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Alexandria
 COMMUNITY MEDIA

America 250: Another French connection to Alexandria during the American Revolution

In 2024, Alexandria celebrated the 200th anniversary of the 1824 visit of Marquis de Lafayette. As we celebrate the United States of America's 250th birthday, Historic Alexandria highlights the history of Alexandria and another French protagonist of the American Revolution, General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau.

Between Aug. 18, 1781, and the start of the siege of Yorktown on Sept. 28 of that year, Rochambeau and George Washington led approximately 6,300 soldiers from Rhode Island to Virginia to trap British General Charles Cornwallis, effectively ending the American Revolutionary War. Washington briefly hosted Rochambeau at Mount Vernon from Sept. 10 to Sept. 12, 1781.

The train of allied American and French troops camped north of Oronoco Street and on either side of Washington Street from Sept. 25 to Sept. 26 after a two-day march from Georgetown. There is a Virginia state marker at the intersection of North Washington Street and Oronoco Street commemorating the brief encampment.

The bulk of the French Army in the Americas stayed outside Alexandria on July 19, 1782, well after the Battle of Yorktown. French officers drew this 1782 map, showing the French Army camped on a large plain near Alexandria. You can also see Alexandria at the time, with two roads leading to Georgetown – which was part of Maryland at the time – and an east-west thoroughfare thought to be along today's Duke Street.

After the victory at Yorktown, Rochambeau kept his army in Virginia, allowing him to support either Gen. Washington farther north, or Gen. Nathanael Greene, who was operating in South Carolina.

By this point, French officials had already decided that Rochambeau's expertise was no longer needed in the New World. The general returned to France while his soldiers moved to the Caribbean to prepare for an invasion of Jamaica.

Rochambeau's connection to Louis XVI led the French revolutionaries to view him with suspicion. Like Lafayette, the revolutionaries imprisoned



PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

A July 19, 1782, map of Alexandria from the Library of Congress' Rochambeau Map Collection.

and investigated him. Also like Lafayette, he avoided the guillotine and spent his final years in retirement in his home of Vendome.

For updates on the Alexandria Sails on the Potomac

event and other America 250 events in Alexandria, please visit alexandriava.gov/america250.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.