



# VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

## THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### PART I --1775-1780

When the "Shot Heard 'Round the World" was fired on that fateful day, April 19, 1775, first at Lexington and then at Concord, Massachusetts, the 13 American Colonies began their long and difficult 'Revolutionary War' against their mother country, England. The easy success in pushing the English soldiers back to Boston on that first day was followed by eight years of struggle, filled with few successes and many disappointments.

The patriot army quickly surrounded the British troops in Boston, fought well when they were attacked on Bunker Hill, and soon greeted their new Commander-in-Chief, General George Washington. (*right*). In the following year, in March, 1776, General Washington, using cannons captured at Fort Ticonderoga in New York by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold, forced the British to abandon their occupation of Boston. The British soon recovered, however, and sent the largest expeditionary force ever, 30,000 troops, to seize New York City in August. For the next five years, the British were to follow this tactic against the Americans: seize their major ports and try to cut off regions of the country.

To help Washington defend New York City, Delaware sent its Continental Regiment under Colonel John Haslet, who was from Dover, to join Washington.

The regiment was at that time the best dressed, equipped, and disciplined in the Army. Performing bravely in their first battle on Long Island, N.Y., they were given the name, "The Blue Hen's Chicks," a reference to the fighting gamecocks

that they brought with them. Their bravery was not enough, however, to prevent the British from pushing the American army all the way back through New

Jersey and across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. But Washington, in a very daring counterattack, crossed the Delaware River on Christmas Day and attacked the British and Hessian soldiers at Trenton, N.J., inflicting a sharp defeat and then, a week later, a second defeat at Princeton, N.J. before going into winter quarters. Tragically, Col. Haslet was killed in action at Princeton.

In 1777, the British sent a force from Canada to try to split off the New England states combined with a second attack up Chesapeake Bay and through Maryland and Delaware to seize the American capital, Philadelphia. The British, headed



by Lord Cornwallis, moved through Elkton, Md. to attack the American's position near Cooch's Bridge on what is now Old Baltimore Pike near Glasgow High School. This was the only battle of the Revolution fought in Delaware. A short time later, the largest

battle of the Revolution, the Battle of the Brandywine, was fought nearby at Chadds Ford, Pa. The Americans were again pushed back, but performed well enough for a French officer with the American Army to report back to France that the Americans had fought well, even though the British were able to capture Philadelphia, and for a brief time, Wilmington. After this setback, Generals Lafayette, Wayne, and Greene and others recommended that the American Army spend the winter at Wilmington. Washington also favored doing so; but, he was ordered to go to Valley Forge, Pa. Meanwhile, the British force, moving south from Canada along the Hudson River, was forced to surrender at Saratoga, N.Y. Instrumental in their defeat was Benedict Arnold who was wounded in the same leg that had been wounded in 1775 in a heroic attack to seize Quebec, Canada. The victory at Saratoga coupled with the performance at Chadds Ford caused the French to form an alliance with the Americans and to help them against the British.



The fightin' blue hen

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## PART II --1780-1781

Because the seizure of the Capital at Philadelphia, the largest city in the colonies, failed to have any impact on the American war effort, the British abandoned Philadelphia the following year and turned their attention to the southern states with plans to seize Charleston. In early 1780, British troops under Lord Cornwallis landed near Charleston, South Carolina. To counter this move, Washington ordered the Delaware and Maryland Continental Regiments to march south, some 700 miles away. They arrived too late to save Charleston where the American Army had surrendered on May 12. This was the worst defeat for the Americans in the war. Cornwallis started to move north, with Virginia as his goal, to try to cut off the south from the rest of the colonies.



In a series of battles fought over the next year, the Americans continued to oppose the northward advance of Cornwallis (*left*). In these battles, the Delaware Regiment under the command of Captain Robert Kirkwood played a

prominent role. They suffered many hardships--lack of food, pay, clothing and replacements for their casualties—but never the will to fight on. They were defeated in some battles, some were a draw, and one, the battle of Cowpens in South Carolina, was a magnificent victory, recently retold in the movie, "The Patriot." Cornwallis continued to advance, but it was obvious that he too was running out of men and supplies, and, more importantly, he was unable to get much support for the British cause from the local population. He was ordered to march to Virginia where he could be picked up by the British navy.



## PART III THE FRENCH - AMERICAN ALLIANCE

After the French signed a treaty of cooperation with the Americans in February 1778, they were at war with the British by June. While the French provided weapons and supplies to the Americans, not much had changed by 1780. To many patriots, it appeared that they were losing the war for independence. In July, 1780, 6,000 French troops under Lieutenant General Count Rochambeau (*left*) (Washington had barely 3000) arrived at Newport, Rhode Island, with instructions to help Washington recapture New York and other ports, but nothing came of it for more than a year.



In preparation for the 1780 campaign, Washington had offered Benedict Arnold (*left, below*) command of one-half of his army, but Arnold declined, requesting instead command of the vital fort at West Point, New York. In September, 1780, while returning from a visit with Rochambeau, news of the darkest kind came to Washington, a report of the treason of General Benedict Arnold. The hero of Quebec and Saratoga and other campaigns, motivated by perceived slights and jealousies, had offered to surrender the fort at West Point to the British. "Who would be next?" Washington asked. Such was the darkest hour before dawn in the American Revolution.

Washington, wishing to avenge his humiliating loss of New York in 1776, had persuaded Rochambeau to attack New York in August 1781. While moving their troops to do so, word arrived that Admiral de Grasse and the French fleet had avoided the British fleet in the Caribbean commanded by Admiral Sir George Rodney, a distant cousin of Caesar Rodney, the President (governor) of Delaware. De Grasse would arrive soon at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, but would be able to stay only for a short time. The stage was now set to cancel the attack on New York and secretly move the American and French forces south to Virginia to lay siege to Cornwallis at Yorktown.

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Arriving at Philadelphia, 1,200 Continental Army soldiers, boarded row-barges to head down the Delaware River to the Christina River, unloading at Christiana Bridge. Soon an army with baggage train, camp followers, and livestock, five times bigger than the entire population of Wilmington, moved down what is now Route 13A, Philadelphia Pike. The French wore splendid uniforms. The Americans marched with great determination even though they lacked the "spit and polish" of the French. French forces moved through Wilmington in two divisions on September 6 and 7, 1781. One division camped near what is now the Adam Street Shopping Center near I-95. The second camped just south of Newport. Spectators waved as soldiers and wagons moved through Christiana and on to Old Baltimore Pike, past the scene of the 1777 Battle of Cooch's Bridge, to camp near Iron Hill. From there by boat and by foot, the American and French armies moved on to Yorktown.

Joining them were two companies, 75 new recruits and 10 "old soldiers" from Delaware, the latter presumably invalids of Kirkwood's Continentals who had come north to recuperate. At Yorktown, these two Delaware companies were assigned to serve under General Knox, Washington's chief of artillery. After the surrender of Cornwallis on October 19, 1781, to the combined French and American armies -- four years to the day after the victory at Saratoga -- these men continued their 550 mile march to join Captain Kirkwood in South Carolina. The victory at Yorktown essentially marked the end of the war. Fighting on a much reduced scale continued for two more years until a

peace treaty was signed in 1783. When the fighting was over, Captain Kirkwood and the Delaware Continentals marched 720 miles back to Christiana Bridge. No other single regiment in the American army had a longer and more continuous term of service, marched more miles, suffered greater hardships, fought in more battles or achieved greater distinction than this one of Delaware.

After Yorktown, Lauzun's Legion (*depicted below*) of the French army, returned to Wilmington in the winter of 1782-1783 to block any possible British attack. Some 550 grenadiers, chasseurs, and cannoners and their 280 horses stayed at the



Wilmington Academy (where the Grand Opera House now stands on Market Street), and in houses and stables nearby. Their visit was welcomed, especially

because they paid in silver for purchases. Some deserted to stay in America, and others whose enlistments had ended also stayed. Many Delawareans waved a sad good-bye when the Legion left. Yorktown proved to be the final decisive battle of the war. Independence had been achieved. Spain and the Netherlands had helped with money but it was the French who had helped the most.



Questions to consider:

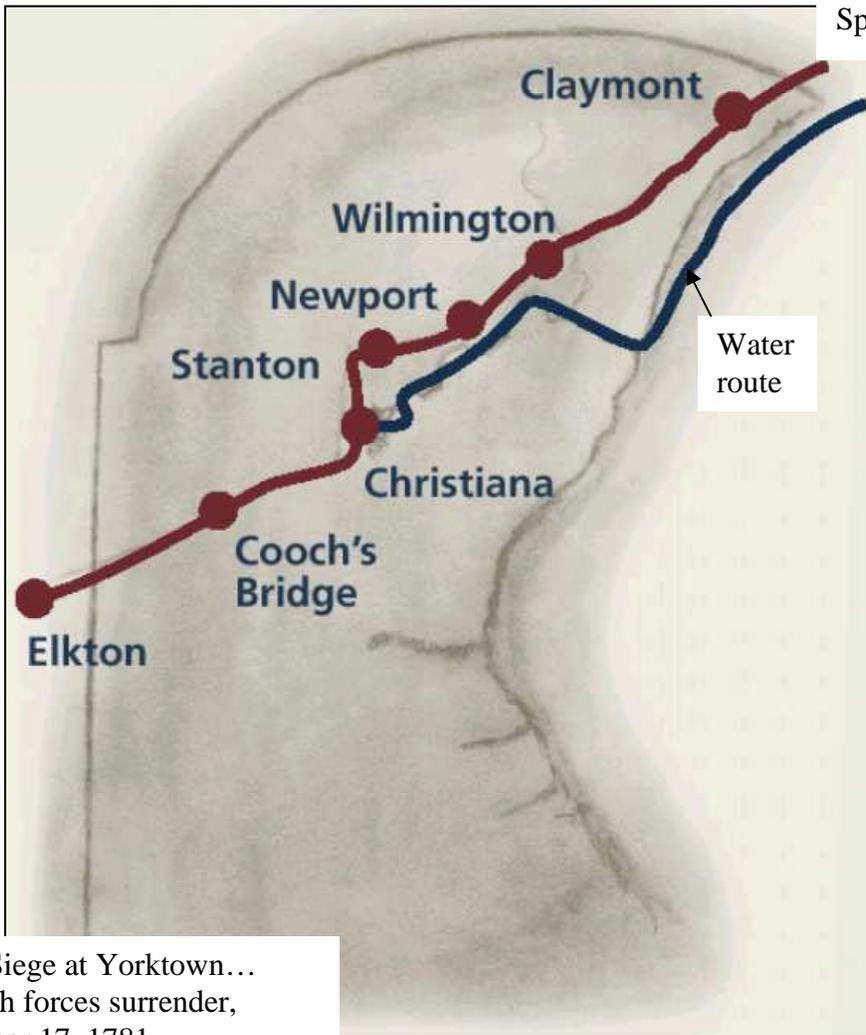
1. Where did the Delaware Continentals fight their first battle?
2. Who was Benedict Arnold?
3. What strategy (general plans) did the British adopt to defeat the Americans?
4. Why is the University of Delaware mascot the "Fightin' Blue Hen"?
5. How are the exploits of Capt. Robert Kirkwood commemorated?
6. Where were the first battles of the Revolution fought?
7. What countries helped the Americans during the Revolution?

Answers:

1.	Long Island, New York
2.	Hero of Quebec, Ticonderoga and Saratoga
3.	Traitor at West Point
4.	Seize the major ports and cut off sections of the colonies
5.	To honor the name given to the Delaware Continental Regiment that carried fighting gamecocks into battle.
6.	Kirkwood Highway, the town of Kirkwood are named for him
7.	Lexington and Concord, Mass, April 19, 1775 Netherlands, Spain, but mostly France



Washington and Rochambeau plan to move south from New England Spring, 1781



The Washington-Rochambeau route in Delaware.

On the march – through the First State – to victory at Yorktown.



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The Siege at Yorktown...  
 British forces surrender,  
 October 17, 1781