

Henry Knox to John Adams

Yorktown, Virginia, 21 October 1781.

Autograph letter, 6 pages.

Camp before York in Virginia 21 October 1781

I have had the honor of receiving several letters from your Excellency since your departure from America, which I have duly answered, and hope you have received them. Your ideas of the necessity of some important blow to the British power in the Southern States were extremely just. The reasons are too obvious to be mentioned.

I am happy my dear sir, in having it in my power to announce to you the joyful event of the reduction of Lord Cornwallis and his whole force in Virginia. This important affair has been effected by the most harmonious concurrence of circumstances that could possibly have happened. A fleet and troops from the West Indies under the orders of one of the best men in the world, an army of American and French troops marching from the North River 500 miles, and a
[so exactly]
fleet of Count De Barras from Rhode Island, all joining [2] in point of time as to render what has happened, almost certain.

I shall not enter into a detail of circumstances previous to the collection of our force at
12 miles distant from this place,
Williamsburg, which was made on the 27th ultimo. On the 28th we marched to this camp, and on the 29th and 30th we completed our investiture of York. A body of American Militia, the Duke Lazan's Legion, and some marines from the fleet of Count De Grasse at the same time formed in the vicinity of Gloucester so as to prevent any incursions of the enemy into the country.

From the 1st of October to the 6th was spent in preparing our materials for the siege, in bringing forward over cannon and stores, and in reconnecting the points of attack.

On the evening of the 6th we broke ground, and began our first parallel within 600 yards of the enemies works undiscovered. The first parallel, some redoubts, and all our batteries were finished by the 9th at 2 o'clock P.M. when we opened our batteries and kept them play [3] ing continually.

On the night of the 12th we began our second parallel at 300 yards distance from the enemy, and on the night of the 14th we stormed the two redoubts which the enemy had [in front] or their main works. The gallant troops of France under the orders of Baron [Vivmenit], and the hardy soldiers of America under the Marquis de laFayette

attacked and carried them both in an instant. This brilliant stroke was effectual without any great loss on our side. – The enemy lost between one and two hundred. This advantage was important, as it gave us an opportunity of perfecting our second parallel, into which we took the two redoubts.

On the 16th just before day, the enemy made a Sortie, and spiked up some of our cannon but were soon repulsed and driven back to their works. The cannon were soon cleared, and the same day our batteries in the 2nd parallel began to fire, and continued on without interruption until 9 o'clock on the morning of the 17 October, -- ever memorable [4] on account of the Saratoga affair, – where the enemy sent a flag, offering to treat if a surrender of the posts of York and Gloucester. The firing continued until two O'clock, when commissioners on both sides met to adjust the capitulation, which was not finished and signed until 12 o'clock on the 19th. Our troops took possession of two redoubts of the enemy soon after, and about two O'Clock the enemy marched out and grounded their arms. The whole garrison are prisoners of war, and had the same honors only as were granted to our garrison at Charlestown. Their colors were cased and they were prohibited from playing a French or American tune. The returns are not yet collected, but including officers they are more than 7000, exclusive of Seamen, who are supposed to amount to 1000.

There are near forty sail of topsail vessels in the harbor, about one half of which the enemy sunk upon different occasions. [5] About two hundred pieces of cannon, nearly one half of which are brass; a great number of arms, drums, and colors, are among the trophies of this
every
decisive stroke. The prisoners are to be sent into any part of this state, Maryland, or Pennsylvania.

The consequences will be extensively beneficial. The enemy will immediately be confined to Charleston and New York &c. rest of sentence confused

He then speaks of the “exalted talents” of General Greene – “without an army, without means, without any thing, he has performed wonders!