try to fend off the British.

For the next two and a half years, the Revolutionary War will be fought across the South, often pitting local Loyalists against their neighbor Secessionists.

Many of the encounters will take place in the interior of South Carolina. On August 16, 1780, General Horatio Gates, chosen by Congress to revitalize American troops after Charleston, blunders into a solid trouncing at Camden, SC. At King's Mountain on October 7, Cornwallis's move toward North Carolina is turned back by frontiersmen under Colonel John Sevier.

American resistance stiffens further when Washington sends 39 year old Major General Nathanael Greene to replace Gates. On January 17, 1781, Greene's men thrash Tarleton's Loyalist cavalry at Cowpens, S.C. Tarleton loses 1,000 men, along with his image for invincibility. Cornwallis remains undaunted, and again pushes into North Carolina, encountering Greene on March 15, 1781, at Guilford Court House (later the town of Greensboro). At day's end, Britain owns the field but at a disproportionately high cost of 500 casualties.

After one more draw with Greene at Hobkirk's Hill, near Camden, SC, Cornwallis decides it's time to fight the war in Virginia, linchpin between Washington's northern army and Greene in the South.

The broad "Loyalist uprising" across the Carolinas and Georgia that British MP Lord North hoped for has failed to materialize, and the Americans have now proven they can stand toe to toe with the redcoats in land battles. All that England has left to show for its move South are Savannah and Charleston, both secured by their superior fleet.

But the Royal Navy is about to be tested in Virginia by America's new ally, the French.

Time: August-September 1791

The Three-Year Old American-French Alliance takes Hold In 1781



Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834)

■ By the time Cornwallis completes his 240 mile trek from Wilmington, NC to Petersburg, Virginia, units under now turn-coat British General Benedict Arnold and William Phillips have burned and pillaged towns along James River and taken control of the new capital city of Richmond.

This incursion into his home state alarms Washington and he sends 5,000 troops under command of the French General Marquis de Lafayette, to defend Virginia and capture the traitor, Arnold.

Given that Cornwallis has 7,000 troops at his disposal, Lafayette decides to avoid a major battle, instead maneuvering his army along the Rapidan River toward Williamsburg. A sharp skirmish is fought there on July 6, 1781.

At this point, General Clinton, resting comfortably in Manhattan, senses that the combined 9,000 man force of Washington and the Frenchman, Rochambeau, may be readying a move against him. In response he first orders Cornwallis to detach 3,000 men back to NYC, then changes his mind and tells him to occupy the deep water port at Yorktown, which he does.

At first, this move to Yorktown looks safe – but then two crucial factors shift the equation.

On May 22, Washington learns that French Admiral Francois Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, plans to move his fleet from the Caribbean to America in the Fall, to support the alliance. For the first time in the war, Britain’s absolute dominance of all sea lanes will be challenged.

Then Washington settles on a major gamble, reminiscent of his desperate move across the Delaware to Trenton some five years earlier.



LaFayette And Washington

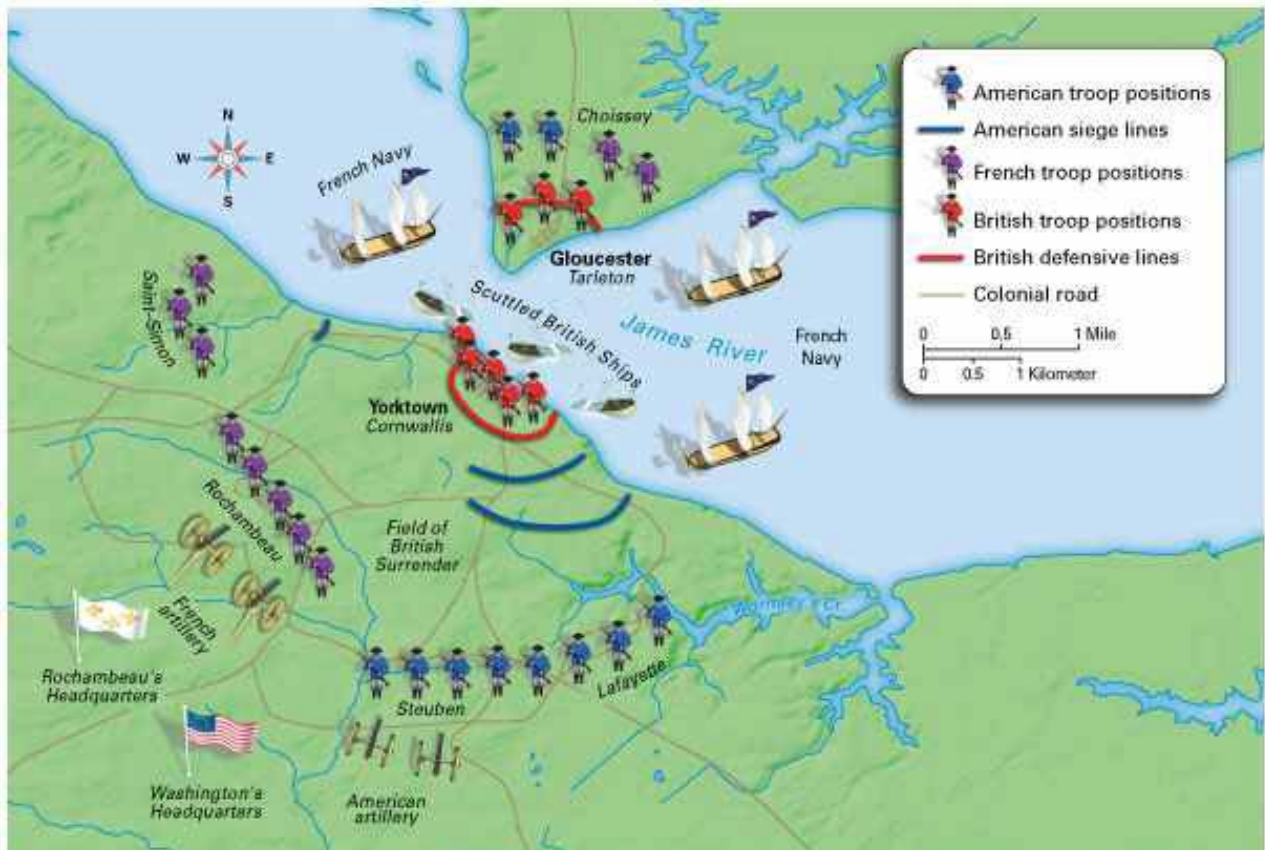
He leaves a shadow army of 3,000 to contain Clinton in New York, and secretly marches with Rochambeau and 6,000 men on August 21 to join Lafayette. Fortunately Clinton does not learn of the move until September 2, when Washington’s army meets Admiral De Grasse’s fleet in Chesapeake Bay, north of Baltimore.

In addition to his navy, the Admiral brings another pleasant surprise – 2,500 French troops, who disembark to bolster the American-French infantry.

Suddenly a joint land and sea attack on Cornwallis at Yorktown becomes possible.

Time: October 19, 1781

The Endgame At Yorktown



Cornwallis is Trapped by Washington and the French at Yorktown

After settling on a plan of attack, Washington and Rochambeau move overland for 12 days to join up with LaFayette in Williamsburg on September 14.

In the interim, Admiral De Grasse fights a crucial sea battle with British Admirals, Sir Thomas Graves and Sir Samuel Hood, that will seal the fate for Cornwallis at Yorktown.

When DeGrasse moves north from Haiti on August 15, Graves and Hood follow him, but with only a part of the fleet, leaving the rest behind to defend the West Indies. This decision proves fateful on September 5 in the Battle of the Capes, fought for control of the entrance to James River and the Yorktown harbor.

In the early afternoon De Grasse brings his 24 warships out past Cape Henry, heading southeast and signaling the classical order "form line of battle." The awaiting British fleet of 19 ships tacks with him, foregoes a thrust at his center, and instead opts for a broadside exchange of fire. But Hood's rear guard never quite catches up to the French, and only eight of the Royal Navy actually close within range of

DeGrasse's main body of fifteen. This nearly 2:1 advantage in firepower pays off in a French victory, after two hours of intense fighting.

The two fleets continue to maneuver out of range off the capes until September 10 when DeGrasse move back into the shelter of Chesapeake Bay. There he is greeted by another French squadron under Admiral de Barras, which brings his strength up to 35 ships, guaranteeing control of the waters surrounding Yorktown.

At this point, Cornwallis's 7200 man army is trapped – between the French fleet on the York River and Washington's predominantly French force of 16,500 infantry who have surrounded him by September 28 from the east and south.

When Clinton sends word promising a relief force from New York, Cornwallis abandons his outer defenses and pulls back to a more tightly controlled perimeter. In turn, Washington and Lafayette are able to construct close-in siege operations, with cannon fire taking its daily toll on the British defenders. By October 10, Cornwallis signals Clinton that his only remaining hope is a rescue by the Royal Navy. Four days later, two critical redoubts (#9 and #10) are stormed, closing the gap between the British and their assailants to only 250 yards.

The end comes on the morning of October 19, 1781, to the beat of the long roll followed by a white flag of surrender from Cornwallis. Formal papers are signed and in the early afternoon the British army marches out of their fortifications to surrender, accompanied appropriately by a popular London tune, "The World Turned Upside Down."



The World Turned Upside Down

Time: September 3, 1783

The Treaty Of Paris Officially Ends The Revolutionary War



John Adams (1735-1826)

The success of the American-French alliance at Yorktown effectively signals the end of British rule over the thirteen colonies – although it takes almost two more years of sporadic warfare to drive the point home in London.

King George is willing to continue the fight, but his Parliament is not. The wartime Prime Minister, Lord North, is forced out in March of 1782.

In the spring, Ben Franklin opens unilateral talks with British counterparts, fearing that the French commitment to an ongoing alliance may be softening. He is joined over time by two other American diplomats, John Adams and John Jay.

By November 1782 a draft treaty is signed, with the opening declaration reading:

His Britannic Majesty acknowledges the said United States...to be free, sovereign and independent.

Still another ten months pass before a final agreement is concluded in Paris on September 3, 1783.

Franklin wants Britain to cede eastern Canada to reduce the odds of a future invasion, but the crown balks at the idea. Instead, the British transfer the land west of the Appalachians to the Mississippi River, to the dismay of their tribal allies.

Other articles grant fishing rights to the United States in Canadian waters and access by Britain to the Mississippi River; finalize payment of outstanding debts; arrange for exchange of prisoners; and protect the rights of any residual Loyalists.

The Treaty of Paris ends the first war between mostly British brethren in America.

The victory of the upstart rebels is an improbable one, and much of the credit falls to one man, General George Washington, whose leadership and sheer determination span over six years of often desperate warfare.

Before long the new nation he secured will ask him to forego private life for another call of duty.