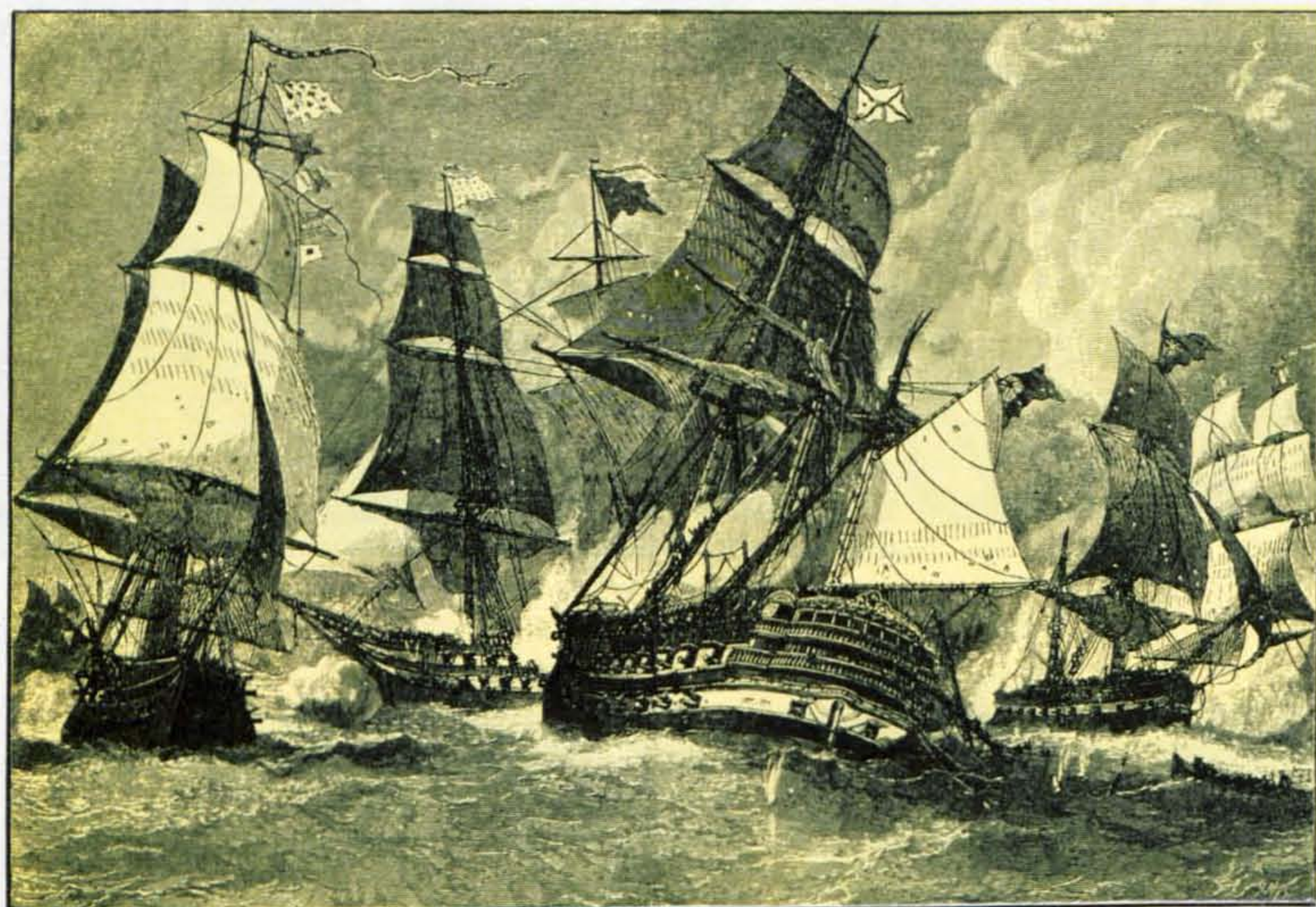


The Battle that Set Us Free

A famous naval authority tells the exciting story of how a daring French sailor won a victory that saved America.

By SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON



The battle off the Capes of the Chesapeake took place on September 5, 1781. "Bear down and engage!" signaled Admiral Graves, and for more than two hours, the French and British warships dueled at close range.

About the Author



"The great historians, with few exceptions," says Samuel Eliot Morison, "are those who have not merely studied, but lived." Following this precept, Morison has lived a full and vigorous life, and in the process has gained a reputation as America's most readable historian. In 1939-40, to gather material for a biography of Columbus, he built a model of the Santa Maria and re-sailed Columbus' voyage across the Atlantic. The resulting book, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, one of the twenty-four Morison has written, won the Pulitzer Prize. When World War II broke out Morison took leave of his professorship at Harvard to become a lieutenant commander in the naval reserve (he retired in 1951 as a rear admiral). Within hearing of gunfire he began preparing his monumental naval history of the war, a fourteen-volume project, of which ten have been published to date.

The Editors

On a bright September day in 1944, United States Coast Guard Cutter Campbell was standing out of Hampton Roads by the swept channel through the minefield. I was on board, a Johnny-come-lately in the Naval Reserve, attached to the staff of Capt. W. A. P. Martin, USN, the escort commander.

As a maritime historian, I am always thrilled at entering or leaving Hampton Roads. There passes through my mind a pageant of sail, from the visit of the first Spaniards to the engagement that marked the finish of the sailing Navy three centuries later. So, when Cape Henry was falling low under the western horizon, I stepped to the starboard side of the bridge and saluted.

"What's this all about?" said Captain Martin.

"I'm saluting the ghosts of Frenchmen."

"What Frenchmen?"

"About fifty sailors in the fleet of the Comte de Grasse, who were killed here in battle and



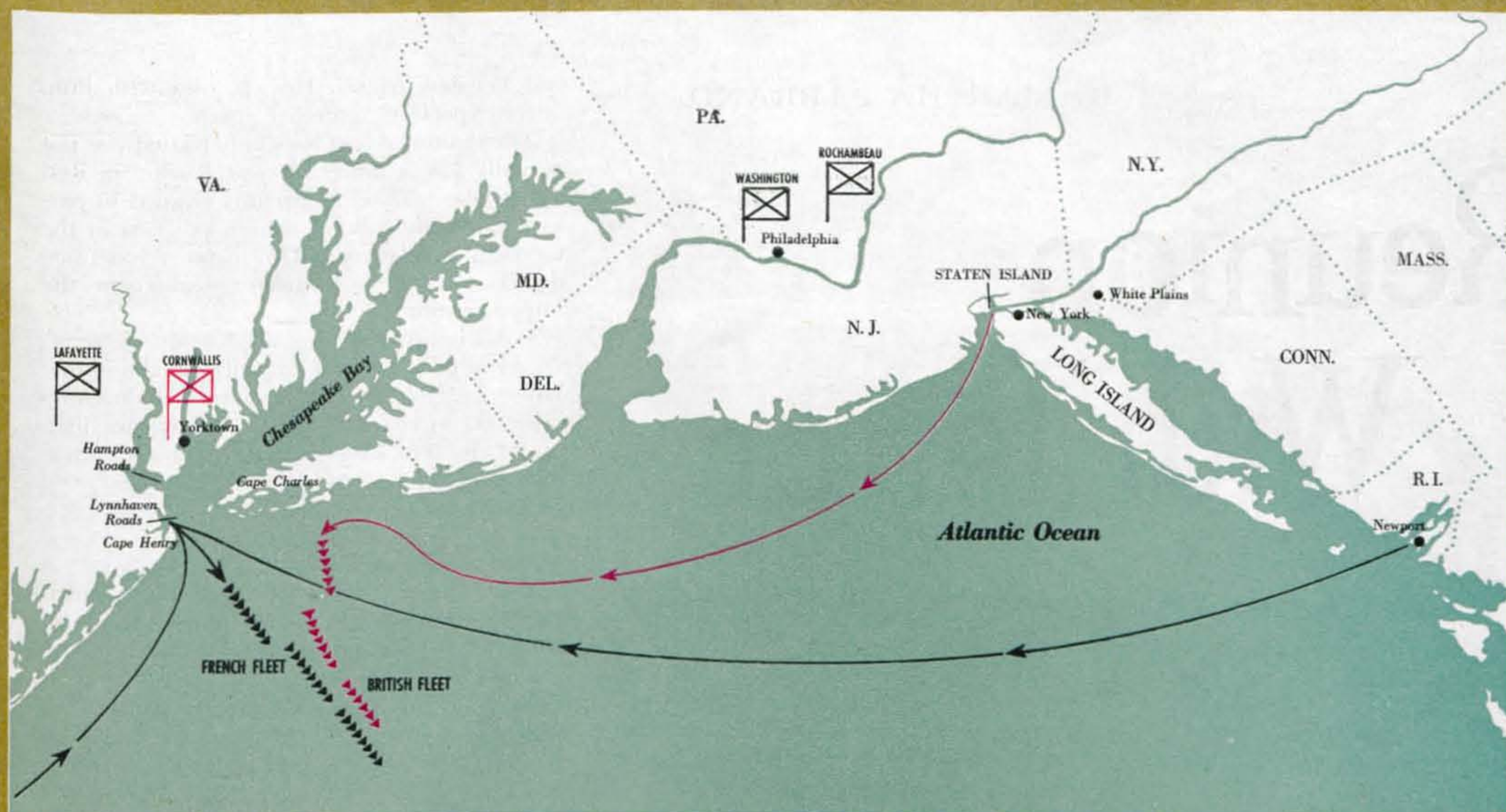
Rear Admiral Bougainville



Rear Admiral de Grasse



Lieutenant General Rochambeau



The king's general, Lord Cornwallis, hoped to lure Washington south, slice the United States into three parts, and cut off our flow of supplies from France. He might have succeeded, but this battle cost Britain the supremacy of her sea power in American waters.

buried at sea—our convoy must be right over their bones now.”

“What in heaven’s name were they doing here?”

“Fighting for the glory of France and for American independence,” said I. “If de Grasse hadn’t won that fleet action, Cornwallis would not have surrendered and America would not have won her independence—at least not when she did.”

“Well, tell me about it as soon as we are in blue water,” said the captain.

And I did.

Here is the story that I told my friend, Captain Martin, at sea, and which I have had ten years to check up on and correct from innumerable books, old ships’ logs and the naval archives of three countries.

The winter of 1780–81 was the darkest period of the war for the American cause. The British held beachheads at Castine, Maine, New York City, Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. Washington was

stalemated on the Hudson, too weak to attack the British force holding New York City. Army desertions were numerous; the states provided reinforcements slowly and reluctantly. Washington could spare only 1000 troops to protect the Carolinas, where Lord Cornwallis was marching northward to Virginia, receiving plenty of help from the Carolina loyalists.

Rochambeau’s French expeditionary force of 6700 men, protected by a small French naval squadron, had been at Newport, Rhode Island, since July, 1780. But it was accomplishing nothing except to amuse the local damsels and enrich the Rhode Island farmers, because there was nothing it could do while the British fleet had naval superiority off our coast.

“Without a decisive naval force,” Washington wrote to Lafayette about this time, “we can do nothing definitive; and with it, every thing honourable and glorious.”

And where, you will ask, was the United States Navy? Part (Continued on Page 56)



Rear Admiral Graves



Rear Admiral Hood

With Their Defeat, England Lost the War

The men above commanded the two British fleets which lost the battle off the Capes. Graves probably would have won the day had he not stubbornly insisted on fighting “by the book.”



General Washington

They Wrought Victory at Yorktown

The siege of Yorktown, decisive engagement of the Revolution, succeeded because of the co-ordinated land-sea effort by Washington and his allies, at left. The place of battle was chosen by the daring Comte de Grasse, described by his sailors as being “six feet tall most days, six feet six on days of battle.”

The Battle That Set Us Free

(Continued from Page 33)

of our fleet had been sunk or captured when the British took Charleston, the year before. John Paul Jones, John Barry and a few other intrepid captains were destroying British commerce in European waters. And, of course, there were the privateers. But all that added up to something less, in effectiveness, than the South Korean Navy in the recent Korean war. There was no hope for the United States' winning independence unless we obtained the aid of a powerful fleet of capital ships to defeat the British Navy off our coasts. And that we got in 1781, thanks to France, and France alone.

In the spring of 1781 there began a series of military and naval movements which, before the end of the year, resulted in the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. That decisive event, which caused the fall of George III's ministry and forced him to sue for peace, was brought about almost entirely by sea power.

The capital ship in that era of sailing navies was the line-of-battle ship, or seventy-four, of which the British Navy had 120, the French 42 and the United States none. She was 170 to 190 feet long, mounted on three decks, seventy-four guns on the average, and carried 600 to 700 officers, sailors and marines. The battle line was formed by a fleet of these seventy-fours sailing in single file about 500 feet apart. Standard tactics were to sail parallel to the enemy's battle line and pound it to pieces.

Next most powerful ship was the frigate. Around 140 feet long, she mounted forty to fifty guns on two decks. Frigates were used as scouts or to escort a convoy. During a battle between two lines of seventy-fours, the frigates hung around to pick on a dismasted enemy ship or lend a hand generally. The sloop of war, smallest of the fighting ships, had only one deck of guns. Like the seventy-fours and frigates, she was ship-rigged—square sails on all three masts.

There was no sense in trying to camouflage the hull of a sailing ship, with its towering masts in plain sight. Topsides were painted gay colors. Green, yellow or blue stripes accented the gun decks; bulwarks and gun ports were a contrasting color, often bright red. A fleet of these ships sailing offshore, yards braced sharp and heeling to the trade wind, white sails and the nervous tracery of rigging standing out against the sky, presented a noble maritime spectacle that has passed from us forever.

Life on board those ships was tough. Seamen of that day slept in hammocks which were rolled into tight packages every morning and stowed in nettings on the bulwarks, so that they might help to stop a cannon ball. The seaman's food was terrible: salt beef and pork, dried peas, hardtack and dumplings boiled in vats with the meat. The sailor got his food in a mess kid, a wooden bowl which he cleaned by polishing off the food with his fingers or his sheath knife. His water was carried in wooden casks, and it often went foul. One cask broached on deck was the "scuttle butt" where he could drink from a tin dipper, favorite skating ground for microbes, so that if one man got influenza, all on board took it. Rum was served out regularly in the diluted form of grog.

After six weeks at sea, scurvy was expected to break out, and usually did. An English naval surgeon who made a careful count of the losses in twenty British line-of-battle ships, during 1781, reported that their total complement was 12,109 men. Only 59 were killed in battle or died

of wounds, but 1518 died of disease and 350 more were sent home disabled, mostly by illness.

Conditions were no better in the French Navy, but its ships were newer and better than the British, and their sailors were better trained. And the French had learned strategy; with their weaker fleet they aimed to be stronger than the enemy at the point of contact.

If you counted up all British and French warships in American waters in the summer of 1781, the British outnumbered the French almost as much as the Japanese outnumbered the Americans at the Battle of Midway. Yet de Grasse won, as Spruance and Fletcher won, because he directed his striking force at the one enemy fleet that really counted.

Rear Admiral François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, came of an ancient Provençal family. He was a natural seaman and a thorough gentleman—"six feet tall most days, six feet six on days of battle," his sailors used to say. In 1781, when he got into the campaign for American independence, he was fifty-nine years old and had been forty-seven years in the navy. Departing Brest on March twenty-second, with twenty line-of-battle ships and a suitable number of frigates, transports and storeships, de Grasse made Martinique on April twenty-ninth, a fair passage for those days.

After driving off a blockading squadron under Rear Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, he captured the island of St. Lucia from the British. Then, escorting a convoy of 200 merchantmen, he proceeded to Cap-Haïtien. More seventy-fours awaited him, and there he arranged to take on board the French garrison of the colony of St. Domingue—now the Republic of Haiti—commanded by General the Marquis de Saint Simon.

While the British never had an actual over-all war plan to defeat the United States, they did follow a general concept. That was to cut the colonies in two along the Hudson River line; to occupy strategic places along the coast, but to stay out of the interior, where the redcoats were likely to get clobbered by embattled farmers.

Cornwallis, having reached Virginia, chose Yorktown on the deep, well-sheltered York River as his base. If he could suck Washington's army away from the Hudson and add this base on the Chesapeake to the many already held by Britain, the United States would be cut into three parts and the flow of supplies from France would be choked off. Sea power would stifle the "rebellion."

But de Grasse was coming over from France to challenge seagoing Britannia. Well ahead of him, Commodore the Comte Barras de Saint-Laurent arrived at Newport on May 10, 1781, bringing reinforcements for the small French squadron already there. He brought dispatches from France for General Rochambeau, stating that de Grasse had orders to sail north from Haiti that summer with his fleet and 3000 soldiers, and that the admiral was to decide at what point on the United States coast he would operate.

With that big news under his cocked hat, Rochambeau galloped through Rhode Island and Connecticut to meet Washington at Wethersfield, Connecticut, and decide what they would do about it. Both generals were keen to use the 10,000 or so troops at their disposal for a combined land and sea attack on New York City. But Washington, who had an amazing grasp of the strategic value of sea power, convinced the Frenchman that de Grasse must make the choice. As he put it, "The navy must have the casting vote. In any operation and under all circumstances a decisive naval superiority is to

be considered as a fundamental principle, and the basis upon which every hope of success must ultimately depend."

This was Washington's long-awaited opportunity for a sustained offensive. He was not going to risk spoiling it by failure to concentrate all available forces, military and naval, French and American. There was no time to argue it out with de Grasse; they must accept his choice and co-operate with him.

Rochambeau sent word of this decision to de Grasse by frigate *La Concorde*. He urged de Grasse to reply quickly as to where he proposed to strike, and begged him to bring all the French troops he could carry and all the hard money he could raise, as the French troops and Washington's were clamoring for their pay.

In the meantime, Rochambeau's army left Newport, marched across Connecticut and joined Washington's forces at Dobb's Ferry.

De Grasse decided to make the Chesapeake his target. There was room in Hampton Roads for a fleet to maneuver, while at New York a British fleet was in a position to concentrate fire on his ships, one at a time, if they tried to pass through the Narrows. On July twenty-eighth he dispatched *La Concorde* north with word of his decision, and sent a frigate to Havana to obtain the wanted money.

One week later the grand French fleet sailed from Cap-Haïtien. It carried 4000 sailors of the St. Domingue garrison, and it was soon joined by the frigate bringing \$240,000 in gold from Havana. The Spanish governor there had collected the war chest—an enormous one for those days—by putting the heat on the merchants of Havana.

La Concorde, bearing de Grasse's message to Rochambeau and Washington, entered Newport Harbor on the twelfth of August. From there a courier sped to White Plains headquarters with the news that the French fleet was coming to the Chesapeake. That decided it; the allies began to ferry troops across the Hudson at King's Ferry.

Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, the British commander at New York, believed that they were aiming to attack that city via Staten Island, and to foster that delusion Washington left 4000 troops behind, on the Hudson and in New Jersey. De Grasse's fleet was now off the coast of South Carolina, making best speed northward before the summer southwest breeze.

In contrast to this beautiful co-ordination between two French fleets and three armies—one American and two French—the enemy was making a mess of his communications.

In the summer of 1781 the British had two fleets in American waters—the North American fleet of Rear Admiral Thomas Graves, based at New York, and the West Indies fleet under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Samuel Hood. Hood sailed north to reinforce Graves, sending the sloop of war *Swallow* ahead to tell Graves that he was coming, and for heaven's sake watch out for de Grasse!

H.M.S. *Swallow* arrived in New York July twenty-seventh, and found Graves gone. He was at sea, trying to intercept a French convoy bringing reinforcements to Rochambeau. *Swallow* put out to sea herself, in hope of finding him, but the sloop was intercepted by four American privateers off Long Island, run ashore and burned.

Admiral Graves returned to New York on August eighteenth. As the dispatches brought by the *Swallow* were now lost, he didn't know that de Grasse's fleet was coming north, until ten days later, when Hood arrived from the West Indies. Up to that time Graves foolishly assumed



"Ask him about dampness in the cellar."

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

that the French would spend the summer at Havana.

It took Graves about three days after Hood's arrival to grasp the situation. Finally, on September first, the combined British fleet sailed from New York, bound for the Chesapeake. Graves did not know that de Grasse had already entered the Capes of the Chesapeake and anchored in Lynnhaven Roads; only that he was coming. But he did know that Barras had sailed from Newport on August twenty-fifth and suspected that he was aiming to combine his fleet with that of de Grasse, which was true.

With the British still in command of our coasts and blocking our harbors, the French and American armies had to walk all the way from the Hudson to the Chesapeake. Washington reached Philadelphia on the last day of August, ahead of his army. He knew that everything now depended on whether de Grasse could keep the British fleet out of the Chesapeake long enough to let American and French troops pin down Cornwallis at Yorktown. Very, very anxious, he wrote to Lafayette on September second, "I am distressed beyond measure to know what has become of the Count de Grasse and for fear that the English fleet by occupying the Chesapeake . . . may frustrate all our flattering prospects in that quarter."

The general had reached Chester, Pennsylvania, on September fifth, when he received news of de Grasse's arrival within the Capes. In view of all we have read about Washington's unbending dignity, it is interesting to note that the French officer who brought the word said that he had never seen such expressive joy. "Washington acted like a child whose every wish had been gratified."

The presence of the French fleet and the troops it carried not only meant that Yorktown could be invested with superior force but that ships and boats would be at hand to float the armies down Chesapeake Bay. All depended, however, on whether the French could beat off the expected attack of the British fleet.

At the very moment that Washington was rejoicing over news that the French had arrived, the naval battle was being fought—the battle off the Capes of the Chesapeake—which would decide the question of American independence.

The British fleet, nineteen ships of the line, approached the Capes at daybreak on September 5, 1781. Rear Admiral Thomas Graves wore his flag in H.M.S. London in the center. The rear division was under a flag officer with a great name, Sir Francis Drake. The van division was under Rear Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, who became in later days a very distinguished admiral indeed. Graves, a "by-the-book" naval officer, was the senior, so he had tactical command, which was lucky for us.

At eight o'clock on the morning of September fifth, a French frigate scouting for de Grasse sighted the British fleet bearing down before a light northeasterly wind. The frigate cracked on all sail to bring the news to de Grasse. The French were nearly caught flatfooted. Almost 2000 officers and men of the fleet were absent with landing craft, setting ashore General St. Simon's troops, and there was no time to re-embark them. The wind was foul and the tide on the flood. The tide was not due to turn until noon—The tide was not due to turn until noon—the earliest moment that a square rigger with a head wind could hope to clear the Capes. Graves, whose foremost ship sighted the French at anchor at 9:30 A.M., let slip a wonderful opportunity to attack while the French were getting under way or beating out of the ship channel, close-hauled and more or less in disorder. That

is what Nelson would have done, and what Nelson did at the Battle of the Nile in 1798.

The French ships promptly heaved in short on their anchor cables—and what a job that was with old-fashioned, walk-around capstans! Four seventy-fours and all the French frigates were assigned to stay behind to support Washington and to finish landing the troops. When the tide turned at noon, all the rest were ready to weigh anchor. A signal gun from the admiral's flagship, the Ville de Paris, marked the moment. Within fifteen minutes every vessel had her anchors off the ground and her masts and yards clothed with lower courses, topsails, topgallant sails and royals. Superb seamanship, glorious sight!

These Frenchmen must have been fine ship handlers, even to get outside the Capes. Full-rigged seventy-fours of that era could not sail nearer the wind than six points, sixty-five to seventy degrees. That meant they had to tack out through the three-mile-wide channel in very flat zigs and zags, and every time they came about, there was the chance of missing stays, being caught aback and drifting ashore before the crew could get the ship under control.

I recall one ticklish moment "Up the Slot" in World War II, when a Japanese torpedo hit square in the fantail of our cruiser but failed to explode. It hung there for about ten minutes, and then dropped off. The aviators quartered aft sent a delegation to the bridge to thank the chaplain. I'll bet every padre in the French fleet was thanked that September afternoon of 1781 after Ville de Paris, eleventh in the French line, had weathered Cape Henry.

Admiral Hood begged Admiral Graves to attack the French ships while they were beating out, but the senior flag officer declined this opportunity in favor of the old-time parallel action between two battle lines. At 2:11 P.M., when Graves was closing the Middle Ground shoal between Cape Charles and Cape Henry, he ordered his fleet to wear ship and head east in reverse order of battle. The French van, commanded by Rear Admiral Bougainville, three miles to leeward, had just passed Cape Henry.

Here was Graves' chance to run down before the wind and beat up Bougainville before the French center (de Grasse) and rear (de Monteil) could get into position to support him. Instead, the British admiral waited until the French center lay opposite his center. He wanted to attack ship-to-ship according to naval doctrine that had been laid down in the reign of Charles II.

Now the two fleets were standing out to sea on converging courses. Wind was about NNE and light. The British were sailing with wind abaft the beam, which enabled them to maneuver well. The French, braced sharp up, could not get any nearer the enemy. Each British ship was a cable's length ahead of the other, and in flagship London the signal "Line ahead" was flying—a Union Jack at the mainmast head. There was a big gap between Graves' center and Hood's rear division.

The French, too, had been unable as yet to form a perfect line. But the French, having twenty-four ships to the enemy's nineteen, were willing to let the British make the first aggressive move.

At 3:46 Admiral Graves hoisted the signal, "Bear down and engage!" If this order had been carried out promptly, Drake's van and Graves' center might have concentrated on Bougainville's van, while Hood bore down and engaged the French center before their rear could come up in support. But Graves' plan of attack was frustrated by two factors.

In the first place, Bougainville fooled the British. Instead of holding his luff and thus offering his eight ships as target for the thirteen under Drake and Graves, the Frenchman sheered off to leeward. Thus he allowed time for de Grasse's center to close him and de Grasse promptly formed a straight line on Bougainville. By the time the British attacked, Bougainville had the support of the whole French center, which included the biggest warship in the world, the Ville de Paris.

Secondly, when Admiral Graves bent on the signal, "Bear down and engage!"

he kept the former signal "Line ahead" flying; and Hood thought, or pretended to think, that meant him. So Hood's rear division continued straight on its course instead of bearing down, and never got into the action.

Shooting began at 4:15. The six ships of Drake's van came down against the French in echelon, one at a time, affording splendid targets for fore-and-aft taking fire. As each British ship got within range of a Frenchman, she straightened out on a parallel course. For over two hours it was

(Continued on Page 59)

GIUSEPPE, WITH SCISSORS AND COMB,

PERFORMED WONDERS ON MANY A DOME.

BUT THIS TONSORIAL HERO

HAD A LAWN-Q OF ZERO

WHEN TRIMMING HIS GRASS PLOT AT HOME!



LAWN-BOY close-trim feature saves smarting knees, makes smarter lawns

Clip-weary wrists take a permanent holiday when you step up to a LAWN-BOY! This modern power mower trims, front and side, within $\frac{3}{8}$ " of walls, trees, and fences—saves hours of hand clipping. You'll like a LAWN-BOY for many reasons: its lightness, its easy handling, its one-pull starting. And, above all, for its exclusive Level Cut that cuts every blade of grass at uniform height—makes every square foot of lawn a pleasure to see. Prove it—without doubt, without obligation. Ask your LAWN-BOY dealer about the FREE HOME TRIAL!

LAWN-BOY

Lamar, Missouri • Division of Outboard, Marine & Mfg. Co.
Makers of **Johnson** and **Evinrude** Outboard Motors
In Canada: LAWN-BOY, Peterborough, Ontario

(Continued from Page 57) fire-away-Flanagan between these portions of the two fleets.

Drake's flagship *Princessa* sailed so close to *Diademe* that she set her on fire with gun wadding, and was about to grapple and board when Admiral Bougainville in *Auguste* came to *Diademe's* aid. Now the fire from *Auguste* and *Diademe* became so hot that Drake's *Princessa* hauled her wind and pulled out of the ruckus. The French, as was their custom, fired at the enemy's masts and sails with *mitraille* or *langrage*—iron bars and bolts chained together. The British concentrated their fire on decks and topsides—"between wind and water," as the old phrase is. They hoped to knock such big holes in the wooden walls that de Grasse, with no dockyard nearby, would lose a number of his ships.

Don't imagine that these old sailing warships didn't throw hardware. We have no statistics for this battle, but in an earlier one off Martinique in 1780, Admiral Rodney's flagship fired 3288 rounds. Compare the Battle of Manila Bay in 1898, in which our flagship *Olympia* fired 1300 rounds; or the action off Casablanca in 1942 when U.S.S. *Massachusetts* fired 786 rounds of 16-inch and U.S.S. *Brooklyn* 2761 rounds of 6-inch ammunition. And we did not kill nearly so many men with our armor-piercing and high-explosive projectiles as Rodney and de Grasse did with their cannon balls, grapeshot and *langrage*.

At 6:30 darkness began to fall and all firing ceased. *Princessa's* mainmast was about to fall, *Terrible* was in a sinking condition, and three other British ships had been heavily damaged. Ninety British tars had been killed and 246 wounded. No French ship was so badly damaged that she could not be repaired at sea, and the total French casualties were 230, of whom about 75 were killed or died of wounds. The critical battle off the Capes of the Chesapeake was over. The French had won supremacy, provided they did not throw away victory by imprudence.

For four days de Grasse and Graves steered southeasterly to a position almost off Cape Hatteras, warily watching each other. The French admiral was leading the British away so that Barras' squadron, bringing siege artillery from Newport and making slow time, could slip into Chesapeake Bay. Graves fell for this ruse. He should have doubled back to engage Barras before he got inside the Capes. Apparently the reason he did not do so was an erroneous report from a scouting frigate that Barras was already there.

De Grasse was criticized for not renewing the battle, since his fleet was superior, but he was right not to risk losing the advantage he had won. The French had no dockyard nearer than Fort-de-France, Martinique, while the British had ample repair facilities in New York. There was no sense in de Grasse taking risks when he had the upper hand. He was not of the school of Admiral Halsey—rather, that of Admiral Spruance, who believes that enough is enough; if you have won your objective, why risk losing it by more aggressiveness? And it was Spruance who, by following that maxim, won the great Battle of Midway and of the Philippine Sea.

On the evening of September ninth, when de Grasse felt sufficient time had elapsed for Barras to arrive in Chesapeake Bay, he broke contact with Graves and squared away for the Capes. Two days later his fleet anchored in Hampton Roads. Barras was there, all right. Now the allies were masters of the bay.

Graves limped back to New York for repairs and upkeep. He lost two frigates

en route, captured by two of de Grasse's frigates. In addition, H.M.S. *Terrible*, one of his biggest ships, had to be abandoned on the point of sinking. The top hamper of every vessel that had engaged was so badly cut up and the supply of spars in New York was so short that Graves could not sail again for over a month.

Let us return now to the land forces. Washington heard of the naval victory at Williamsburg, where he met Saint Simon and Lafayette, ten days after the battle ended. He promptly sent a message to the French admiral by a small sailboat:

I take particular Satisfaction in felicitating your Excellency on the Glory of having driven the British Fleet from the Coasts, and taking two of their Frigates; these happy events and the decided Superiority of your Fleet, give us the happiest Presages of the most compleat Success, in our combined Operations on this Bay.

De Grasse replied that he had already sent up the bay to Annapolis six ships with a troop capacity of 4000. And he invited the general and staff to visit him. Washington, with Generals Knox and Lafayette, Governor Nelson, of Virginia, Col. Alexander Hamilton and others of his staff, embarked at Hampton in the *Queen Charlotte*, a British prize recently taken by the French, and went on board flagship *Ville de Paris* on the eighteenth, in Lynnhaven Roads.

Fortunately Washington by this time was used to French manners; for he had no sooner climbed the gangway to the quarter-deck than the impetuous admiral embraced him warmly, addressing him as "*Mon cher petit général!*" As Washington

stood six feet four and de Grasse only six feet, the assembled officers restrained their laughter with difficulty, and jolly General Knox laughed aloud "till his fat sides shook."

After a dinner with toasts, each accompanied by a salvo of gunfire, some important business was done. De Grasse's orders required him to return to the West Indies not later than October fifteenth. Washington was appalled. He did not see how he and Rochambeau, even with Saint Simon's reinforcements, could force Cornwallis to give up in less than six weeks. Siege operations in those days were protracted affairs, with deep trenches to be dug in creeping approach to enemy fortifications, all according to classic rules. If the French fleet left before these labors were over, Graves might return with reinforcements and raise the siege. So Washington begged de Grasse to stay on.

The admiral promised to stay, and to leave St. Simon's troops ashore, too, until November first. Washington thanked him warmly and departed the same evening for Williamsburg.

Toward the end of September, de Grasse received a disquieting piece of false news, to the effect that Graves was on his way back to the Chesapeake, reinforced by ten ships. Like all good sailors, de Grasse hated to ride idly at anchor, especially at a time when equinoctial gales were expected and ships might drag ashore. So he proposed to put out to sea and search for Graves, and if he didn't find him, take a crack at New York. Washington wrote him on the twenty-fifth, begging him not to do so, pointing out that he would risk all by leaving, but

would assure victory over Cornwallis by staying. He sent Lafayette to present this letter in person, together with a plea from General Rochambeau. Again de Grasse agreed, but he begged Rochambeau to urge Washington to get on with the siege.

Washington needed no urging. His engineers had done their stuff, and the big French siege guns, brought from Newport by Barras, had been sited around Yorktown. On September twenty-eighth the American and French troops made the first assault, driving the redcoats back to their inner fortifications. The attack on the inner defenses opened on October ninth. The French fleet lent fire support all the afternoon, and at night too. Their red-hot cannon balls destroyed the last British warships which were anchored on the York River.

On October seventeenth a British drummer under protection of a white flag appeared on a parapet of the British fortifications and beat a parley. An armistice was concluded, and on the morning of the nineteenth Lord Cornwallis signed the surrender. De Grasse sent hearty congratulations and was represented at the ceremony by Commodore Barras.

By deliberate tactics Washington had saved many lives. The French lost sixty killed and the Americans only twenty-eight during the siege; the French had 193 wounded and the Americans 107. Cornwallis lost 156 killed and 326 wounded, and he surrendered 7241 officers and men, 840 sailors of the Royal Navy, 24 colors, 214 pieces of artillery, 7320 small arms, 457 horses, 40 vessels in good condition, and 11,000 hard dollars.

On the very day of surrender, the repaired British fleet sailed from New York, escorting transports carrying 7000 troops to reinforce Cornwallis. En route, Graves heard the bad news from scouting frigates; he turned back to New York.

In his General Orders of October twentieth, Washington expressed in glowing language his gratitude to the French for their aid on land and sea; especially to the fleet, "the most numerous and powerful that ever appeared in these seas, commanded by an Admiral whose Fortune and Talents ensure great Events." And before the end of the month Thomas McKean, president of Congress, wrote to the French admiral: "Your whole conduct justly endears you to us, and entitles you to every mark of honor that we can possibly confer upon you."

Fickle fortune soon reversed the roles of some of the naval contestants. De Grasse lost the next big battle, off Les Saintes in the West Indies, on April 12, 1782. Bougainville on that occasion acted much as Hood had off the Capes of the Chesapeake; he failed to support his commander; while Hood, having learned a lesson, followed Admiral Rodney closely. The *Ville de Paris* was cut off and surrounded, and de Grasse was forced to strike his flag after losing half the crew. He put up such a stout fight that as a prisoner he became quite a hero in England, but after the war was over he was ignored by Louis XVI.

Admiral Graves never recovered from his defeat in 1781, but Admiral Hood went on to a brilliant career in the war of the French Revolution. And Lord Cornwallis became a great governor-general of India.

Washington, as we know, went from strength to strength. Yet he knew well, and never denied, that without that French naval victory off the Capes of the Chesapeake, history would have more probably recorded not a Surrender of Cornwallis but a Surrender of Washington.

THE END



You be the Judge

By JOSÉ SCHORR

When school let out, husky sixteen-year-old Zeke was ordered by his father to work on the family farm "or else." That wasn't Zeke's idea of a vacation, so he lit out and spent a leisurely summer with an uncle. Later the uncle sued Zeke's father for the boy's board, spending money and new clothes.

"I didn't ask you to take care of Zeke," the father said. "The law doesn't require me to reimburse every softhearted person who heaps handouts on a child of mine."

"You practically refused to support Zeke if he didn't work on the farm," the uncle replied. "When a parent won't support a child, he is liable to whoever does. You let me keep him all summer without paying me a cent."

If you were the judge, would you make dad pay?

... ..

Dad did not have to pay. The court said he would have had to pay if he had "cast his son out helpless upon the world," but to make him responsible under the circumstances

might incite unruly children "to set at naught all reasonable parental control" by threatening to walk out if not given their way.

Based upon a 1937 Indiana decision.