General Rochambeau’s French Army 1780-1783

René Chartrand
The French Navy Reborn

• In the 1760s and 1770s, France rebuilt its navy; by 1778, it was the 2nd strongest in the world.
Rebirth of the French Army

- Army is totally reorganized in 1760s-1770s.
- Strict discipline; education of officers; new tactics, weapons systems, uniforms
- About 200,000 regulars plus about 60,000 trained militia
Combat de Ouessant 23 juillet 1778
West Indies

- Primary French objective
- Strong fleets and nearly 30 battalions deployed there.
- From 1778, British loose Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat. By 1783, only Barbados, Antigua and Jamaica remain
Grenada 1779
Savannah
September 1779

Some French Regiments at Savannah, 1779
Louis XVI of France

- King from 1774 to 1792
- Musée Carnavalet
- Paris
General de Rochambeau

- Chosen in early March 1780 for his diplomatic as well as his military skills

- Engraving after a 1780s sketch by the American artist Trumbull
Commander-in-Chief

- Rochambeau’s instructions include:
  - Gen. Washington as C-in-C
  - Joint Staff work
  - Diplomacy, discipline and open approach by all ranks
  - Smooth out language and technical issues with Americans (fortunately, a number of them understood French)
Lieutenant-général

Dress uniform
General commanding a corps

- Uniform of Rochambeau’s senior officers
Commissaire des guerres

- The Army’s administration branch in charge of supplies and finances.

- This image is of the senior officer.
Logistics

• Complete camp and clothing supplies for two campaigns (about two years)
• Food, drink, etc., for six months
• Complete supplies to set up hospitals
• 350 horses for light cavalry (hussars of Lauzun’s Legion) to be bought in America
• Saddles, briddles etc. brought to America
Rochambeau and Staff

- 1st row: Berthier (future marshal), artillery, Royal D-Ponts, Rochambeau, Engineers.
- 2nd row: Commissaire, navy, hussard, staff, engineer-geographer.
- (by Eugène Lelièpvre - Military Uniforms in America plate, Company of Military Historians)
Expeditionary Force 12 March 1780

- 6 line infantry regiments (2 battalions each)
- 1500 men per regiment: 9000 infantry
- 1 artillery battalion - 600 men
- Lauzun’s Legion - 900 men
- Total: 10,500 plus various support detachments.
Régiment Bourbonnais

- 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Engraving by Hoffman
Régiment Soissonnais

• 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Engraving by Hoffman
Régiment Saintonge

21 February
1779 Dress
Regulations
(by Eugène Lelièpvre - Military Uniforms in America plate, Company of Military Historians)
Régiment Royal Deux-Ponts

• A German regiment in the French Army.

• Portrait miniature of a second lieutenant
Officer, Neustrie Regiment

• French infantry officers in Rochambeau’s army would have looked much the same as this original uniform as per the French 1786 Dress Regulations. Almost similar to 1779 except for three instead of four cuff buttons. (Musée de l’Armée, Paris)
Régiment Anhalt

- A German regiment in the French Army.

- 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Engraving by Isnard
Légion de Lauzun

- Corps of 300 hussars and 300 infantry, made up mostly of Germans.
- Acted as light cavalry to Rochambeau’s army.
French mortar battery

- The French artillery corps was probably the most advanced technically in Europe. (Uniforms are pre-1776. Print after Moltzheim)
Royal-Artillerie

- Régiment Auxonne (one battalion)

- 21 February 1779 Dress Regulations Engraving by Isnard
Royal-Artillerie Ouvrier

- Artisans and pioneers attached to the artillery.
Ordnance 1780

• Field Artillery
  • Eight 12-pdrs
  • Sixteen 4-pdrs
  • Six 6-inch howitzers
• Siege Artillery
  • Twelve 24-pdrs
  • Eight 16-pdrs
  • Two 8-inch howitzers
• Twelve 8 and 12-inch mortars
French Gribeauval Artillery

- Field Artillery 4 lbs cannon (original at the Musée de l’Armée, Paris)
French Gribeauval Artillery

- Field Artillery cannon (original at the Musée de l’Armée, Paris)
French Gribeauval Artillery

- Howitzer
  (original at the Musée de l’Armée, Paris)
French Gribeauval Artillery

- Ammunition caisson (original at the Musée de l’Armée, Paris)
Royal-Artillerie driver

- Teamster in charge of conducting the ordnance and supply wagons.
Care of casualties

• Medical services at the time were still mostly for officers, but there was progress to extend specialized access to all ranks. The level of care, no matter the rank, was relatively crude. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University)
Medical Corps

• Medical officer

• The necessary, if not often mentioned corps.
Medical Corps

• Surgeon’s assistant
Expeditionary Force 27 March 1780

• 4 line infantry regiments (2 battalions each)
• 1000 men per regiment: 4000 infantry
• 1 artillery battalion - 400 men
• Lauzun’s Legion - 600 men
• Total: 5000 plus various support detachments.
Rochambeau in America

• Rochambeau’s HQ in Newport, Rhode Island, 1780-1781.
• Instead of the automobile, there would be a few hussars and ADCs as dispatch riders.
New York City
North America
Marching south to Yorktown - the Royal Deux-Pont Regiment in Philadelphia 1781

- The march of the French Army from Rhode Island to Virginia had a remarkable effect on the Americans.
Battle of the Virginia Capes 5
September 1781
Washington greets De Grasse 1781

- Rochambeau is at right
- Soldiers of Soissonnais at left
Reinforcements from West Indies
September 1781

- 3 line infantry regiments (2 battalions each)
- 1000 men per regiment: 3000 men
- 100 gunners (Metz Regt, Royal Artillerie) with some support corps
- 100 hussars of Volontaires Étrangers de la Marine
- 800 Marines from French warships landed
- Total: 4000
Régiment Agenais

- 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Engraving by Hoffman
Régiment Tourraine

- 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Engraving by Isnard
Régiment Gâtinais

• 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Engraving after
  Lefferts
Régiment Gatinais

- 21 February 1779
  Dress Regulations
  Print after Edmond Lajoux
Royal-Artillerie

- Régiment Metz (one company)
- Print after Hoffman
Marine infantry & marine artillery 1774-1782

• 100 companies of infantry
• 3 companies of bombardiers
• About 1/12th of corps deployed in Grasse’s fleet.
• Shortage of marines; detachments of army troops in France and colonial troops also put on ships.
Drummer’s livery lace

• The livery lace of the Bourbon royal family, rulers of France, Spain and Naples. Worn by most drummers in the armies of these nations.
Ordnance from West Indies
1781

• Ten field guns
• A few siege guns
Batteries at Yorktown

- Gen. Washington firing a siege gun
- Gen. Rochambeau in the background

- Plate after Jacques Onfroy de Bréville (JOB)
Assault on Yorktown 1781

- Royal Deux-Ponts and Gâtinais overcome the British Redoubt at Yorktown
Royal-Auvergne
1782

• Gâtinais was given this title following its distinguished role in the siege of Yorktown.

• Title wished by the men. Rochambeau obtained approval of Louis XVI.
Duc de Lauzun

- In command of the French troops remaining in the US after Rochambeau’s departure with most of his army for West Indies, December 1782.
- French troops remaining mainly in Philadelphia: Lauzun’s Legion, Royal-Artillerie, Medical Corps and support staff. Leave in 1783.
Epilogue: Cincinati after the war

- American and French officers who had served in the war could wear the medal of the Order of Cincinati. (Medals of French officers, Musée de la Légion d’Honneur, Paris)
French officer wearing the Cincinnati medal

• 1780s portrait (Musée de la Légion d’Honneur, Paris)
After 1783

- Basis for the Army of the French Revolution and Empire

- Lafayette with friends, 1790 (Musée Carnavalet, Paris)