

Virginians and the Continental Army, 1775-1779

The decision to make George Washington commander-in-chief of the Continental armies was undoubtedly a political act meant to bind the southern colonies to the war and to blunt charges that this was a New "He has abdicated government here...."England revolution. Seldom has a political decision borne greater positive benefits. Washington is an enigma and he always will remain so to his countrymen. His greatness as a man and as a commander are difficult to fathom. The contradictions are best summarized by military historian John Alden:

Faults have been, and can be, found in Washington as commander. He did not have the advantages of a good military education. He did not know, and he never quite learned, how to discipline and to drill his men. He was not a consistently brilliant strategist or tactician.... (Often) he secured advantage ... by avoiding battle. Actually he was quite willing to fight when the odds were not too heavily against him. He retreated only when he was compelled to do so, during the campaigns of 1776 and 1777.... On occasion he was perhaps too venturesome. His generalship improved as the war continued. However, his defeats in the field were more numerous than his victories; and he had to share the laurels of his great triumph at Yorktown, with the French. If Washington had his shortcomings as a tactician, he nevertheless performed superbly under the most difficult conditions. He gave dignity, steadfast loyalty, and indomitable courage to the American cause.... Indeed Congress supplied historians with convincing evidence of Washington's greatness. It not only appointed him as commander in chief, but maintained him in that post year after year, in victory and defeat, in prosperity and adversity, until the war was won.⁴²

At first Congress was not certain Washington could command and eagerly sought European officers for field command positions. Charles Lee and Horatio Gates, two of the four major-generals appointed to serve under Washington, were residents of Virginia. Both were English army officers who had left the British army, settled in Berkeley County, and become ardent advocates of the colonials' cause. Lee, the well-bred son of English gentry had served under Braddock in the ill-fated Fort Duquesne expedition of 1756, was later wounded, left the army after the war, and became interested in western land schemes. He came to Virginia in 1775 after a stint as a general in the Polish army. Lee was courageous, ambitious, and vain. He could command when necessary, but had difficulty following Washington's orders. Given credit for stopping the British attack on Charleston, South Carolina, in June 1776, he came back north and was captured in New Jersey in December 1776. Exchanged by the British, he resumed command in 1778. However, his scandalous behavior at Monmouth in June 1778

resulted in his court martial. He was finally dismissed from the service by Congress in 1780.

Gates was the son of an English servant. Somehow he received a regular army commission, serving in the colonies during the French and Indian War. He resigned as a major in 1772 and moved to Virginia. Whereas Lee was haughty, Gates was pleasant and amiable. He also was ambitious and constantly sought military commands whose demands exceeded his talents. Commander of the northern army which won the great victory at Saratoga in 1777, Gates was willing to take over as commander in chief in the dark days of 1777-1778, but his friends in Congress could not displace Washington. Over Washington's recommendation, Congress elected him commander of the southern armies in 1780. He left that command after the blundering defeat at Camden, South Carolina, in August 1780. Gates retired to Virginia where he lived to an old age, much honored as an Englishman who loyally supported independence.

The English generals from Virginia did not give Washington his eventual victories, however. His command strength came from Virginians who learned by experience, were devoted to the Revolutionary cause, and were loyal to the general. They were with the Continental Army in its darkest days at Morristown in the winter of 1776-1777 and Valley Forge in 1777-1778. These included Colonel Theodorick Bland and his cavalry who fought at Brandywine in 1777 and Charleston in 1780; General William Woodford, the victor at Great Bridge, who commanded Virginia Continentals fighting at Brandywine and Germantown in 1777, and Monmouth in 1778, was captured at Charleston in 1780 and died in a New York prison that December; Colonel William Washington and his cavalry who fought in nearly all the battles in southern campaigns; Colonel Peter Muhlenberg, who raised the German Regiment from the Valley and Piedmont around his Woodstock home and commanded them with distinction at Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, and Stony Point, and later led Virginia militia against Cornwallis in 1781; and the gallant Colonel Edward Porterfield, who died with many of his troops, called "Porterfield's Virginians" at Camden.

There also was a distinguished group of young men like John Marshall, James Monroe, and Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee who achieved distinction and displayed loyalty to the national cause which they never surrendered. The percentage of Virginians who fought in the Continental Army and who supported the stronger national government of the Federal Constitution was high. These were men who experienced and remembered the embarrassments and inadequacies of a weak national government during the Revolution. They did not want to see the experience repeated.

Perhaps the best Virginia field general and the prototype of the inventive, untrained American general was Daniel Morgan. A wagon

master from Frederick County, Morgan had fought in the French and Indian War. He raised the first unit of Virginia Continentals, a company of Valley riflemen, and took them to Boston in 1775. He and his men fought brilliantly in the near victory of General Richard Montgomery at Quebec on Christmas 1775. Captured along with the equally bold Benedict Arnold, Morgan was exchanged. Developing effectively the Virginia riflemen into mobile light infantry units and merging frontier tactics with formal warfare, Morgan showed a real flare for commanding small units of men. His greatest moments were at Saratoga in 1777 and later in his total victory over Colonel Banastre Tarleton at Cowpens, South Carolina in 1781. The wagon master progressed steadily from captain to colonel, to general, and became one of the genuine heroes of the Revolution.

The total number of Virginians who fought in the Continental Army is difficult to determine. Records were poor, lengthy service infrequent, and troop strength constantly overestimated. There were possibly 25,000 Virginians in the Continental Army at one time or another, although the number in the field at any one time was much smaller. Another 30,000 to 35,000 might have joined the Virginia militia. In an era when European armies went into winter quarters and did not fight at all, the unorthodox Continental Army won some of its greatest victories in the dead of winter, yet it too tended to suffer from winter desertions and unauthorized leaves. Still the shriveled army always seemed to revive in the spring as the men returned to the ranks.

Troops, even continental units, tended to serve near home. Northern troops were rarely found in the deep southern colonies and vice versa. Yet Virginians, because of their proximity to all fighting zones, fought from Quebec to Charleston, contributing heavily to the units fighting to hold the middle states in 1777 and 1778 and the Carolinas in 1780 and 1781.

Appendix

A Chronology of Selected Events in Virginia 1763-1783

May 10, 1763. After the news of the signing of the Peace of Paris on February 10, 1763, came to Virginia, the Virginia regiment was disbanded.

May 28, 1763. The defeat of the French in America introduced new stresses and strains in the British Empire. Differences between the colonies and Mother Country began to appear immediately and with increasing frequency and intensity. The Bland Report of 1763 made to the House of Burgesses revealed one point of conflict between the two. Virginia had in part financed her contribution to the recent war by issuing paper money backed by taxation. The British merchants, creditors of the colonial planters, feared

inflation and were bitterly attacking the policy of printing paper money in the colonies. Defending Virginia's actions, the Bland Report presented the American argument for paper money. The British merchants carried the day to their own hurt by securing an Act of Parliament in 1764 forbidding the future issue of paper currency in the colonies.

October 7, 1763. Another cause for colonial resentment at war's end was the King's proclamation closing the trans-Allegheny west to settlement.

December, 1763. One consequence of the Parsons' Causes was the sudden emergence of young Patrick Henry on the political scene. When the court of Hanover county decided in favor of Reverend James Maury, the defendants called on Henry to plead their cause before the jury which was to fix the amount of damages. By appealing to the anti-clerical and even lawless instincts of the jury and by doing it with unmatched oratorical skill, Patrick Henry won the jury to his side and made himself a popular hero in upcountry Virginia.

October 30, 1764. Many Burgesses arrived early for the October-December session of the General Assembly "in a flame" over the Act of Parliament proposing a Stamp tax on the American colonists. The committee of correspondence had been busy during the summer communicating with the agent in London, and the Burgesses were ready to take action against the proposed tax.

December 17, 1764. The House of Burgesses and the Council agreed upon an address to the Crown and upon memorials to the House of Commons and to the House of Lords. The three petitions stressed the sufferings such a tax would cause war-weary Virginians and also opposed the levy on constitutional grounds. They argued that the colonial charters and long usage gave the Virginia House of Burgesses the sole right to tax Virginians and that the fundamental constitution of Britain protected a man from being taxed without his consent. These arguments, elaborated and refined, were to be the heart of the colonial contentions in the turbulent days ahead.

May 29, 1765. The arguments of the Virginia Assembly went unheeded. On February 27, 1765, Parliament decreed that the stamp tax should go into effect on November 1. The General Assembly was in session when news of the passage of the Stamp Act came to Virginia, and on May 29 the House went into the committee of the whole to consider what steps it should take. Burgess Patrick Henry presented his famous resolutions which fixed at the outset the tenor of colonial opposition to the stamp tax. The House adopted by a close vote on the 30th five of Henry's seven resolutions, and all seven were given wide circulation throughout the colonies.

October 30, 1765. On the day before the stamp tax was to go into effect, George Mercer, the collector, arrived in Williamsburg with the stamps. Williamsburg was filled with people in town for the meeting of the General Court, and Governor Fauquier had to intervene to protect Mercer from the insults of the mob. On November 1, the courts ceased to function and all public business came to a virtual halt.

February 8, 1766. Foreshadowing the judicial review of a later day, the Northampton county court declared the Stamp Act unconstitutional and consequently of no effect.

March 13, 1766. A number of the inhabitants of the town and environs of Norfolk assembled at the court house and formed the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty usually appeared hereafter at the forefront of any anti-British agitation in the colonies.

1766. Richard Bland published his famous *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies* in which he took a rather advanced constitutional position in opposition to parliamentary taxation of the American colonies.

May 11, 1766. At the height of the Stamp Act crisis, the dominant group in the House of Burgesses was shaken by a scandal involving the long-time Speaker and Treasurer of the Colony, John Robinson, who died on this day leaving his accounts short by some 100,000 pounds.

June 9, 1766. Governor Fauquier announced by public proclamation the repeal of the Stamp Act (March 18, 1766). Although repeal brought a wave of reaction against the agitation of the past months and a strong upsurge of loyalty to Great Britain, the leaders of Virginia, and of the other colonies, had consciously or not moved to a new position in their view of the proper relationship between the Colony and the Mother Country. The failure of the rulers of Britain to appreciate and assess properly the changed temper of the colonists lost for them the American empire.

November 6, 1766. The General Assembly of 1766-1768 met: November 6-December 16, 1766 and adjourned to March 12-April 11, 1767, and then met in a final session, March 31-April 16, 1768.

January, 1768. The Virginia Gazette began to publish John Dickenson's letters from a "Pennsylvania Farmer." These letters did a great deal to clarify, in the minds of many, the American position with regard to the Parliamentary claim of the right of taxation in the colonies.

March 3, 1768. Governor Fauquier died.

March 31, 1768. News of the passage of the Townshend Acts and of

the suspension of the New York legislature was already causing a wave of indignation in Virginia when the General Assembly met in March. Having taken under consideration the circular letter of the Massachusetts legislature opposing the Townshend Acts and various petitions to the same effect, the House of Burgesses prepared petitions to the Crown and to both Houses of Parliament, and on April 14 adopted all three unanimously. The House then sent word to the other colonial Assemblies of its action and congratulated the Massachusetts House "for their attention to American liberty."

August 12, 1768. In a move to strengthen the hand of the Virginia Governor and at the same time to conciliate the Colony, the King made Fauquier's replacement, Norborne Berkeley, Baron de Botetourt, Governor of Virginia in the place of Jeffrey Amherst. Not since the time of Governor Nicholson had the Governor himself come out to Virginia.

October 26, 1768. Lord Botetourt arrived in Williamsburg.

May 8, 1769. The Governor, Lord Botetourt, opened the first and only session of the General Assembly of 1769 (May 8-17) with a conciliatory speech; but, obviously unmoved, the House of Burgesses set about with remarkable unanimity to restate their position with regard to Parliamentary supremacy. The House also denounced the reported plan for transporting colonists accused of treason to England for trial. On May 16, the House adopted resolutions to this effect and then on the next day unanimously approved an address to the Crown.

May 17, 1769. The House resolutions of the 16th caused Lord Botetourt to dissolve the General Assembly. Dissolution blocked the planned adoption of George Mason's proposal for forming an association with the other colonies for the purpose of suspending the importation of British goods. But the Burgesses got around this by meeting in their private capacity at the house of Anthony Hays. This was a momentous step. The meeting made Speaker Peyton Randolph the moderator and appointed a committee to present a plan for association.

May 18, 1769. The Burgesses adopted the report of the committee calling for a boycott on English goods to force the repeal of the Townshend Acts and invited the other colonies to join the association.

November 7, 1769. The General Assembly of 1769-1771 met November 7-December 21, 1769, and adjourned to May 21-June 28, 1770; and then it met in a final session July 11-20, 1771.

In his speech to the Assembly on the first day of its meeting, Lord Botetourt pacified the Virginians momentarily with information from Lord Hillsborough that His Majesty's

administration contemplated no new taxes in America and in fact intended the repeal of the Townshend Acts.

June 22, 1770. During the May-June session of the General Assembly, the gentlemen of the House of Burgesses joined with a large group of merchants to take action against the duty on tea retained when the Townshend Acts were repealed. The Burgesses and merchants formed a new association to replace the ineffective one of 1769. This time, committees in each county were to take proper steps to see that the terms of the association were abided by.

June 27, 1770. The members of the House of Burgesses agreed unanimously to a new petition to the King asking for his interposition to prevent Parliament levying taxes in America.

October 15, 1770. Lord Botetourt of necessity had often opposed the colonists in their quarrel with the British Parliament, but he had done so without losing their affection and respect. On October 15, 1770, he died. William Nelson, president of the Council, then acted as Governor until the fall of 1771 when Governor Dunmore arrived.

October 12, 1771. John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, dissolved the General Assembly of 1769-1771 after coming to Virginia on September 25, 1771. Dunmore, Virginia's last British Governor, was an unperceptive and timorous man, a man who could do nothing to still the coming storm that rent an Empire.

February 10, 1772. The General Assembly of 1772-1774 met February 10-April 11, 1772; March 4-15, 1773; and May 5-26, 1774, when it was dissolved. Meeting in an interlude of relative peace between Britain and her colonies (1770-1773), the Assembly in its spring session of 1772 proceeded in a routine fashion and the Burgesses found no occasion to try the mettle of the new Governor.

March 4, 1773. Governor Dunmore for the first time found reason to complain of the General Assembly in its March meeting of 1773. He was miffed by an implied rebuke of the House of Burgesses for his handling of counterfeitters; but he had better reason to be disturbed by another development. On March 12, the House revived its committee of correspondence and extended its functions. As proposed by a self-constituted meeting at the Raleigh Tavern and headed by Richard Henry Lee, the House instructed its new committee of correspondence to inquire into the Gaspée affair, to keep in touch with the legislatures of the other colonies, and to correspond with the London agent. A key factor in the transfer of power which was to come shortly, the plan of a committee of correspondence was quickly adopted in the other colonies. Before proroguing the Assembly on March 15, Governor Dunmore signed the last Acts assented to by the royal Governor of Virginia.

May 24, 1774. The May meeting of the Assembly was uneventful

until the news of the Boston Port Acts stirred up a hornets' nest in the House of Burgesses. The House expressed alarm and promptly declared June 1, the day the Acts were to go into effect, a day of fasting and prayer. Two days later, May 26, Governor Dunmore dissolved the General Assembly of 1772-1774. One consequence of interrupting the Assembly before any legislation had been completed was to put an end to civil actions in the courts for the lack of a fee bill, which pleased many a debt-ridden colonist.

May 27, 1774. On May 25, the day after the news of the Boston Port Acts, Richard Henry Lee had ready his proposals for calling a Continental Congress, but when he delayed presenting them to the House so as not to invoke dissolution, he lost the opportunity of having the House of Burgesses act upon them. The day after Dunmore had dissolved the Assembly, the members of the House met in the Apollo room of the Raleigh Tavern. After denouncing the "intolerable" Acts, they instructed the committee of correspondence to write to the other colonies and propose a Continental Congress.

May 30, 1774. Twenty-five Burgesses who were still in town met to consider a packet of letters fresh from Boston. Massachusetts proposed that all of the colonies suspend all trade with Britain. The Burgesses agreed to send out notices to the members of the "late House" for a meeting on August 1, 1774. During the next two months, the inhabitants in the various counties met to elect delegates to the August Convention and to prepare resolutions condemning the Boston Port Acts. Feeling was running high and sympathy for Boston took the form of an outpouring of gifts for the unfortunate city. Jefferson's Summary View published at this time was intended as a guide for the August Convention, but it was too advanced for the moment in its outright denial of all Parliamentary authority in America.

August 1, 1774. With the meeting of the August Convention, Virginia took a big step toward revolution and began to build an extra-legal framework which would take over the functions of government when British authority collapsed. The Convention agreed to import no more from Britain after November 1 and to export no more after August 10, 1775. It chose as delegates to the Continental Congress Peyton Randolph, Richard Henry Lee, George Washington, Patrick Henry, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Edmund Pendleton. The Convention instructed each county to appoint a committee of correspondence. The amazing effectiveness with which the committees organized the counties helps to explain Virginia's smooth transition from colony to commonwealth.

1775. With an estimated population of 550,000, Virginia had 61 counties on the eve of the Revolution. Ten of these were formed since the departure of Governor Dinwiddie in 1758: Fauquier in

1759; Amherst and Buckingham in 1761; Charlotte and Mecklenburg in 1765; Pittsylvania in 1767; Botetourt in 1770; and Berkeley, Dunmore, and Fincastle in 1772.

March 20, 1775. Peyton Randolph, moderator of the August Convention, called for a meeting at Richmond in March. The March convention, dominated by members of the House of Burgesses, approved the work of the Continental Congress, but foremost in the minds of the delegates was the problem of defense. After Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, the delegates made provisions for developing a military establishment. What they in fact did was to undermine the regular militia through the formation of "Independent Companies" in the counties. The revolutionary government which was evolving became a little more clearly defined when the Convention instructed each county to elect two delegates to sit in future Conventions.

April 20, 1775. Lord Dunmore watched the events of 1774-1775 with helpless alarm. Particularly frightening for him was the formation of the "Independent Companies" in the spring of 1775. On the night of April 20 he took the precaution of having the small store of arms and ammunition in the magazine at Williamsburg removed and placed on H.M.S. Fowey in the York River. On the morning of the 21st, the people of Williamsburg learned what the Governor had done during the night and were vastly excited. An incredible wave of fury spread through the Colony and everywhere men took up arms. All the pent up passion of the past months was turned against the unfortunate Governor.

April 28, 1775. At the height of the excitement over the powder magazine affair, news came from the northward that colonials had engaged British regulars at Concord and Lexington.

May 3, 1775. Thoroughly frightened, Lord Dunmore made a public proclamation on May 3 in which he attempted to justify his actions of April 20 and to pacify the people. Beyond being pacified, the people cheered Patrick Henry who marched upon Williamsburg with the Hanover Independent Company and stopped short of the town only because Governor Dunmore sent him 300 pounds to pay for the powder taken from the public magazine.

June 1, 1775. Fortified with Lord North's conciliatory proposals, Dunmore made his last bid to regain control of the colony by recalling the General Assembly to Williamsburg on June 1, 1775. The Burgesses refused to re-open the courts as Dunmore asked; they approved the proceedings of the Continental Congress and the colonial Conventions without a dissenting vote; and then they allowed Jefferson to reply to North's proposal in terms of his Summary View of the year before.

June 8, 1775. Lord Dunmore wrote the Assembly that he considered Williamsburg no longer safe for him and his family and that he

had taken up residence in the Fowey in the York River. When the General Assembly refused to do business with him there and proceeded to operate independently of the Governor, royal government in Virginia was virtually at an end. The General Assembly adjourned itself on June 24 to October 12, 1775, and then to March 7, 1776, and finally to May 16, 1776, but a quorum never appeared.

July 17, 1775. The July Convention completed the transfer of power from the royal government to the revolutionists. It sought to legalize its control by providing for the proper election of its members. The Convention became the successor of the colonial General Assembly. When the rumor went about on August 16 that Dunmore was going to attack Williamsburg, the Convention appointed a Committee of Public Safety of 11 members. This Committee acted as the executive of the Colony until after the adoption of the constitution in 1776. The Convention also set up the basic structure for the defense establishment and for taxation.

November 7, 1775. The main threat to the revolutionary regime in 1775 came from Lord Dunmore who remained at Norfolk with his small fleet and a detachment of British regulars. Despite the "chicken stealing" raids of the ships in the late summer and fall, the Committee of Public Safety made no move against Dunmore until after he had declared martial law on November 7 and it had become apparent that disaffection was growing in Norfolk.

December 1, 1775. The December Convention acted as the legislative body for the government of Virginia.

1776. Hampden-Sydney, a school for men, was founded under the auspices of the Hanover Presbytery.

January 1, 1776. The provincial forces skirmished with Dunmore's at Great Bridge on December 9 and took Norfolk on December 14. The guns of Dunmore's ships set Norfolk afire on January 1, 1776, and colonial troops, with connivance of officers, added to the conflagration by setting fire to the houses not hit by the ships. Lord Dunmore finally sailed away in May, 1776.

May 6, 1776. The revolutionary Convention met for the last time in May and June of 1776. It proceeded to draw up a constitution for Virginia, which it adopted on June 28. It incorporated in the constitution George Mason's famous Bill of Rights and provided that the legislature should dominate the new government.

May 15, 1776. The Convention adopted Richard Henry Lee's resolution instructing the delegates to the Continental Congress to urge the Congress "to declare the United Colonies free and independent States."

June 29, 1776. The Convention chose Patrick Henry to be the first Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. A skilled agitator, a great orator, and a radical-turning-conservative, Henry made but an indifferent Governor.

July 8-9, 1776. At the battle of Gwynn's Island, Dunmore's fleet was so severely damaged that he soon left the coast of Virginia, never to return.

1776. During the Revolution, nineteen counties were formed: Monongalia, Ohio, and Yohogania in 1776; Henry, Kentucky, Montgomery, Washington, Fluvanna, and Powhatan in 1777; Greenbrier, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Illinois in 1778; Fayette, Jefferson, and Lincoln in 1780; Greensville in 1781; and Campbell in 1782.

October 7, 1776. The first session of the new legislature was dominated by Thomas Jefferson, who replaced Henry as the leader of the more radical elements in Virginia. Jefferson began a needed revision of the laws. In the next two decades, the colonial codes and laws were adapted to the needs of an independent state. In this same session, he also secured the abolition of primogeniture and entail, humanized the criminal code, and began his attack upon the church establishment.

July 4, 1778. George Rogers Clark captured Kaskaskia. On the strength of this victory, the Virginia legislature created Illinois county, thus providing the first American administrative control in the Northwest Territory.

February 25, 1779. The dramatic capture of Vincennes by George Rogers Clark on this date secured the Northwest Territory from British control.

May 9, 1779. For the first three years of the Revolutionary War, Virginia was spared invasion because the British were concentrating their efforts in the northern colonies; but on May 9, 1779, Admiral Sir George Collier anchored in Hampton Roads with a British fleet. After capturing Portsmouth with little trouble, he sent out raiding parties and then departed. Naval stores in large quantity and thousands of barrels of pork were destroyed.

June 1, 1779. Thomas Jefferson was elected Governor to replace Patrick Henry. Weakened by a conservative shift in opinion and unable to cope with invasion which came in 1780, Governor Jefferson left office with a tarnished reputation, June 12, 1781. He was replaced by Thomas Nelson who served only until November 30, 1781. Benjamin Harrison was the last of the war Governors.

April, 1780. The capital was moved from Williamsburg up to Richmond.

October, 1780. The British recaptured Portsmouth, this time primarily for the purpose of establishing communication with General Cornwallis in South Carolina. General Leslie remained in Portsmouth with his 3000 men for one month.

January 5, 1781. The third and most serious British attack upon Virginia was carried out by General Benedict Arnold who sailed through the Capes on December 30, 1780. Instead of stopping at Portsmouth, he continued on up the James to capture Richmond, the new capital, on January 5, 1781. After Arnold had set up his headquarters at Portsmouth, two attempts to launch a sea and land attack against him failed to materialize. Cornwallis marched into Virginia in late spring and in May crossed the James and entered Richmond. During the summer of 1781, the main achievement of Lafayette and the continental forces in Virginia was to avoid destruction.

July 25, 1781. Cornwallis, marching from Richmond, reached Williamsburg on June 25. He remained there until July 5, when he moved toward the James River where transports awaited to take him to the Surry side. Before he was able to make the crossing, he was attacked by Lafayette, at Green Spring. After successfully repelling the American forces, he crossed the river and pushed on to Portsmouth. In August he crossed Hampton Roads and marched to Yorktown, which he fortified.

August 30, 1781. The stage was being set for the destruction of Cornwallis's army when the French fleet under Admiral de Grasse sailed through the Virginia Capes on August 30, 1781. General Washington was hurrying with his army from New York and Lafayette was bringing up his troops preparatory to bottling up Cornwallis on the Yorktown peninsula where he had encamped with his army.

September 5, 1781. One avenue of escape for Cornwallis's army was shut off when De Grasse assured French control of the river and bay by repulsing the British fleet commanded by Admiral Graves.

September 28, 1781. The surrender of Cornwallis became only a matter of time when Washington brought his army up to reenforce the besieging forces of Lafayette.

October 19, 1781. General Cornwallis surrendered his army at Yorktown. With the aid of the French, General Washington had won for the colonies their independence. The independence of America became official with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783.

October 20, 1783. Virginia, agreeing to the terms of Congress, ceded her claims to territory north of the Ohio, and the deed passed March 1, 1784. Virginia was shrunken to the limits contained in the present States of Virginia, West Virginia, and

Kentucky.

Source: The Road to Independence: Virginia 1763-1783 by Virginia
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