

LEQ: What was the final important battle of the American Revolution?



By the middle of the 1700s, Yorktown, Virginia was a prosperous town located along the York River. This image was painted by Sidney King. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

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Yorktown, Virginia



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American General Benjamin Lincoln appears mounted on a white horse. He extends his right hand toward the sword carried by Charles O'Hara, who heads the long line of troops that extends into the background. To the left, French officers appear standing and mounted beneath the white banner of the royal Bourbon family. On the right are American officers beneath the Stars and Stripes. General George Washington, riding a brown horse, stayed in the background because Lord Cornwallis himself was not present for the surrender. This image was painted by John Trumbull (1756-1843) in 1820. It is courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

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On July 4, 1776 the United States declared its independence from Great Britain.



This painting depicts the moment on June 28, 1776, when the first draft of the Declaration of Independence was presented to the Second Continental Congress. This image was painted by John Trumbull (1756-1843) in 1817. It is courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

Although the British won at Guilford Courthouse, they suffered 25% casualties.



This image shows a physician bandaging a foot of a soldier. This illustration was produced by Don Troiani in 1983. It is courtesy of the National Park Service.

One British official stated, “Another such victory would have ruined us.”



The 1st Maryland Infantry Regiment, supported by Continental Light Dragoons, charged the elite British Guards at the third American line during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse on March 15, 1781. This image was created by Don Troiani in 1975. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

British General Charles Cornwallis led his 7500 troops out of North Carolina into Virginia.



Cornwallis' route to Yorktown was not a direct one. He first chased Nathaniel Green's American Army, then marched to Virginia in an attempt to live off the land. Finally he marched to Yorktown in an attempt to be resupplied by the British navy. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

American soldiers under the Marquis de Lafayette followed Cornwallis through the Carolinas and Virginia.



“The Meeting of Washington and Lafayette at Yorktown, 19th October 1781.” This painting was created by Georges-Jules-Auguste Cain circa 1790. It is courtesy of the Commonwealth of Virginia and historyisfun.org.

Yorktown was on a peninsula formed by the James River, the York River, and Chesapeake Bay.



This postage stamp was created by the United States Postal Service in 1981 for the bicentennial of the Siege of Yorktown. This image is courtesy of usstampgallery.com.

Having your army on a peninsula can be good because ships can bring supplies and reinforcements, or take your army away if you need to retreat.



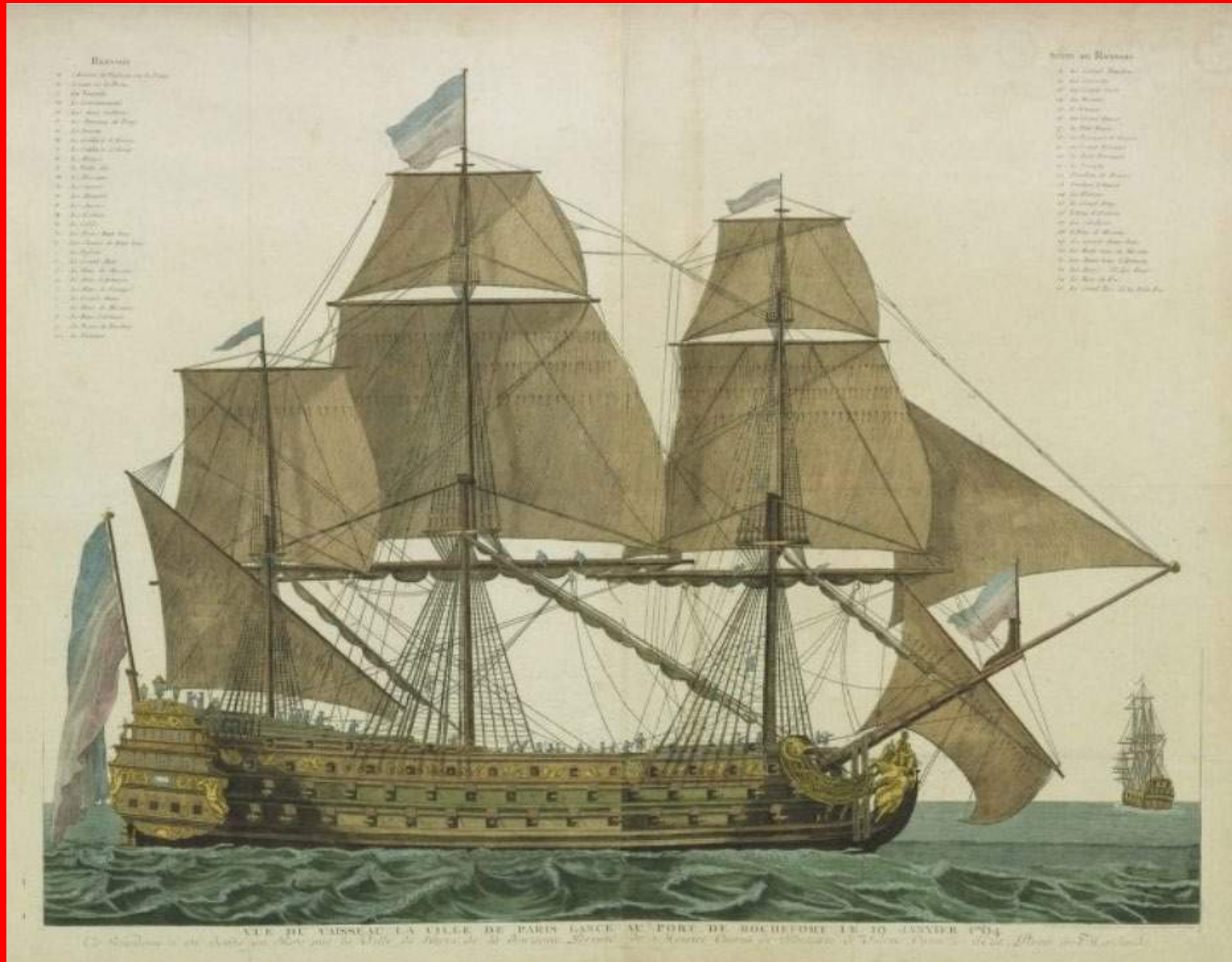
HMS Norwich and *HMS Success* are depicted in front of Yorktown, Virginia in 1756. This view was produced by midshipman John Davis who served aboard one of the British ships. It is the earliest view of Yorktown known to exist. This image is courtesy of cdlib.org.

A peninsula can also be a trap, however, if your ships never arrive and your back is against the water.



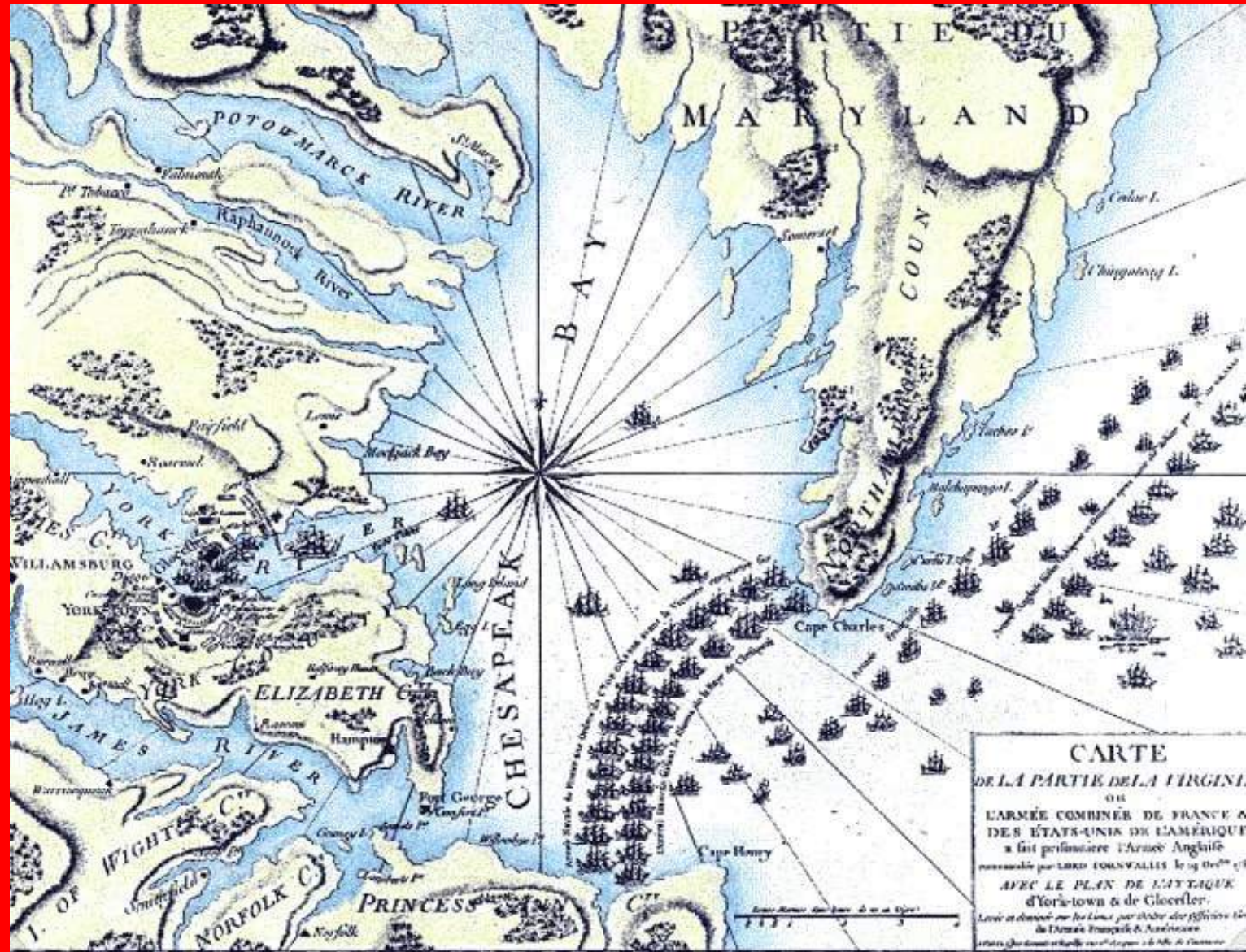
This image is titled *Destruction of the British Frigate, Sharon, during the Battle of Yorktown, circa 1781*. This image is courtesy of allposters.com.

A French fleet under the command of Admiral Francois de Grasse sent word that they were leaving the West Indies to sail for the Chesapeake Bay.



This is a depiction of the flagship of Admiral Francois de Grasse, the *Ville de Paris* in 1764 when it was launched at the Port of Rochefort. At Yorktown, she had 104 guns/cannon. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The French fleet arrived off the coast of Virginia before the British navy and anchored their warships across the entrance to Chesapeake Bay.



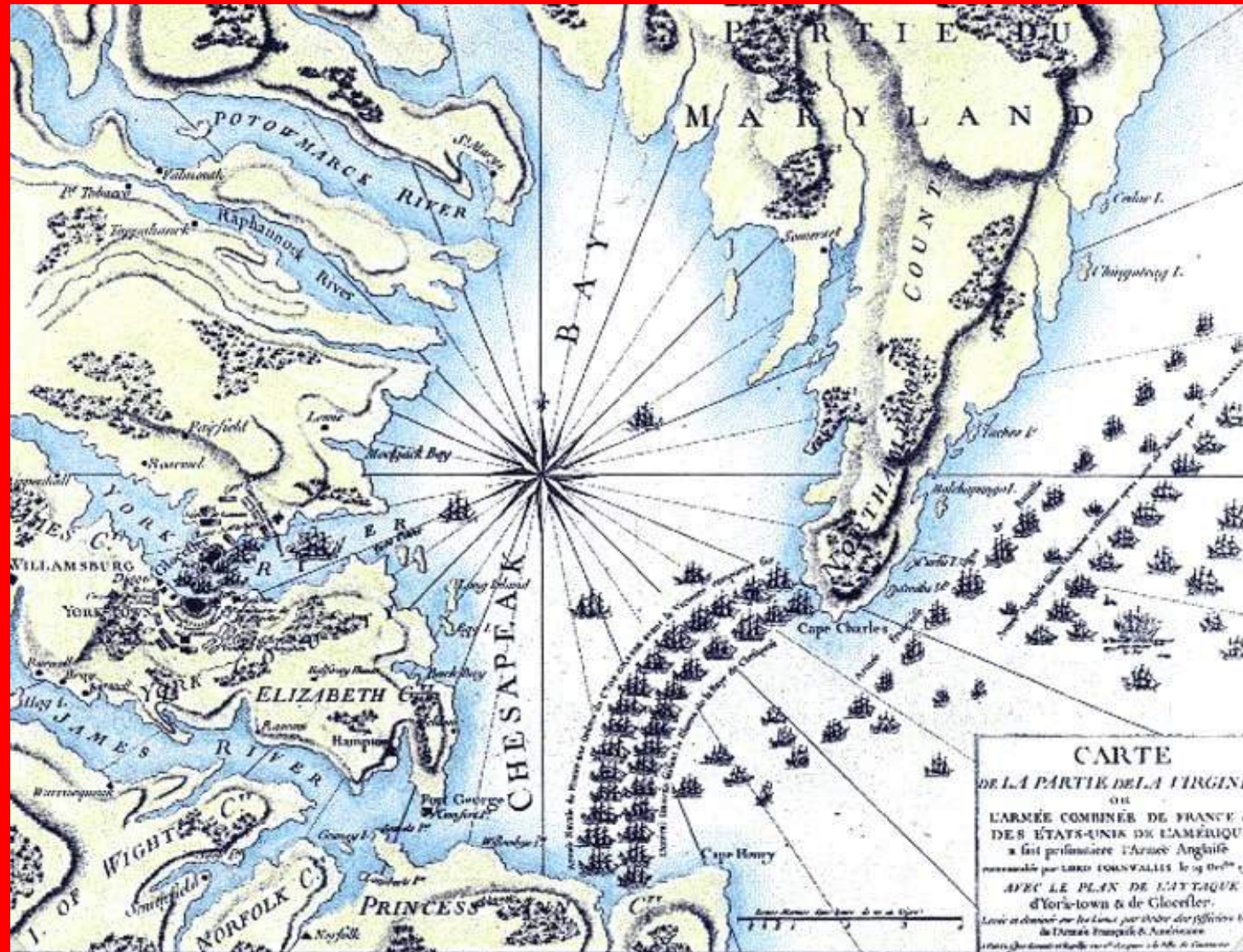
The French fleet blocked the British ships from entering Chesapeake Bay. A rare, original French map showing French naval superiority during the Siege of Yorktown, Virginia in 1781. This image is courtesy of history.navy.mil.

When the British Navy arrived, the French sailed out to meet them and defeated the British in what became known as the Battle of the Chesapeake.



This is a depiction of the Battle of the Chesapeake. The French ships are on the left and the British ships are on the right. The painter is V. Zveg who created the image in 1962. The original is on display at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum in Norfolk, Virginia. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Another French fleet that sailed from Rhode Island arrived to help De Grasse's fleet block the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay again.



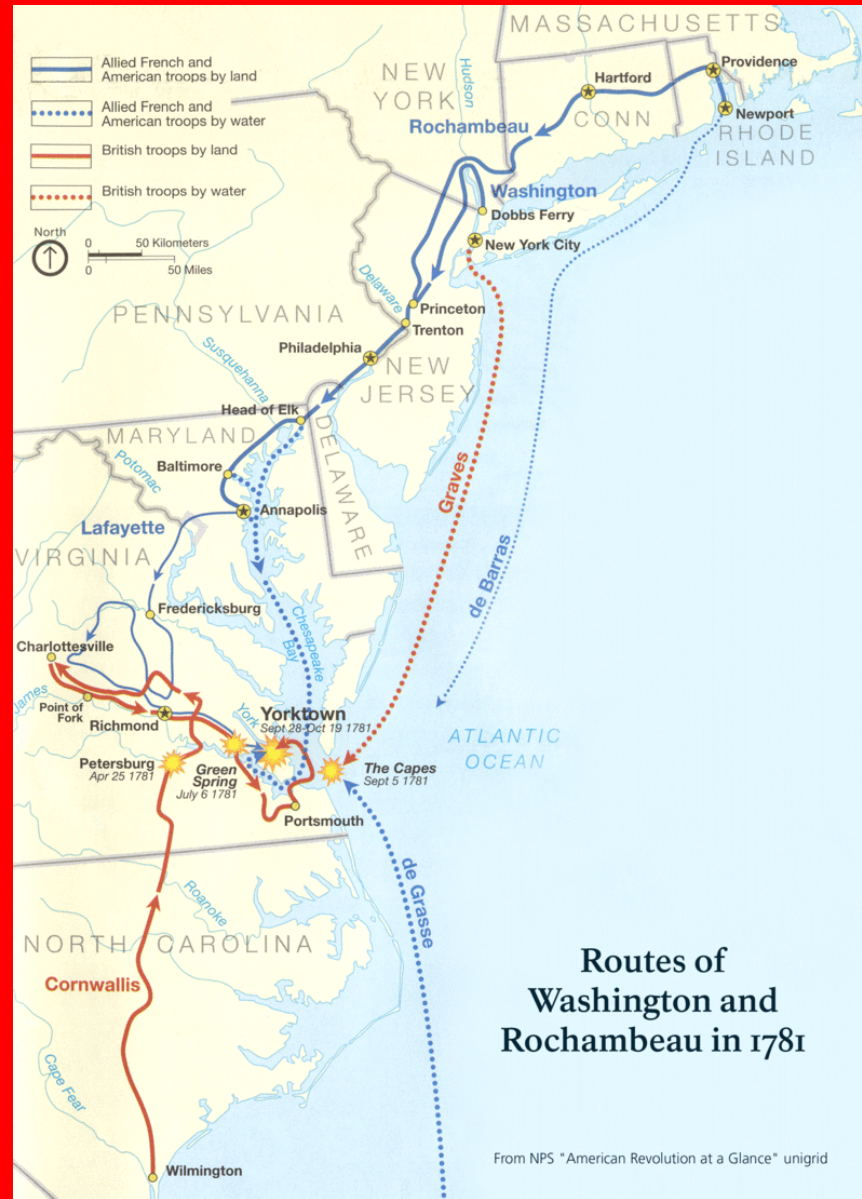
The new French fleet was under the command of the Comte de Barras Saint-Laurent. This is a rare, original French map showing French naval superiority during the Siege of Yorktown, Virginia in 1781. This image is courtesy of history.navy.mil.

Washington's army of 4000 men and 5000 French troops led by General Jean de Rochambeau hurried from New England to Virginia.



This image shows Washington's army and Rochambeau's army marching from Rhode Island and New York to Virginia. DeGrasse's navy arrived to block the Chesapeake Bay. This image is courtesy of lauzunslegion.com.

On the march, Washington thought about attacking New York and a British army there of 3000 men. The British army prepared their defenses.



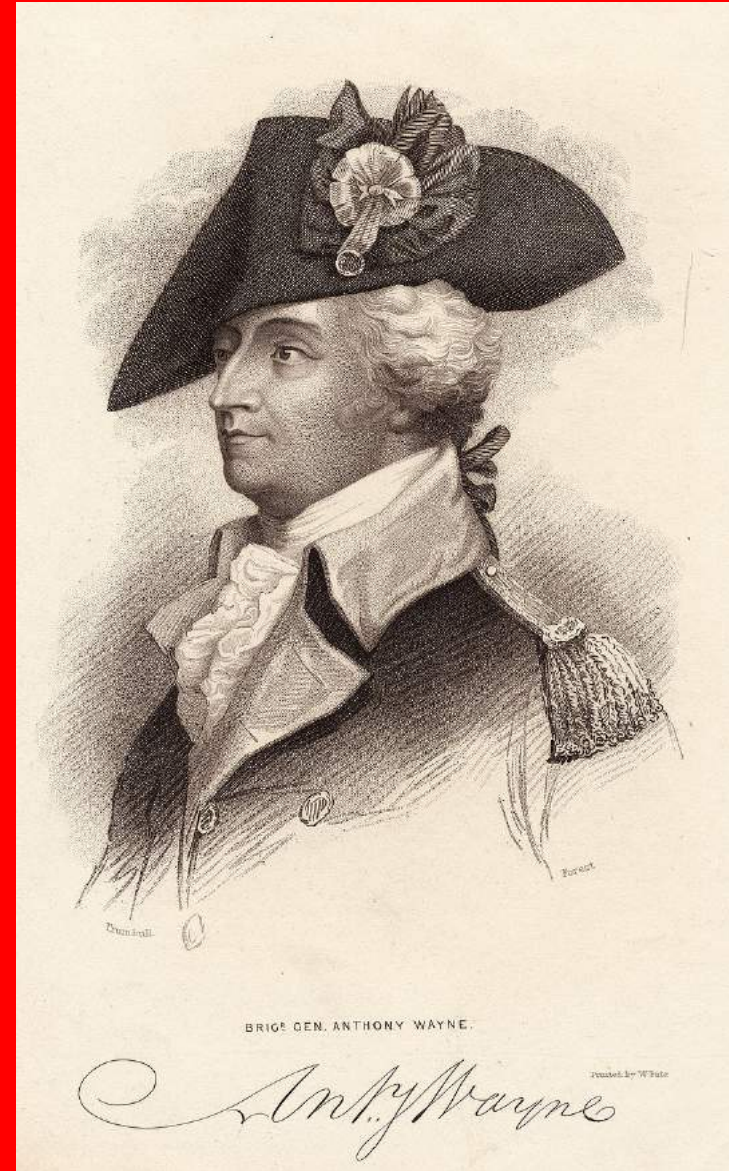
This image shows Washington's army and Rochambeau's army marching from Rhode Island and New York to Virginia. DeGrasse's navy arrived to block the Chesapeake Bay. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Washington marched past New York towards Virginia. This British army stayed in New York thinking they were Washington's target, not Cornwallis.



This image shows the British army entering New York on September 17, 1776. This image was created by Francois Xavier Habermann. This image is courtesy of pps-west.com.

4500 American forces led by the Marquis de Lafayette and Anthony Wayne arrived near Yorktown...



Gilbert du Motier Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) was a French aristocrat who joined the American Army at the age of 20. He became a Major General. Anthony Wayne (1745-1796) was born in Pennsylvania. The painting of Lafayette is by Joseph Desire. The image of Anthony Wayne is by Trumbull and Forest. They are courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

...and prevented the British from escaping by land until Washington's and Rochambeau's forces arrived.



Lafayette and Wayne's forces were in the Williamsburg, Virginia area. This is The Old Dominion's Political Map.

Washington's and Rochambeau's armies arrived after a march of over 550 miles.



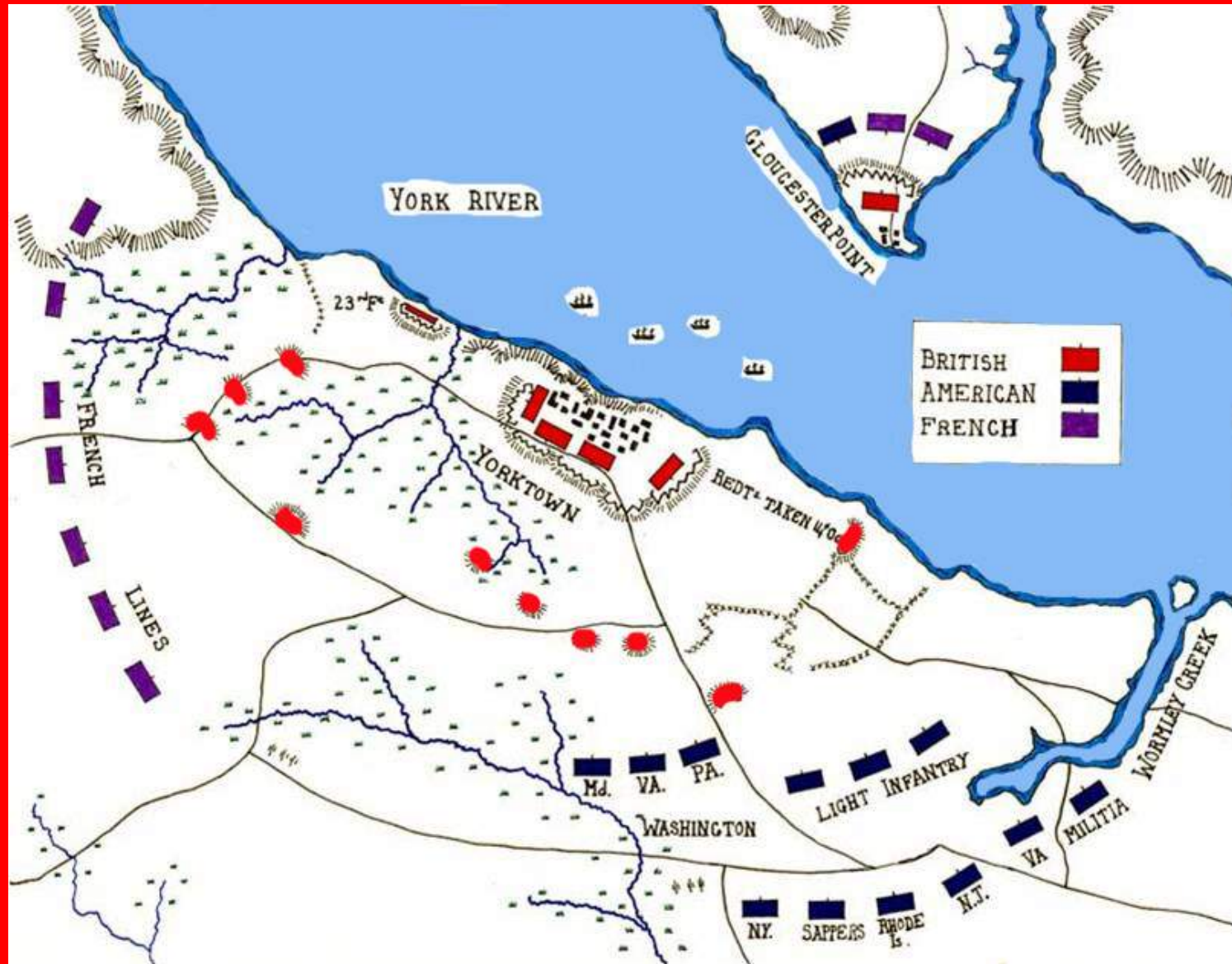
The armies of Washington and Rochambeau reached Williamsburg, Virginia on September 25, 1781. Their 16,000 men was approximately more than double the size of Cornwallis' army. The French deployed on the left (yellow), and the Americans (blue) deployed on the right (south) in this image. This image is courtesy of battlefields.org.

The Americans and the French decided not to directly attack the British lines, but to lay siege to Yorktown.



The French were experts at siege warfare. They directed the Americans in digging trenches that would protect them, and slowly come closer to the British lines. This painting was created by Sidney King. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

For the British, every route of escape by land and by sea was blocked.



The armies of Washington and Rochambeau reached Williamsburg, Virginia on September 25, 1781. Their 16,000 men was approximately more than double the size of Cornwallis' army. This image is courtesy of britishbattles.com.

The siege lasted for 21 days with the Americans and the French digging closer and closer to the British lines.



To escape detection from the British, most of the digging in the siege lines took place at night. This painting is by Sidney King. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

While men were digging, cannon protected by the trenches were constantly firing at and moving closer to the British in Yorktown.



General George Washington fired the first cannon during the Siege of Yorktown. This painting was created by Henry Alexander Ogden (1856-1936). This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The Americans and French fired an average of 1700 cannon balls each day of the siege.



This painting shows the French artillery park during the Siege of Yorktown. This painting is by Sidney King. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

Some cannon would fire cannon balls with a speed of over 550 miles per hour with a “flat” trajectory directly at the British lines.



This is approximately 820 feet per second (559.091 miles per hour). This painting is called “Artillery of Independence, Siege of Yorktown, Virginia. This painting is by Don Troiani. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

Some cannon balls would be solid and would be used to knock down structures such as buildings or earthworks.



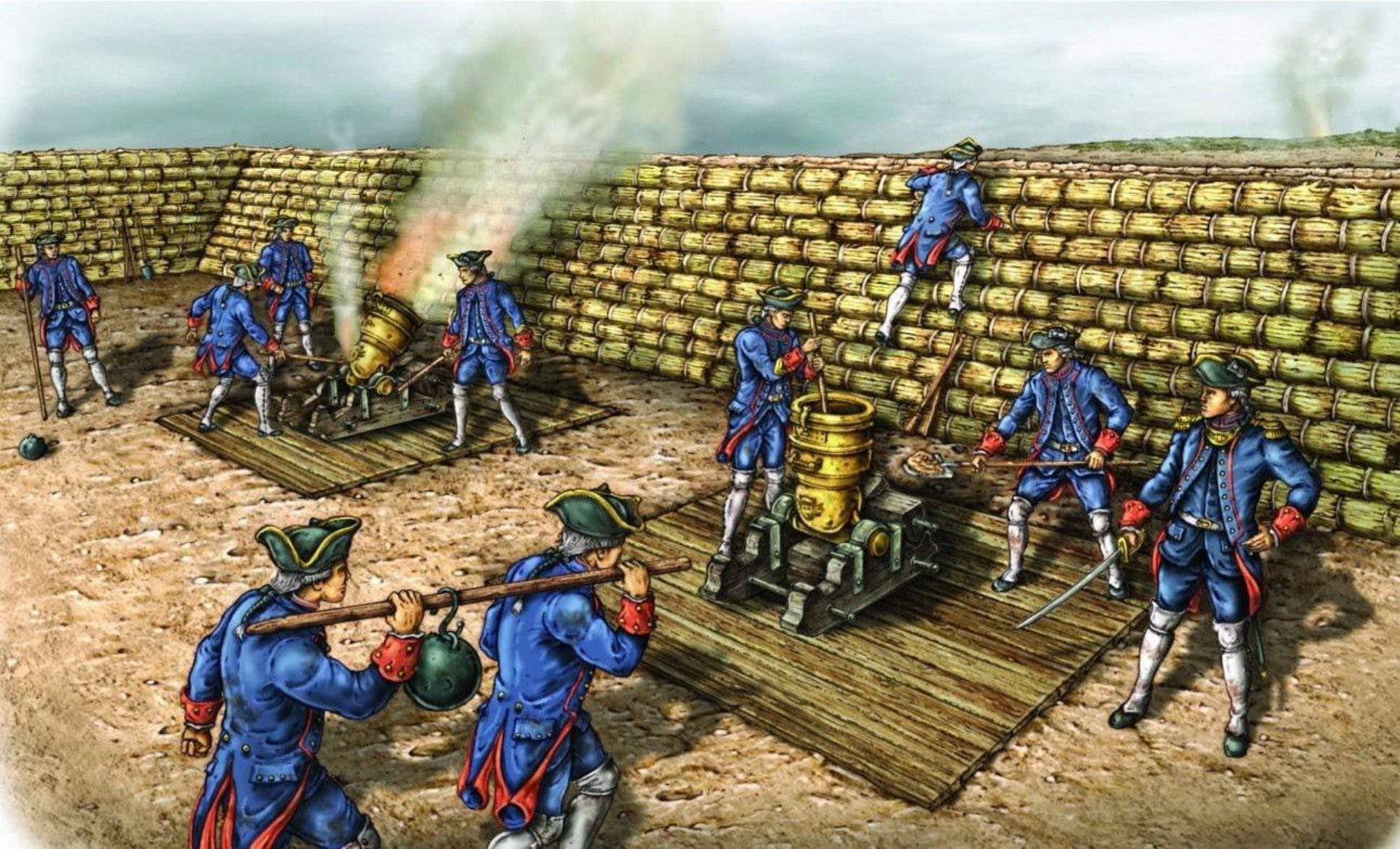
This solid cannon balls (solid shot) were usually weighed anywhere from 4 pounds to 12 pounds. This is an 8 pound shot from a Rhode Island battle in 1778. This image is courtesy of ambroseantiques.com.

Other cannon balls would be shells that were to explode apart with a fuse (they were sometimes difficult to explode exactly when you wanted).



This image shows a shell with a hole for the fuse. Gunpowder would have previously been poured inside the shell. This image is courtesy of wallbuilders.com.

Mortars would fire cannon balls into the air and attempted to “drop them” into the British trenches/forts.



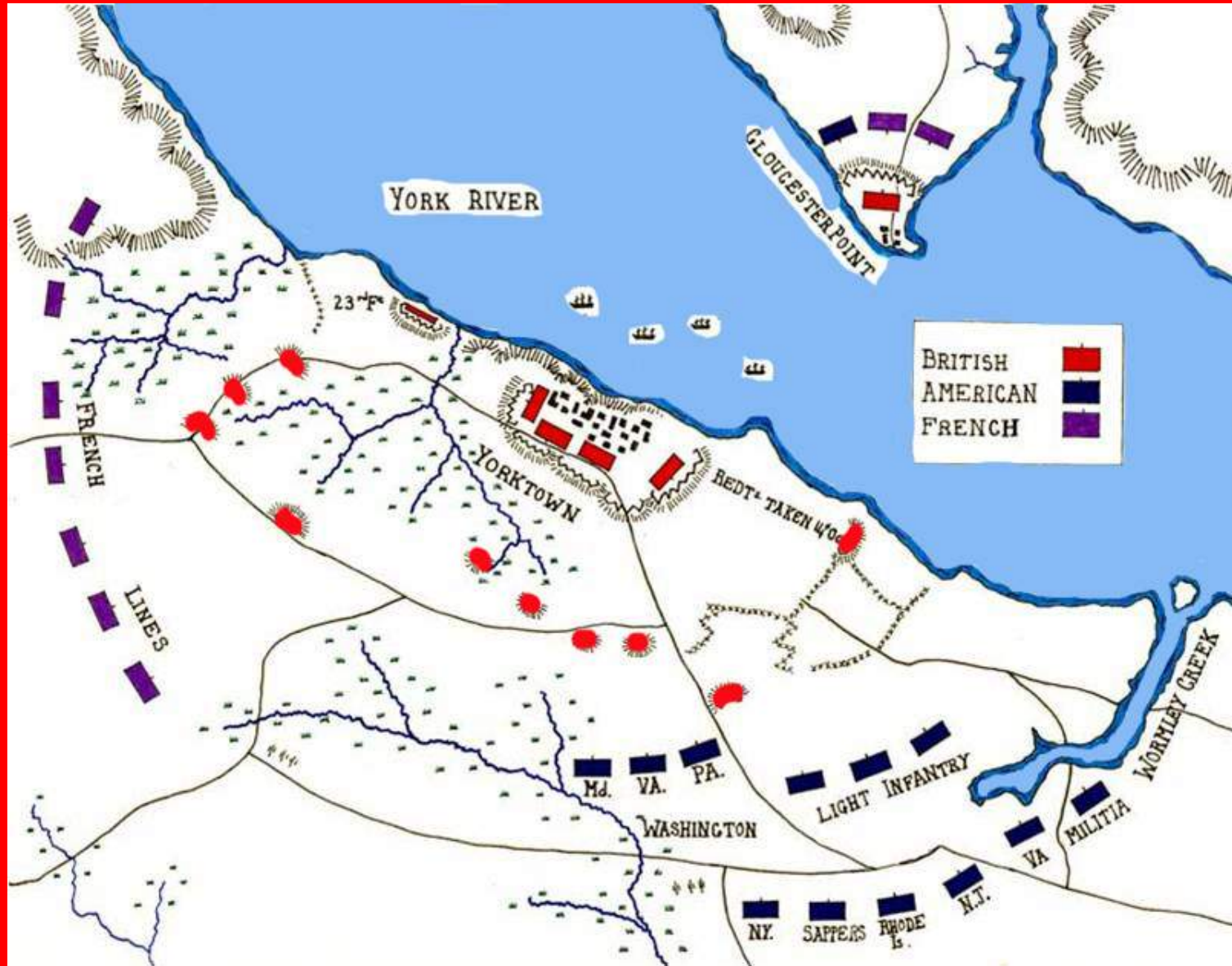
This painting shows a French mortar battery at the siege of Yorktown, Virginia. This painting is courtesy of [pinterest.com](#).

As the lines came closer, and the allies sensed a weakness in the British positions, they decided to attack some British earthworks.



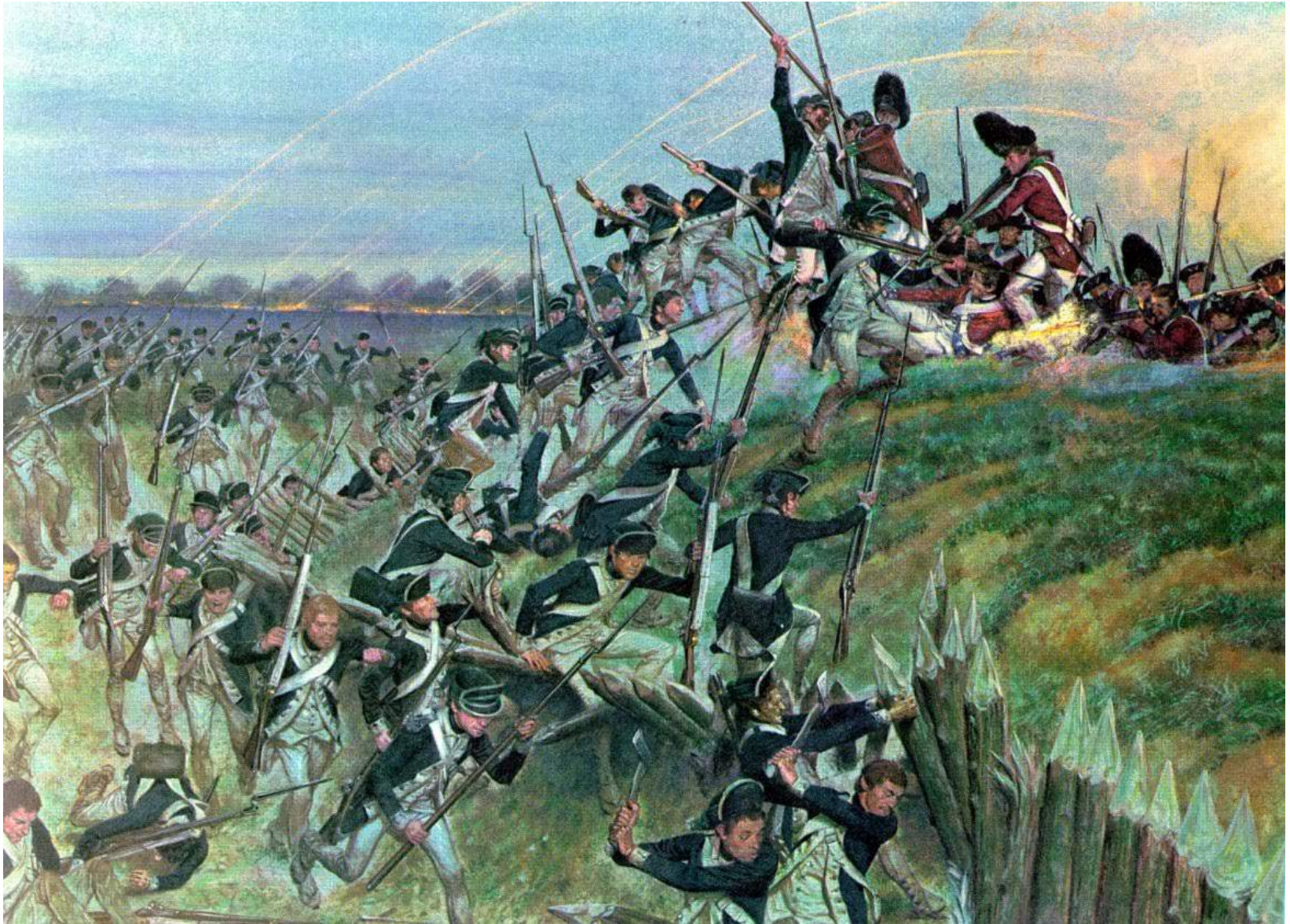
Storming of a British Redoubt by American troops at Yorktown. Alexander Hamilton led the American assault on Redoubt Number 10. This painting was created by Eugene-Louis Lami in 1840. This image is courtesy of virginiamemory.com.

The British had 10 small forts or redoubts, connected by trenches, that surrounded Yorktown. #1 was on the left, #10 was on the right.



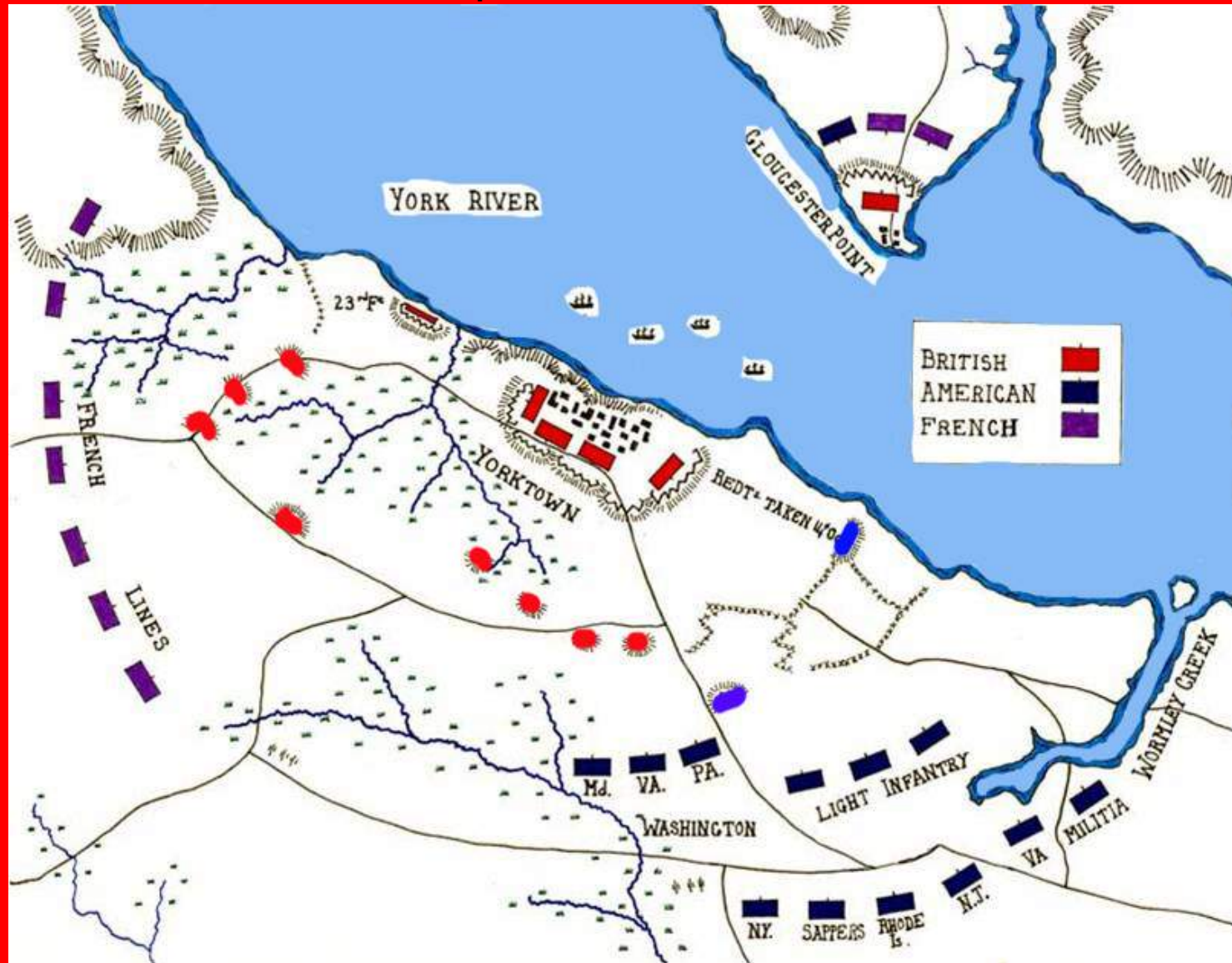
The redoubts are shown in a brighter red color closer to the French and the American lines. They were numbered from left to right #1-#10. This image is courtesy of britishbattles.com.

The French attacked Redoubt #9. The Americans, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Hamilton, attacked Redoubt #10.



Alexander Hamilton, later the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, led the American assault on Redoubt Number 10. This image is courtesy of the United States Army Center of Military History.

With the capture of these small British forts (redoubts) the Americans and French could not put a “crossfire” on the British lines.



There were small British forts or redoubts connected by trenches. The Americans captured Redoubt #10 (now shown in blue near the York River, and the French captured Redoubt #9 shown in purple. This image is courtesy of britishbattles.com.

On October 17, 1781, Cornwallis wrote to General Washington requesting a cease-fire.



The Surrender at Yorktown. On October 17, 1781 an officer carrying a white flag along with a drummer stood upon the British works at Yorktown. The bombardment of the British lines immediately ceased. This painting was created by John Ward Dunsmore (1856-1945). This image is courtesy of americangallery.com.

The surrender negotiations, which lasted for two days, occurred at the Moore House outside of Yorktown.



The Moore House was chosen as the site for the surrender negotiations by General Cornwallis in his message to Washington on October 17, 1781. The Moore House was well outside the line of siege fire, and therefore, not damaged. It was a neutral location, hiding the British situation in town, and possibly selected in the hope of securing better surrender terms. And finally, it was a convenient location for both sides to reach, as it was situated along the York River.

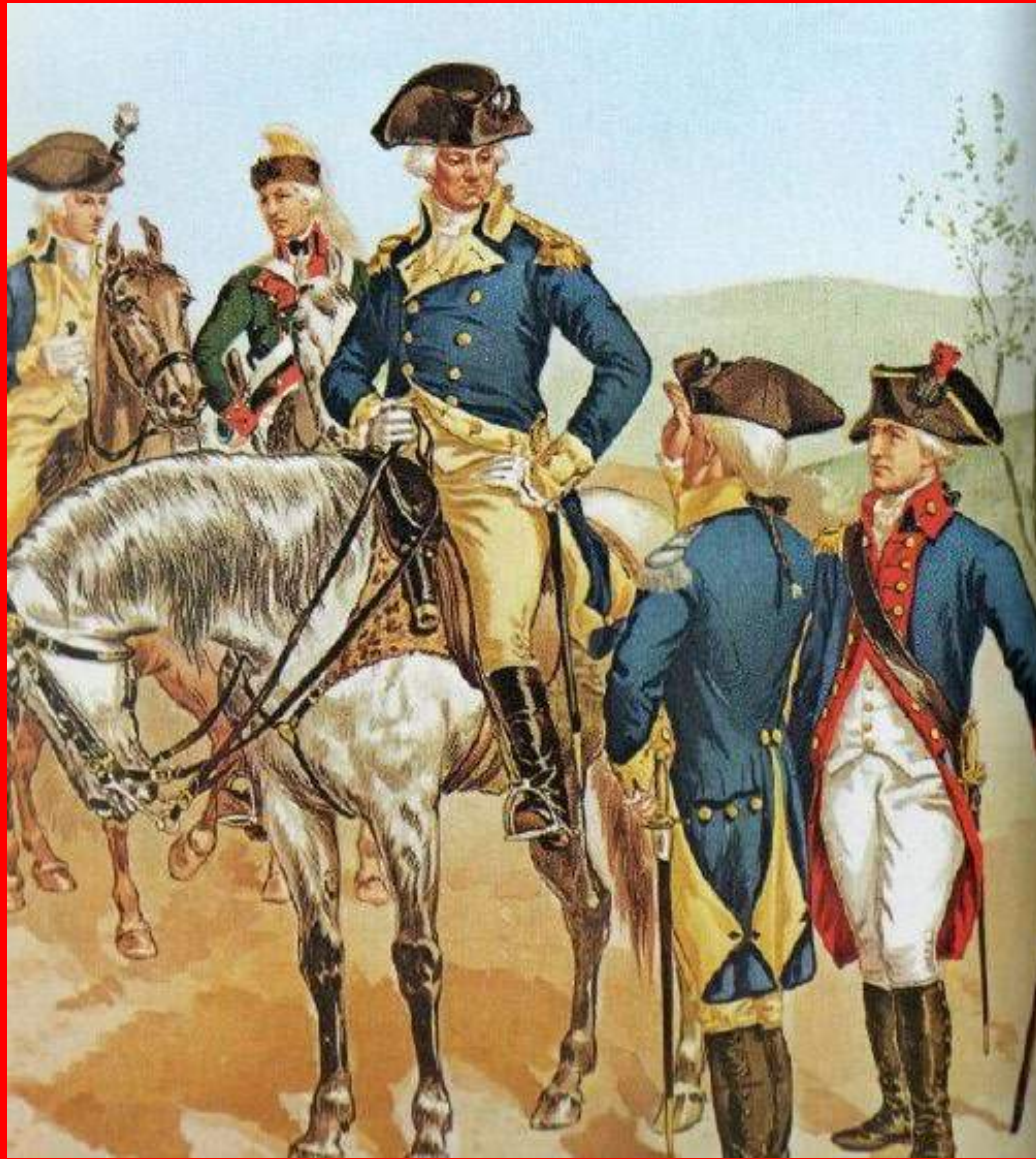
On October 19, 1781 British, French, and American troops met outside of Yorktown in a large open field.



YORKTOWN, 1781

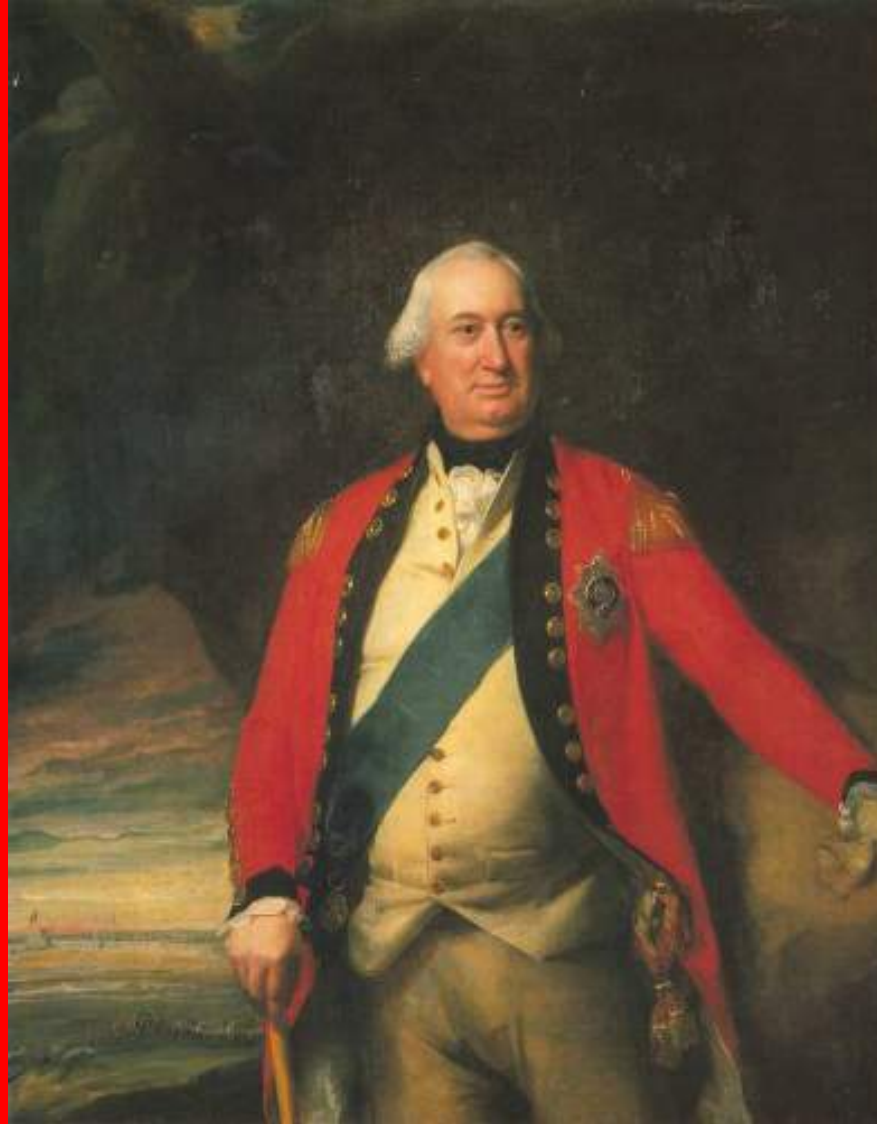
The field is now known as "Surrender Field." British soldiers are shown laying down their arms under a symbolic sunset. This image is courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

General Washington waited to accept General Cornwallis' sword in the gesture of surrender.



This image shows Commander-in-Chief George Washington and Aide-de-Camp Line officers. This image was painted by Henry Alexander Ogden (1856-1936). It is courtesy of americangallery.com.

Cornwallis, however, was not there. He claimed to be too ill to attend the surrender ceremony.



Lord Charles Cornwallis (1738-1805) was the First Marquis of Cornwallis. This image was painted by John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) circa 1795. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Instead, Cornwallis named General Charles O'Hara to act in his place.



This painting is titled *Washington Enforces the Surrender at Yorktown, 1781*. This painting was produced by Eugene Hess (1824-1862) in 1861. It is displayed at the Maximilianeum Foundation in Munich, Germany.

Washington selected General Benjamin Lincoln to represent the Americans.



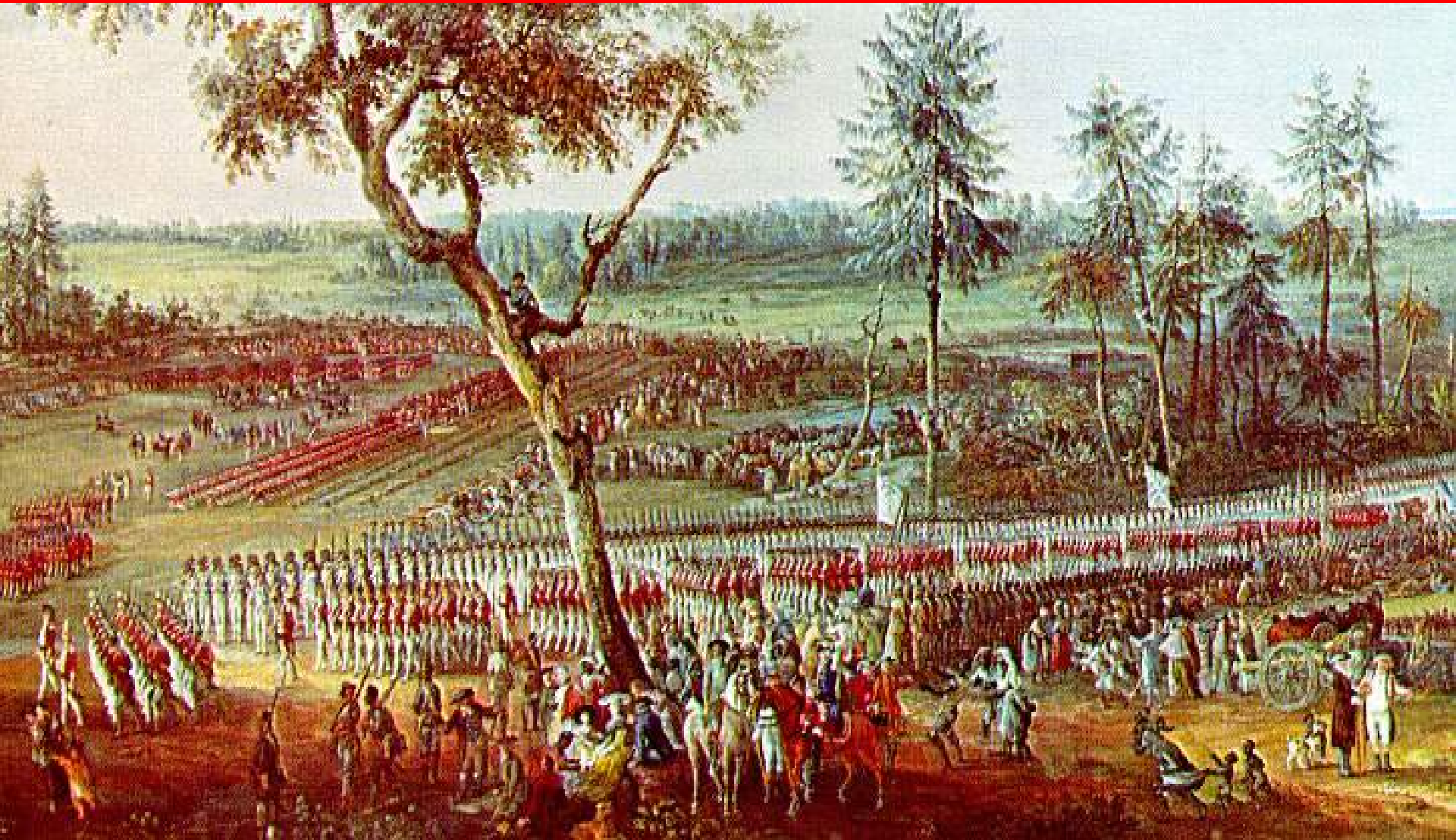
American General Benjamin Lincoln appears mounted on a white horse. He extends his right hand toward the sword carried by Charles O'Hara, who heads the long line of troops that extends into the background. To the left, French officers appear standing and mounted beneath the white banner of the royal Bourbon family. On the right are American officers beneath the Stars and Stripes. General George Washington, riding a brown horse, stayed in the background because Lord Cornwallis himself was not present for the surrender. This image was painted by John Trumbull (1756-1843) in 1820. It is courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

Lincoln accepted O'Hara's sword and then directed the British troops to stack their weapons and return to Yorktown.



British soldiers lay down their arms during the surrender ceremony at Yorktown, Virginia. This painting was created by Sidney King. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

The British band might have played a tune titled “The World Turned Upside Down.”



This is a detail from Louis Nicholas van Blarenberghe's *Surrender at Yorktown*. It was painted in 1785 by order of the King of France. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

Although the war was not quite over, a major battle had been won, and the Americans knew ultimate victory was close.



This painting shows George Washington and his senior staff at the Siege of Yorktown. This painting was created by Sidney King. This image is courtesy of the National Park Service.

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When news of the surrender reached London, British Prime Minister Lord North exclaimed, “It is all over!”



Lord Frederick North (1732-1792) was Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1770-1782. This painting was created by Nathaniel Dance from 1773-1774. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

John Jay, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams traveled to Paris to meet with the British and work out the details of a peace treaty.



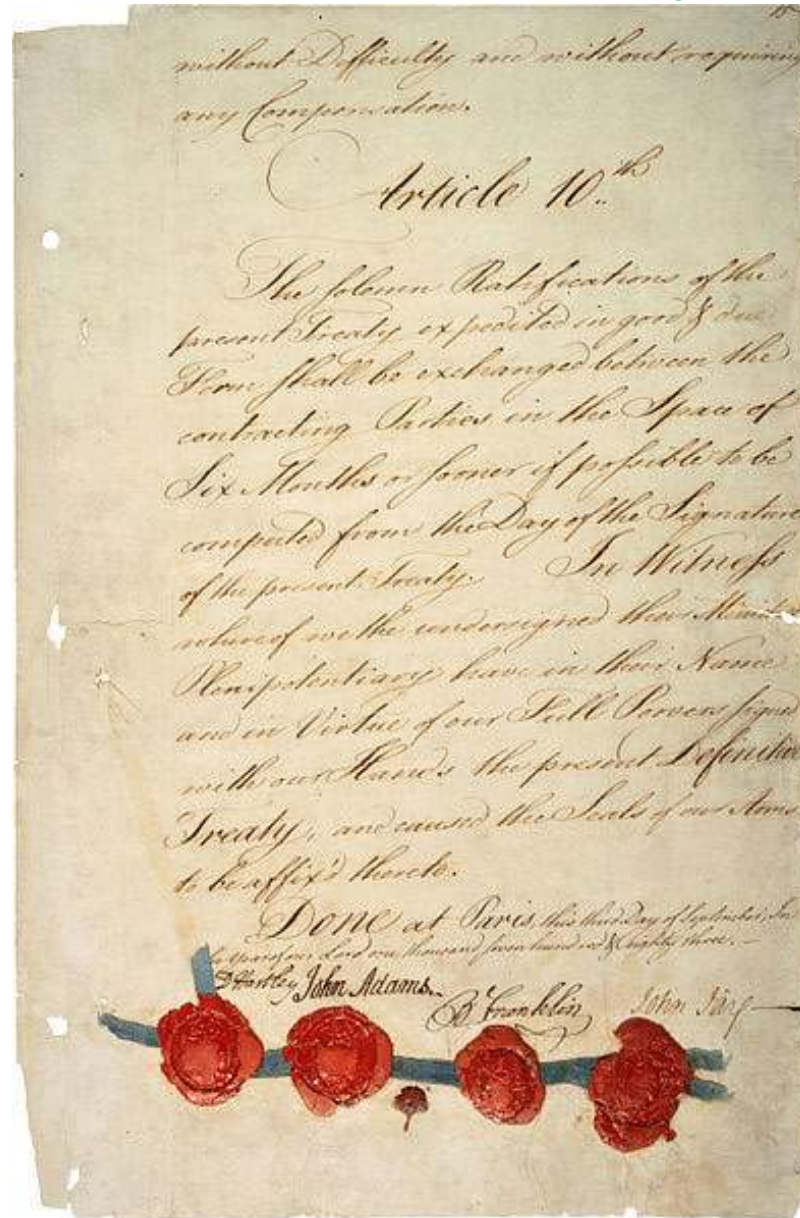
American Commissioners of the Preliminary Peace Agreement with Great Britain also sometimes referred to as the "Treaty of Paris" From left to right: John Jay, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, and William Temple Franklin. The British commissioners refused to pose, and the picture was never finished. This painting was created from 1783-1784 by Benjamin West and is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Finally, on September 3, 1783, the two sides signed the Treaty of Paris.



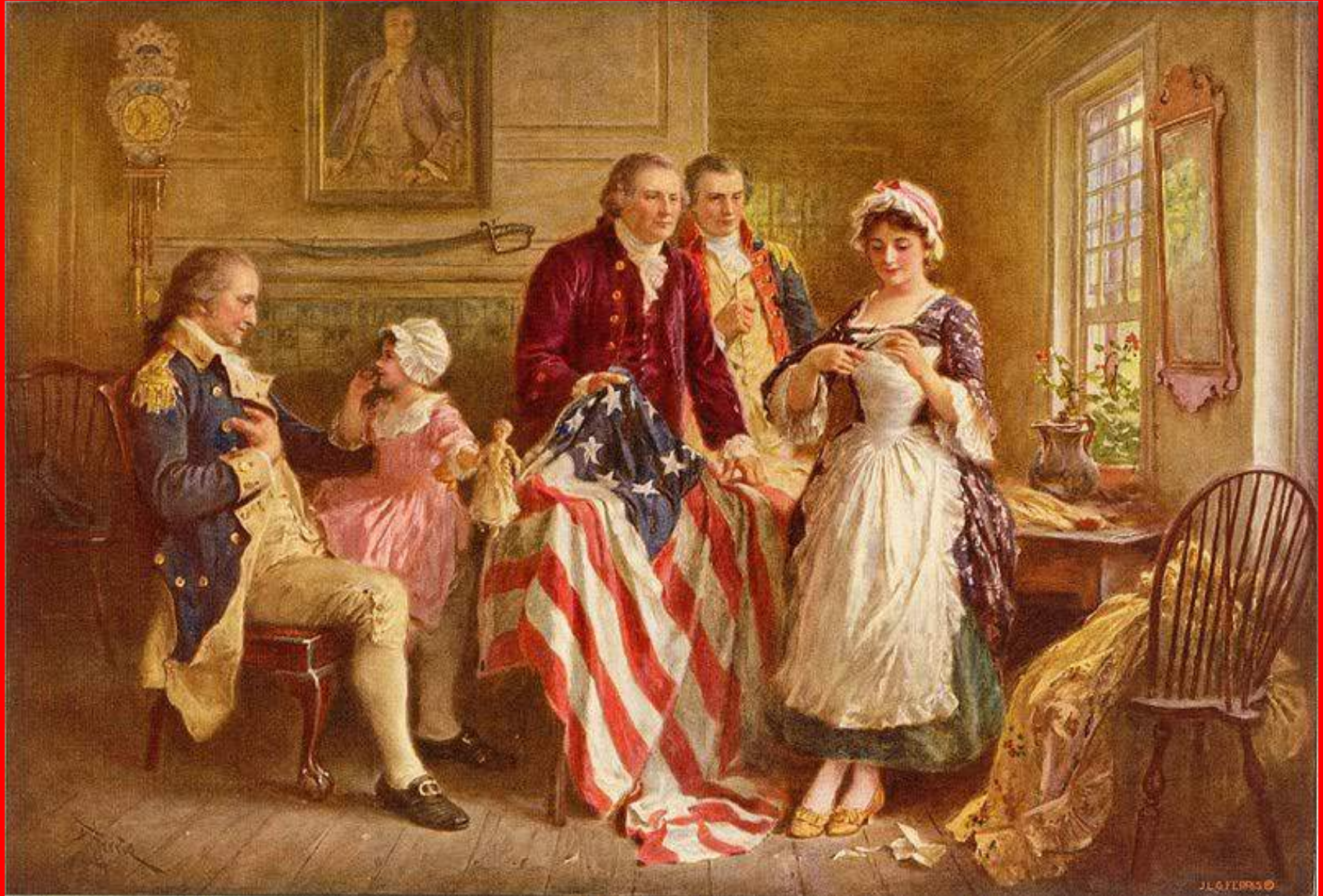
This image is titled *Signing the Preliminary Treaty of Peace at Paris, November 30, 1782*. John Jay and Benjamin Franklin are standing at the left. This print is from a painting by Carl Wilhelm Anton Seiler (1846-1921). The print was created in 1905. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Some important points in the Treaty of Paris included:



This is the signature page from the Treaty of Paris. This image is courtesy of the National Archives and Wikimedia Commons.

Great Britain acknowledged the independence of the colonies.



Betsy Ross may or may not have produced the first American flag. This painting by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris (1863-1930) depicts Betsy Ross in 1777 showing Major Ross and Robert Morris how she cut the stars for the American flag. George Washington sits in a chair on the left. This image is courtesy of the Library of Congress and Wikimedia Commons.

Great Britain agreed to remove its troops from American soil immediately.



The 10th Regiment of Foot furling their colors during the 225th Anniversary of the Surrender at Yorktown. This image is courtesy of redcoat.org.

Great Britain agreed that the United States could have all the land west of the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River.



Canada is at the top of the map. The United States is in purple. Spanish territory, including Florida, is in the light, tan color. This image is courtesy of learner.org.

This new United States territory extended from Canada in the north to Florida in the south.



The new boundaries of the United States extended from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River except for Florida and the lower Mississippi River Valley. This image is courtesy of d211.org.

The Americans agreed to ask state legislatures to pay Loyalists for property they lost in the war.



However most of the states ignored the Loyalists' claims. This image is Benjamin West's 1812 portrait of John Eardley Wilmot, with West's allegorical painting *Reception of the American Loyalists in England*. This image is part of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection in the Bridgeman Art Library.

Patriots throughout the colonies celebrated when the last of the British troops left New York City.



The British had held New York ever since Washington evacuated the city following the Battle of Long Island. This image is titled "The Last Boat-Load of the British Leaving New York" by Howard Pyle, an illustration for Henry P. Johnson's article "Evacuation of New York By the British, 1783" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* for November 1883.

After the British left, George Washington, at the head of his troops rode triumphantly into New York City.



This image is titled *Evacuation Day and Washington's Triumphal Entry in New York City, November 25, 1783*. Lithograph by E.P.&L. Restein, 1879. This image is courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Washington addressed his highest ranking officers in a final farewell at Fraunces Tavern in New York City.



This image shows the north and west fronts of the Fraunces Tavern at Pearl and Broad Streets in New York City. This image was taken on April 30, 2016 by Robert Housch.

During Washington's speech, he said, "I cannot come to each of you, but shall feel obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand."



This image shows George Washington saying farewell to the officers of the Continental Army at Fraunces Tavern. This painting by Alonzo Chappel was created in 1866. This image is courtesy of humanevents.com.

Washington returned to his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia where he planned to live quietly with his family.



This is an aquatint of Mount Vernon, near Alexandria, Virginia. It was created by Francis Jukes (1745-1812) in 1800. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Washington knew, however, there would be great challenges ahead for his young and promising country.



George Washington, shown here in an 1851 painting, oversees his slaves at Mount Vernon. This image titled *Washington as Farmer at Mount Vernon* was created by Junius Brutus Stearns. It is located at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. This image is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

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