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Maps, photos, and illustrations have been interspersed throughout this book for the convenience of the reader.

From the pen of

*Louis-François-Bertrand du Pont d'Aubevoye,
comte de Lauberdière*



“When the Treaty of Alliance was signed with America, the British did not fail to paint us in the darkest colors to the Americans. At the arrival of our army, fear had already alienated many inhabitants.”

“Mrs. Arnold played the actress, pretended to be ill, sobbing, ignorant of the despicable action of her husband.”

“The British are very brave but they only fight well when the forces are equal or when they have superiority.”

“We hardly see an unhappy man in America because a young man's and a young girl's desire and inclination make them decide to get married.”

“The Americans are beginning to want nothing to do with the English except the language.”

“We often find beauties, lovely girls in the country. They bring their flocks to pasture. They truly fulfill the idea we have of the shepherdess and which we no longer find in Europe except in the pastorals and in the poets.”

“General Washington's demonstration of joy upon seeing us join him was very moving.”

“The enemy began firing. . . . We did not respond with a single musket shot. The march was rapid. The Baron had the charge beaten and penetrated the redoubt. We did not have any need for ladders. The same zeal, the same bravery animated the commander and the soldiers and we took the work sword in hand.”

Introduction



early April of 1777, a 19-year-old Frenchman named Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette set sail for America. Upon arrival, he joined the fledgling Continental Army in its struggle against the British empire. Lafayette's name and contributions remain storied lore in the tale of the birth of the United States.

Less well known are the names of those who followed Lafayette to North America. By 1780, hundreds of other young Frenchmen were in the camps and battlefields across America. They included: 25-year-old Donatien Marie Joseph de Vimeur, Vicomte de Rochambeau, son of the general; Mathieu Dumas (27); Count Hans Axel von Fersen (26); Joseph Louis César Charles, Comte then Duc de Damas (22); Alexandre-Théodore-Victor, Comte de Lameth (20) and Louis-François-Bertrand du Pont d'Aubevoye, Comte de Lauberdrière (21). All of these men served as staff officers for General Rochambeau.

Like all young men in their circumstance, they headed off to war burdened with fear and excitement. The element of fear was because many were leaving home for the first time to participate in combat in an unknown country more than 3,000 miles away. Many would never see their families and friends again, like 13-year-old drummer François Gogue, who died at a hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, on November 5, 1780.

Excitement tempered their fear, beckoned as they were to adventure in a foreign land. They would be shoulder-to-shoulder with their country's former enemies and have a chance to observe these people who spoke a different language, wore unusual clothes, and practiced unfamiliar customs, mannerisms, and styles of dress.

There was great eagerness in France for the war from the very beginning. Brigadier General Louis Duportail made that clear to the Minister of War, the Comte de St. Germain, on November 12, 1777, when he reported: “There is a hundred times more enthusiasm for this revolution in a single cafe in Paris than in all the united colonies.”¹

French Involvement

The French Enlightenment thinkers, called the philosophes, laid the ideological foundations for both the American and French revolutions. Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755) developed the idea of the separation of powers and the need to divide power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, particularly in his book *The Spirit of the Laws*, which went through eighteen printings in less than two years of its original printing in 1748.

François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), better known by his pen name Voltaire, used sarcasm and irony to advocate intelligent political authority based on the rule of law. During his entire literary and professional life, Voltaire advocated freedom of thought in all of its forms and the ability to ensure social and political organizations do not silence voices—particularly those of dissent. Most of his political views were based on the ideas of John Locke (1632–1704) and Isaac Newton (1642-1726/27). Voltaire distrusted democracy, which he saw as propagating the idiocy of the masses and was very critical about other people’s ideas. Essentially, he believed enlightened despotism to be the key to progress and change. Only an enlightened monarch or an enlightened absolutist, advised by philosophers like himself, could bring about change. It was in the king’s interest to improve the power and wealth of his subjects and kingdom. He considered the French bourgeoisie to be too small and ineffective, the aristocracy parasitic and corrupt, the commoners ignorant and superstitious, and the church as a static force useful only as a counterbalance since its “religious tax,” or the tithe, helped to create a strong backing for revolutionaries. Voltaire was a firm advocate of secular rule.

1 Louis Duportail to St. Germain, 12 November 1777 in Walker, Paul K. et al. *Engineers of Independence: A Documentary History of the Army Engineers in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*. Historical Division, Office of Administrative Services, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1981 pp. 175-177.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) remains the most celebrated of the French political philosophers. His works, particularly *The Social Contract* (1762), developed the principles of general will and the importance of a social contract between people and government.

The increasing absolutism of the French monarchy directly shaped French political philosophy. The role and influence of representative institutions in France were diminishing. In direct contrast, at this time the British Parliament saw a growth in political power and the importance of legislatures surged in the British North American colonies. While the Americans, and even many Britons, adopted the ideas and concepts that shaped the democratic ideals of the American Revolution, there were few practical outlets for corresponding anti-monarchical views in France. This became important as French adherents to the philosophies of Montesquieu and Rousseau, such as Lafayette (1757–1834) and Mathieu Dumas (1753–1837), traveled to the colonies to fight for democracy.

During the eighteenth century, the British and French fought for domination in Europe and around the globe. This conflict spilled over into the established colonies. The Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War (known as the French and Indian War in America) in 1763 and marked the end of French territorial ambitions in North America. The conflict's end saw the emergence of a mainly European foreign policy regarding Great Britain. France lost Canada, officially called the Province of Québec, after 1763. Nearly all of Québec's population, about 85,000, were of French ancestry except for 2,000 to 3,000 British or American newcomers. France's loss of territory included all the land explored by the French in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. These territories were annexed to Canada, which now extended all the way south to Louisiana.

The economic system known as mercantilism, which exploited the colonies for the benefit of the mother country, shaped the trade laws of the period. France reasoned any steps loosening the bonds between the colonies and the mother country would naturally diminish overall British power. Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723–1790), in his famous treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, opposed mercantilism and advocated free trade.

When the war ignited between Britain and her American colonies in 1775, many colonists believed the French would welcome an opportunity to retaliate and regain their country (New France). The concentration of some 800 British troops in southeastern Canada, coupled with the fluid and undefended borders, invited raids from both sides.

While the majority of colonists viewed France as a natural ally in the struggle with Britain, others remained distrustful of French ambitions. Many recently divorced British subjects shared the mother country's hatred for the French. For

generations, English and Americans had been taught to despise the government, religion, and culture of France. The fact that the French had been their bitter enemies during the French and Indian War was still fresh on the minds of many.

Moreover, the French were predominantly Catholic. Many colonists came to America in search of religious freedom and, particularly, to escape the Inquisition run by the Catholic Church. Consequently, there was a strong distrust and hatred of Catholicism in the colonies in the eighteenth century.

Despite the continuing rhetoric of hostility, the Americans conducted a clandestine illegal trade with France and the French West Indies. This relationship helped pave the way for France's allowance of American privateers in her ports and those of her colonies in the West Indies. Such areas served as vital havens for prizes captured at sea. The West Indies were also later used as main ports for receiving supplies from France before transferring them on to the American colonies.

King Louis XVI appointed Charles Gravier, the comte de Vergennes, as his foreign minister in 1774. One of Vergennes's priorities was to reduce British power, both as revenge for the humiliation of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and as a way to make France's own position in Europe strong enough to deal with challenges from other nations. Vergennes was patient, and did not want France to act too soon for the consequences were severe. The Treaty of Paris of 1763, for example, prohibited France from aiding and abetting any of England's enemies; such actions would be considered an act of war by Britain. France could not risk, at least not yet, entering another war without some reasonable expectation of victory.

When news of the outbreak of hostilities reached France, many aristocrats, imbued with the ideas of the philosophes, wanted to foster their careers by coming to aid the Americans in their struggle for liberty. King Louis could not openly condone such actions, but he could turn a blind eye to them. As a result, Brigadier General Louis Lebègue de Presle Duportail arrived in America in February 1777, and the Marquis de Lafayette four months later in June. They were the first of many Frenchmen who would volunteer to serve the Continental Army.²

2 Others included: Pierre Colomb; Charles-François, Vicomte Dubysson des Hays; Matthias Alexis Fermoy; René-Etienne-Henri de Vic Gayault de Boisbertrant; Jean-Joseph Gimat de Soubadère; Jean-Michel-Gabriel Houdin de Saint-Michel; Baptiste Gouvion; Luc de LaCorne; Alexandre-Théodore-Victor, comte de Lameth; Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Chevalier de Laumoy; Augustin-François L'Epine; the Marquis de Malmédy; Augustin Mottin de la Balme; Louis-Pierre Penot Lombart; Philippe Hubert, Chevalier de Preudhomme de Borre; Philippe François Rastel, Sieur de Rocheblave; Lieutenant Colonel François Louis Teissedre de Fleury; Ann-Louis Toussard; Philippe Charles Jean Baptiste Tronson du Coudray; Armand Charles Tuffin, Marquis de la Rouërie; Jean-Gaspard Vence and Pierre-Jean-François Vernier.

The Marquis de Saint Simon commanded a body of 200 volunteers and Major General Vicomte François de Fontanges recruited 2,979 “Europeans” and 545 “Colored: Volunteer Chasseurs, Mulattoes, and Negroes, at St. Domingue [Haiti]. The Volunteer Chasseurs, called the Fontanges Legion, included young men who would become famous in the Haitian revolution.³

The odds of an American victory, however, were slim. It was not until the Battle of Germantown outside Philadelphia in September 1777, coupled with the decisive American defeat of General John Burgoyne at Saratoga the following month, that France made up its mind. King Louis XVI decided it was time to side with the Americans and openly entered the Revolutionary War by signing the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and the Treaty of Alliance on February 6, 1778. The king dispatched Admiral Comte Jean-Baptiste-Charles-Henri-Hector d’Estaing to America with a fleet of 12 ships of the line, three frigates, and approximately 4,000 French soldiers. They arrived off New York in June of 1778. Sir Richard Howe’s fleet of nine ships in New York harbor became Admiral d’Estaing’s first target. When he arrived off Sandy Hook on July 9, however, d’Estaing discovered that the water was too shallow for his ships to get at the British fleet. The French admiral and General George Washington decided instead to attack the British at Newport, Rhode Island, the second largest British seaport at the time.

The French and British fleets were preparing for battle off Rhode Island in August when heavy winds struck just as the battle was getting underway. The high winds made it impossible to wage a fleet-level action, and the opposing ships engaged in combat individually. Both sides suffered severe damage and returned to port to refit. The first effort at French-American cooperation was unsuccessful and increased anti-French sentiment.

The events off Rhode Island, along with his government’s instructions to regain territory for France, compelled Admiral d’Estaing to take his fleet south to attack the British colonies in the Caribbean. He successfully captured Grenada but was recalled to aid in the American siege of British-held Savannah, Georgia. D’Estaing’s fleet captured the 50-gun *Experiment*, the frigate *Ariel*, and two store

3 Some of these men included: Pierre Astrel, Pierre Auba, Louis Jacques Beauvais, Jean-Baptiste Mars Belley, Martial Besse, Guillaume Bleck, Pierre Cangé, Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, Pierre Faubert, Laurent Férou, Jean-Louis Froumentaine, Barthélemy-Médor Icard, Gédéon Jourdan, Jean-Pierre Lambert, Jean-Baptiste Léveillé, Christophe Mornet, Pierre Obas, Luc-Vincent Olivier, Pierre Pinchinat, Jean Piverger, André Rigaud, Césaire Savary, Pierre Tessier, Jérôme Thoby, Jean-Louis Villate, and Henri Christophe, future king of Haiti.

ships carrying the £30,000 payroll for the Savannah garrison along with Brigadier General George Garth, on his way to take command of the British in Georgia.

With his fleet off the seaport, D'Estaing demanded General Augustine Prevost surrender the city. Prevost declined, and the Franco-American forces hurried their ensuing attack. D'Estaing, remembering his experience at Rhode Island, chose not to risk his fleet in a position dangerously exposed to hurricanes. He abandoned plans of a systematic approach by regular parallels and prepared for a more immediate attack, which in turn failed. D'Estaing suffered a pair of wounds in the fighting that followed, and the French army boarded ships on October 20, 1779, and sailed to the West Indies. The second attempt at Franco-American cooperation ended in much the same atmosphere of bitterness and disillusion as the first.

King Louis XVI planned to send 12,000 troops to America in 1780 under the command of Lieutenant General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur Comte de Rochambeau (1725–1807). As only 32 transports could be assembled to carry them to America, only 5,800 men embarked for the long journey. By the time the transports returned to France for the remaining troops, the soldiers had been redeployed elsewhere, or had returned to their peace-time assignments.

General Rochambeau's arrival in Newport, Rhode Island on July 11 marked the beginning of a new and decisive phase of Franco-American military cooperation. A series of British strategic blunders, the decision of Admiral François Joseph Paul Comte de Grasse to move his large French fleet north from the West Indies to support the allied armies of Rochambeau and Washington, and the skillful operations of Lafayette in Virginia, contributed to the victorious Yorktown campaign and the end of British military power in America.⁴

Louis François Bertrand Dupont d'Aubevoye de Lauberdière

Rochambeau's nephew, Louis François Bertrand Dupont d'Aubevoye de Lauberdière, one of the general's aides-de-camps, lived a rather extraordinary life full of accomplishments and adventure on both sides of the ocean.

Louis François was born at the château de l'Auberdière (formerly Lauberdière) in Bocé (Maine-et-Loire) in the province of Anjou, on October 27, 1759. He was the son of Louise-Jeanne-Claire Le Gros de Princé and François-Charles-Mathieu

4 For the best overall treatment of the Yorktown Campaign, with good coverage of French participation, see Jerome A. Greene, *The Guns of Independence: The Siege of Yorktown, 1781* (Savas Beatie, 2005).

du Pont d'Aubevoye, seigneur de Lauberdière (1723-1795), a musketeer in the king's guard and Knight of Saint-Louis (chevalier de Saint-Louis).

Louis François entered military school in Paris (Collège militaire de la Flèche) on October 7, 1767 with a recommendation from Étienne-François de Choiseul-Beaupré-Stainville, Count then duc de Choiseul (1758) and duc d'Amboise (1764), head of the government of King Louis XV between 1758 and 1770. He entered the royal military academy, l'École Royale Militaire, on October 3, 1773, and left as a gentleman to join the Saintonge Regiment with the rank of sub-lieutenant on January 30, 1778.

Louis François was promoted to captain in the Royal Normandy Cavalry Regiment on April 15, 1780, and served as a staff officer and aide-de-camp of General Rochambeau during the American campaigns. Louis François and his cousin, Colonel Donatien-Marie-Joseph de Vimeur, vicomte de Rochambeau, at 21 and 26 years of age respectively, were the youngest of General Rochambeau's six aides-de-camp. On June 13, 1780, Louis François was appointed sub-assistant quartermaster general in the expeditionary corps while serving as an assistant of the army staff.

After the conclusion of the American Revolution, Lauberdière was promoted to assistant quartermaster general on December 2, 1787, and elevated to lieutenant-colonel on June 11, 1789. He was admitted to the Order of the Cincinnati in 1789 and became a Knight of St. Louis in 1790. The officer was sent to Ireland at the beginning of the French Revolution on a reconnaissance mission. While there, he met Caroline Macnamara Hussey (December 28, 1772- 1834), and the couple married on June 16, 1790, at the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. Later, during the French Revolution, Count de Lauberdière was posted to the Northern Army as a colonel.

Lauberdière returned to Ireland in 1791, but during this tour the British authorities arrested and held him as a prisoner of war from May 1793 to June 1800. After his exchange, his uncle, Marshal Rochambeau, recommended him to Napoléon Bonaparte, who was then First Consul. Lauberdière resumed his service as staff officer of the Army of Italy, and thereafter with the Army of Germany, and distinguished himself at the battles of Elchingen and Jena.

Lauberdière represented Maine-et-Loire in the legislature in 1804, was reelected in 1808, and was afterwards known as Dupont-Lauberdière. He left the legislature the following year to fight in Poland with the Grand Army, where he suffered a serious wound at Deppen (and for which he was awarded the medal of the Legion of Honor). Lauberdière served as chief of staff of the Lasalle division on

January 2, 1807, and was promoted to the rank of brigadier general the following month on February 12.

Through a new act of the senate, he managed another reelection. The title of Baron of the Empire became his on June 3. From 1808 to 1811, Lauberdère was appointed to Spain. On February 12, 1812, he commanded Madrid in the Spanish War, and participated in many engagements. Lauberdère also added the post of governor to his impressive list of appointments; while still employed in Westphalia, in Northern Germany in 1812, he served as governor of the provinces of Leon, Zamora and Toro.

Lauberdère was given command of the 32nd army division in 1813, headquartered at Hamburg. He ordered the bridges of Haya and Nieubourg blown up and captured Brême from the Russians. He commanded the Wessel line on August 26, 1813, and directed the retreat to Wessel at the end of October 1813 after the Battle of Leipzig.

The revolt of the Hanseatic countries of Westphalia and Holland brought General Dupont-Lauberdère to the banks of the Ijssel and Rhine rivers. King Louis XVIII promoted him to Lieutenant General of the King's Armies on August 23, 1814 and he became Commander of the Legion of Honor.

Lauberdère commanded the 15th Army division at Rouen from April 17, 1815, to July 21, 1815, and was elected representative of the Baugé district in the Chamber of One Hundred Days on May 23, 1815.

After the return of Louis XVIII, Lauberdère expressed his Royalist sentiments. He claimed that he was forced to take the command when he wanted to board a ship to go to England. On November 13, 1815, however, the Duc de Castries linked Lauberdère to the Bonapartists three years earlier. Lauberdère was the candidate of the liberal opposition in the elections of 1815 and 1820, and returned to his estate after this legislative session and retired on January 1, 1816.

Lauberdère tried unsuccessfully to get reelected to the Chamber of Deputies, followed by an unsuccessful appeal to be raised to the position of peer of France in 1822. King Charles X granted him a private audience on March 13, 1825. On January 9, 1831, he gained the post of general counsel, but chose to resign later same year.

He grieved the death of his wife in 1834 and had her buried at the l'Auberdère chapel. He died a few years later, on February 8, 1837, and was buried at the same chapel, leaving behind no children.

The Manuscript

Lauberdière kept a diary during his time in America. His “Journal de l’armée aux ordres de monsieur le comte de Rochambeau pendant les campagnes de 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783, dans l’Amérique septentrionale” remained in private hands in France until its owner, “Ms. Weelen,” donated it to the Bibliothèque Nationale (the national library of France) in February 1978. An article about the journal by Michèle Sacquin appeared in the *Bulletin de la Bibliothèque Nationale* in 1979. The fact that this remarkable and invaluable journal has never been published or translated until now is remarkable.⁵

Lauberdière kept his journal in four separate booklets now bound in a single quarter-leather volume with brown marbled covers. The booklets have a sequentially printed number in the upper right corner of each folio. The upper left corner has a page number written in pencil. This number is sequential for the text of the manuscript; title pages, blank pages, maps, and inserts (newspaper issues and other documents) are not numbered in pencil, but they do have a printed page number.

The text is generally written in a fine hand with very few corrections, strikeouts, or ink blotches, suggesting that it may have been rewritten from an earlier manuscript. Many memoirs of the war were written when the soldiers were advanced in years and wanted to record their recollections for their grandchildren or to submit them for pension applications. Some diaries, originally kept during the war, were recopied for the same purpose. This one was not. Lauberdière was not eligible for a pension from Congress nor did he and his wife have children (and hence no grandchildren). He kept the journal primarily for his own purposes. Hence, he is very frank and blunt in expressing his thoughts about the people he met and the locations he visited.

Unfortunately, the booklets were bound so tightly that some words at the end or beginning of lines on the inner margins (gutter) cannot be fully read. It is often possible to deduce the word from the initial letters and the context. When this is not possible, or if a word or sequence of words cannot be read due to faded ink or bleeding through the page, the text is marked “illegible.” Sometimes characters are somewhat legible, but their combination cannot be understood. Consonants like m, n, u, v, w, and vowels like a, e, o can often look alike and sometimes be difficult

5 Michèle Sacquin, *Bulletin de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (1979), pp. 51-57. All documents refer to her only as Ms. Weelen. Her brother, Jean-Edmond Weelen, owned the manuscript and instructed her to give it to the Bibliothèque Nationale upon his death in 1978.

to interpret. Such cases are indicated as “unintelligible.” Words that are not clear or could have multiple meanings are indicated with a question mark if not positively clear.

Proper names of places and people are often misspelled or spelled phonetically, which is to be expected. Sometimes, places undergo name changes. In these cases, the first instance of a name will appear as written in the manuscript with a note identifying the person or place more completely. Subsequent instances will have the proper spelling or modern name. For example, “Crompond” is usually written “Crompound” in the journal. The town, now known as Yorktown Heights, New York, not to be confused with Yorktown, Virginia, is transcribed as Yorktown Heights in the second and subsequent occurrences.

As General Rochambeau’s nephew and aide-de camp, Lauberdière had a unique perspective on the war and the French army in America, and his literate and informative journal reflects this. Indeed, nothing remotely comparable has appeared in the war’s literature. His diary contains a detailed account of the army’s camp in Newport, the march to Yorktown, combat, and the march back, and the people he met and the places he visited along the way. His observations—lively, frank, and clear—are not only fresh and original to the study of this period, but offer glimpses into the strains of the unlikely alliance that won American independence.

Lauberdière describes the reception (or lack of it) that the French encountered wherever they traveled in America. His descriptions of the anti-French prejudice he found everywhere, and how General Rochambeau dispelled those prejudices and won over the populace, are invaluable. The young French officer also discusses the total absence of culture—in his opinion—within the colonies, and how the colonials attempted to imitate European manners and styles. He marveled at Philadelphia’s adoption of Parisian fashions in the brief time between his visits to the city, and recalled his fascinating visit to George Washington’s home at Mount Vernon, complete with pointed comments about his wife Martha. Lauberdière also penned a lengthy detailed account of Admiral de Ternay’s death and funeral, touching accounts of friendships, and a description of a Quaker wedding that he thought resembled a funeral more than a celebration. There’s even an account of General Rochambeau’s arrest for the destruction of property. By 1783, each nationality had accepted the other’s customs, which they used to express their sadness and cordiality as the French departed Boston to return to France.

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J. David Dameron and Theodore Savas created the modern maps for Jerome A. Greene's book *The Guns of Independence: The Siege of Yorktown, 1781*. They graciously granted permission to use several, which are interspersed in this volume.

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