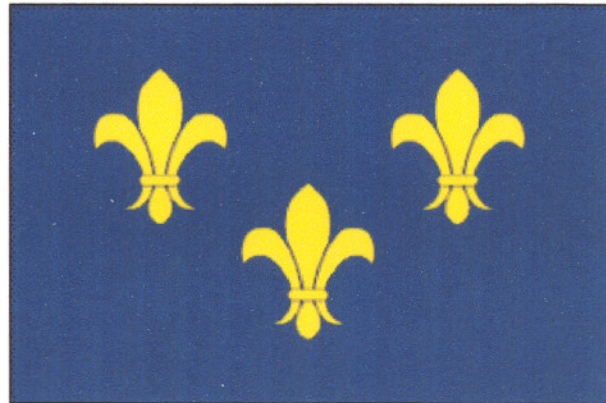
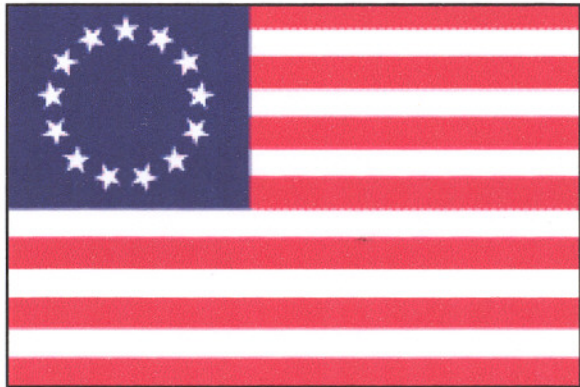


Westchester County, July and August, 1781

**The Washington-Rochambeau Encampment
of the American and French Armies
*at Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley, Hartsdale and Edgemont***

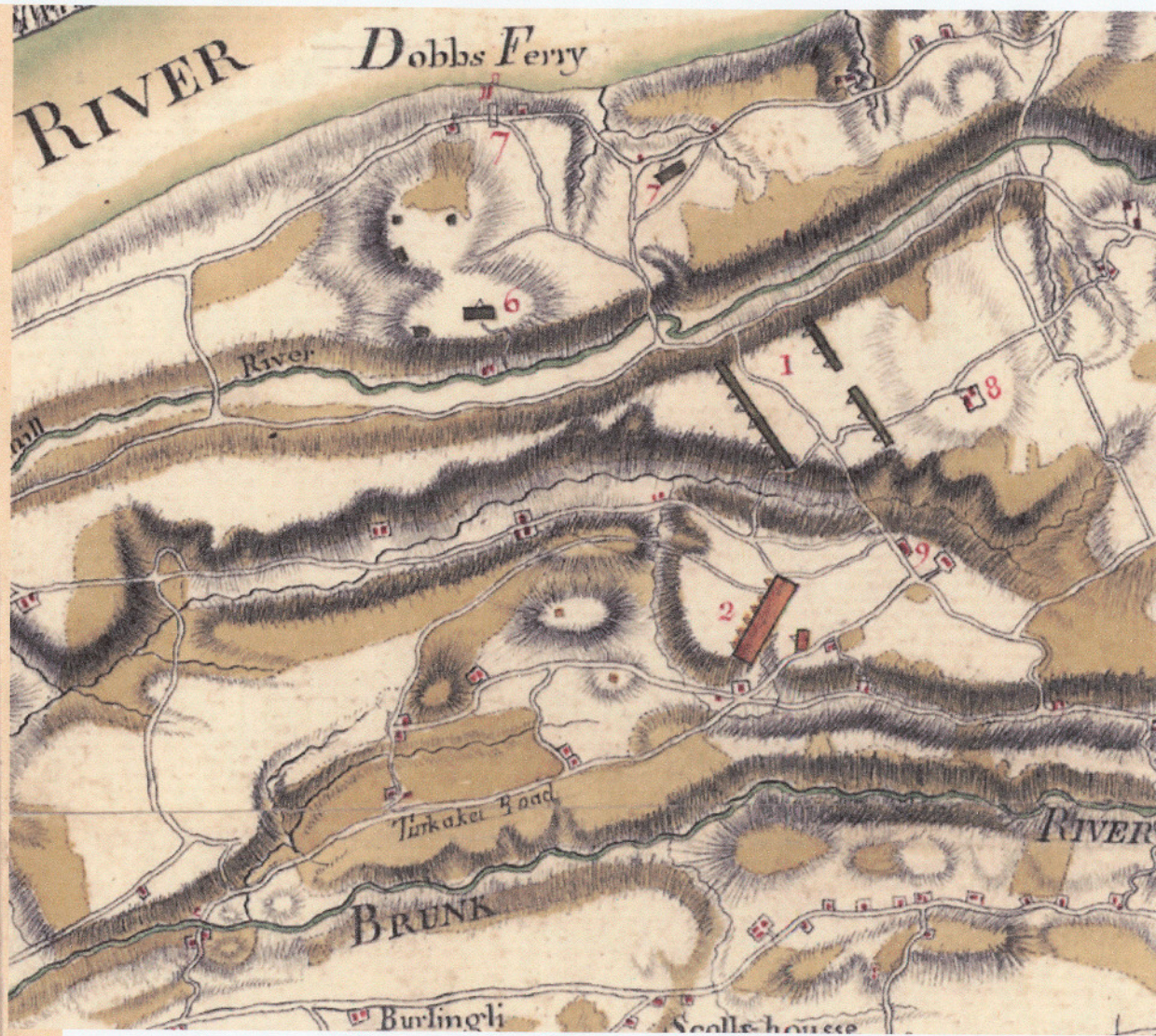
A Turning Point for the United States



Map of the encampment of the allied armies
 prepared by Rochambeau's cartographer summer, 1781

Legende

- Position du Camp
 de L'Armée. Coubr
 inée a Philipsburg
 du 6 Juillet au
 19 Aoust.
- 1781.
- Total 9000 h.^{es} dont 4000 Américains
 et 5000 Français
1. Camp Américain
 2. Camp français
 3. Grenadiers et Chasseurs
 4. Légion de L'Anzur
 5. Corps du C.^{te} Watcobury
 6. Corps du C.^{te} Skinbets
 7. Corps de Dragons de Sheldon
 8. Quartier du g.^{al} Washington
 9. Quartier du g.^{al} Rochambeau
 10. Hopital français
 11. Batteries de Dobb.^s Serry pour
 Empêcher les Vaisseaux de remonter la Rivière



Washington-Rochambeau encampment

July 6-August 19, 1781

The Continental Army units on the right (by the Hudson) encamped in Dobbs Ferry and constructed a redoubt.

The Continental Army units on the left encamped in the Ardsley High School area, and in Hartsdale, just south of Secor Road.

The French troops encamped in Edgemont, to the east of the Americans, between the Sprain Brook and the Bronx River.



Redoubt , Dobbs Ferry
J. F. Cropsey 1892

Why were the American and French armies encamped here?

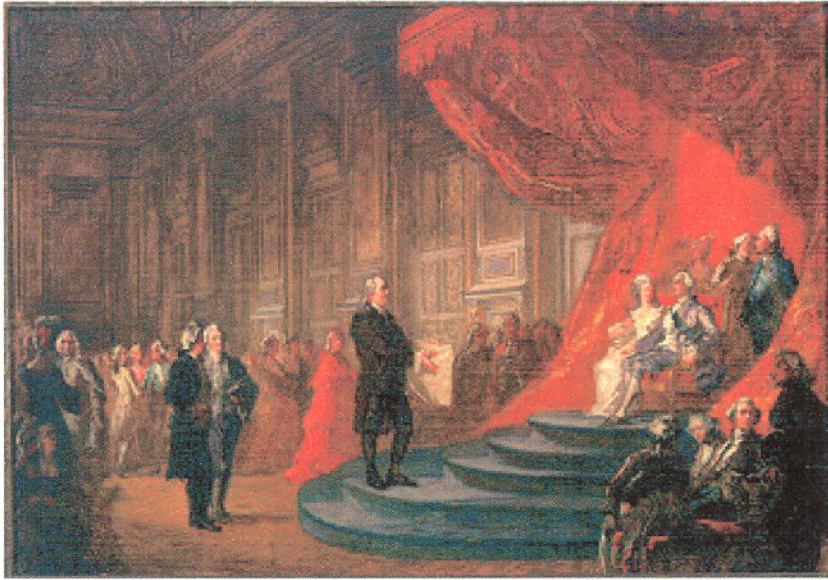
By mid-1781 more than six years had passed since the hostilities at Lexington and Concord (April, 1775) and the start of the War for Independence. Despite occasional battlefield successes, such as the victory at Saratoga in October, 1777, the military fortunes of the United States were in decline by 1781, the opposing forces seemed to be stalemated, and political prospects for the new republic were poor. British armies controlled Manhattan and much of the south, and, to all appearances, could not be dislodged. Congress saw no way out of the military stalemate and was prepared to accede to unfavorable peace terms.

Washington understood that secure, uncontested independence for the United States was at stake, and that it would not be achieved without a major victory. He planned to gain that victory by driving the British army out of Manhattan.

The Dobbs Ferry area was selected for encampment in the summer of 1781 because of its proximity to General Henry Clinton's British forces in Manhattan.

But there was a major problem with Washington's plans: British defenses on Manhattan were strong, and the chances of success were minimal.

*Battle of Saratoga, October, 1777;
Alliance with France, February, 1778*



George P A Healy: *Franklin Urging the Claims of the American Colonies Before Louis XVI* [ca1847]



Charles Vergennes

The defeat of the British army of General Burgoyne by American forces under the command of General Gates at the Battle of Saratoga (north of Albany) in October, 1777, stunned the British government.

Benjamin Franklin, representing Congress in Paris, had been attempting to arrange a military alliance between the United States and France. Franklin's efforts were unavailing until news of Saratoga reached the French court. **Because of the American victory at Saratoga, the French government, and especially the influential foreign minister, Charles Vergennes, concluded that the American side had a chance to win the war.** A military alliance between France and the United States soon followed (February, 1778).

A large French army, commanded by General Rochambeau, arrived in Rhode Island in the summer of 1780. The following summer, the Continental and French armies joined forces, encamping side by side in Greenburgh.

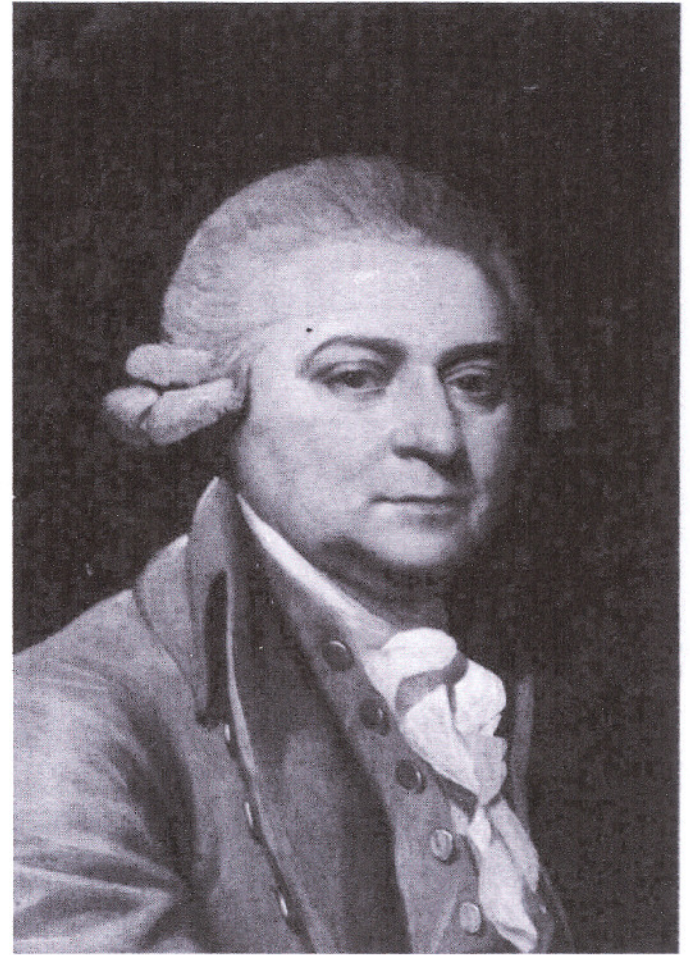
An unwinnable war?

In 1780 and 1781 John Adams reported to Congress about a growing conviction in France that the war was unwinnable.

The French government was contemplating a peace treaty under the terms of *uti possidetis*.

According to the principle of *uti possidetis*, the United States would possess only the territory which its military currently controlled.

Congress, discouraged by the long, inconclusive war, instructed its representatives in Paris to acquiesce to French peace proposals.

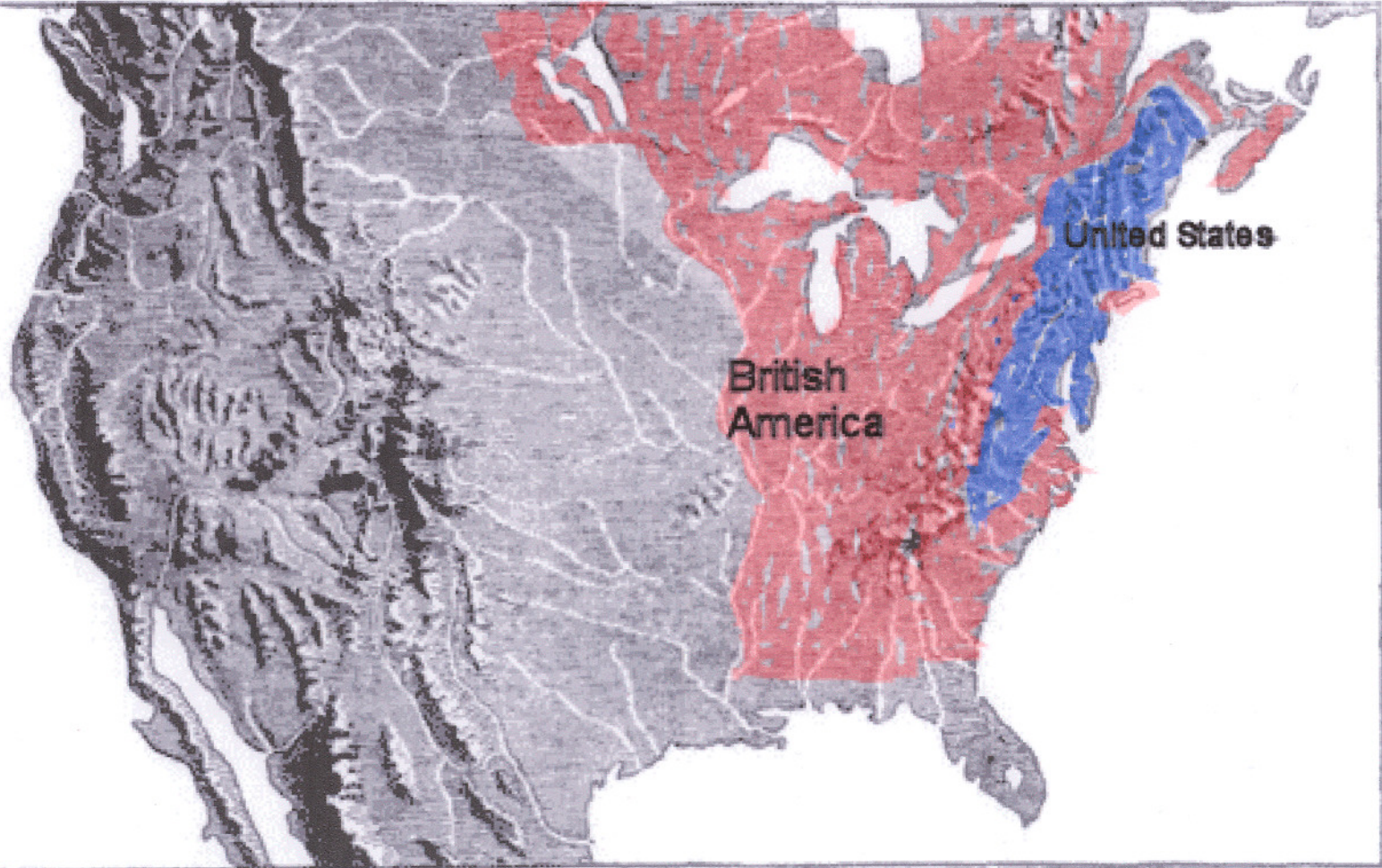


John Adams of Massachusetts
Representative of Congress in Amsterdam
and (with Franklin) in Paris

*Possible boundaries of the United States, under terms of
uti possidetis*

(if applied in mid-summer, 1781):

The new nation would be confined to a narrow coastal strip.



***Summer, 1781:
Intelligence was received at the Westchester
encampment from Lafayette in Virginia***

During the summer of 1781 the Marquis de Lafayette, commander of Continental troops in Virginia, was watching the movements of British General Cornwallis, whose large army had moved from the Carolinas into Virginia in the spring.

In August Lafayette informed Washington that Cornwallis had halted at the York River and was fortifying the hamlet of Yorktown, Virginia.



Marquis de Lafayette

August 14, 1781: “possibly the most momentous message of the entire war”

During this period of stalemate and dismal prospects for the United States, a message from French Admiral de Grasse was received by General Washington (most likely at his headquarters in Hartsdale near Secor Road). Historian Robert Leckie has called de Grasse’s letter, “possibly the most momentous message of the entire war.” *

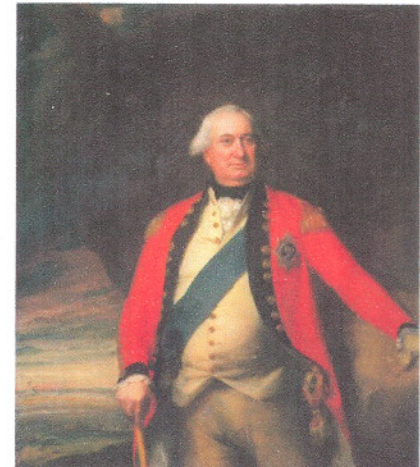
The letter informed Washington that Admiral de Grasse planned to sail his large fleet from the West Indies to the Chesapeake Bay, and would be able to assist in a joint land and sea campaign against the British forces of General Cornwallis in Virginia.

If Washington and Rochambeau quickly moved the Continental and French armies from New York to Virginia, it might be possible to trap Cornwallis’s troops.

Control of the Chesapeake Bay by de Grasse’s fleet would prevent Cornwallis’s escape by sea.



Admiral de Grasse



General Cornwallis

*George Washington’s War by Robert Leckie (1992)

August 14 to August 19th, 1781: *A turning-point for the United States*

Washington abandoned his plans to attack British forces in New York.

Rochambeau, who had little enthusiasm for Washington's New York strategy, readily agreed. (By some accounts Rochambeau convinced a reluctant Washington to abandon his New York strategy.)

The allied commanders decided instead to take the risk of marching the American and French armies more than four hundred miles, from Greenburgh to Yorktown, Virginia, in the hopes of trapping Cornwallis's army and gaining a decisive victory.

Secrecy would be essential. If General Clinton were to discover the plans of the allied armies, he might quickly reinforce Cornwallis and take control of the Chesapeake Bay before the arrival of de Grasse's fleet.

Clinton might also disrupt the march at its most vulnerable points, such as the Hudson River crossing.



General Washington



General Rochambeau

Washington's March from Dobbs Ferry to Yorktown, Virginia

Aug 19th to Sept 18th, 1781

Map prepared by historians at
the United States Military Academy,
West Point:

http://www.dean.usma.edu/HISTORY/web03/atlases/american%20revolution/american%20revolution%20pages/march_yorktown.htm



Col. Scammell's light-infantry unit broke camp in Dobbs Ferry on August 19th, 1781:

“a select corps intended to march in advance of the main army”

James Thacher, MD, participant in the march to Yorktown, was a surgeon in Col. Alexander Scammell's light-infantry corps, encamped in Dobbs Ferry in the summer of 1781. Scammell's unit broke camp on August 19th.

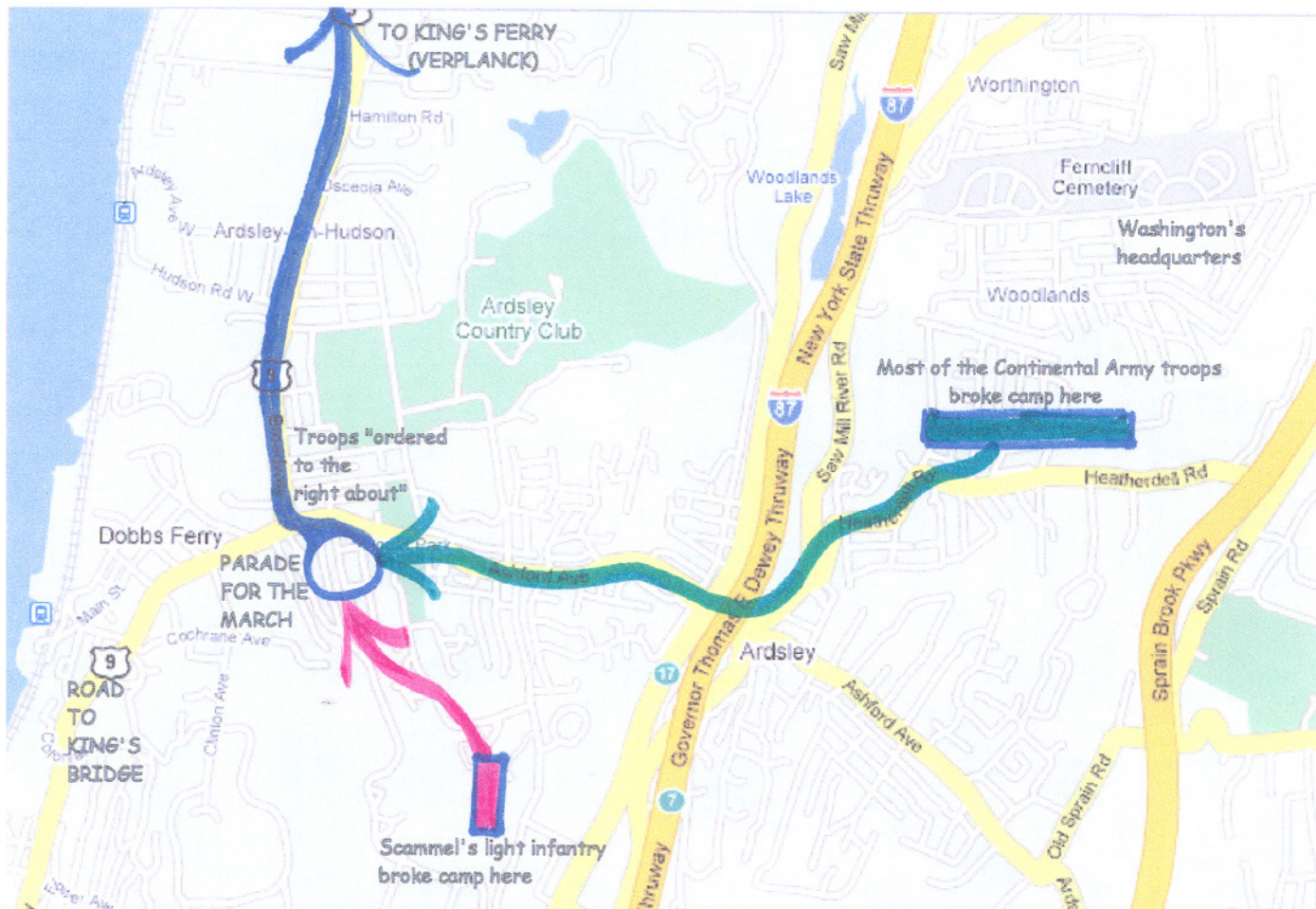
Dr. Thacher's *Military Journal of the American Revolution* is a lively account of his experiences in the Continental Army from 1775 to 1783.

Dr. Thacher writes that Scammell's unit was :

“a select corps, consisting of the most active and soldierly young men and officers... intended to march in advance of the main army, constantly prepared for active and hazardous service.”



AUGUST 19, 1781: Continental Army breaks camp and begins the march to Virginia



WASHINGTON'S LINE OF MARCH:

*The Gateway intersection is the first
identified landmark*

Dobbs Ferry's Gateway intersection is the first landmark

along the line of march of more than 400 miles to Virginia which is identified by a primary source

(Military Journal of the American Revolution

by Dr. James Thacher)

On August 19, 1781, American troops coming out of Ardsley entered Dobbs Ferry where Col. Scammell's unit was placed at the head of the army. The American troops then paraded for the march prior to setting out for Virginia.

The American troops assumed that they would be instructed to turn left at the Gateway intersection and march south in order to engage the enemy in Manhattan. Thus, they were puzzled by the orders which were actually issued: *to turn right, not left, and to march north.*

"August 20th, 1781

According to orders, we commenced our line of march yesterday, a party of pioneers being sent forward to clear the road towards King's-bridge [in Manhattan], and we expected immediately to follow in that direction;

but an army is a machine, whose motions are directed by its chief. When the troops were paraded for the march, they were ordered to the right about, and, making a retrograde movement up the side of the North [Hudson] river, we have reached King's-ferry [at Verplanck], and are preparing to cross the Hudson at this ferry."

Military Journal of the American Revolution

by Dr. James Thacher

The decision to march to Yorktown, Virginia, made by Generals Washington and Rochambeau in mid-August, 1781, at the Greenburgh encampment, radically altered the military fortunes and political prospects of the United States.

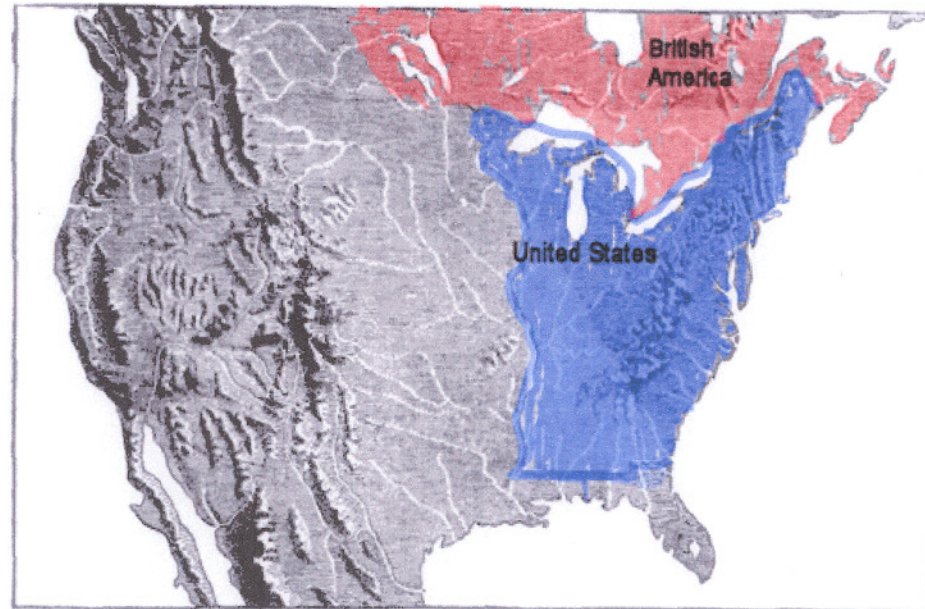
The victory of the allied American and French forces at Yorktown two months later, in October, 1781, led to favorable peace terms under the Treaty of Paris (1783) and to uncontested independence for the United States.



October 19th, 1781

*The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis
at Yorktown*

painting by John Trumbull 1797



**The United States under the terms of
the Treaty of Paris of 1783;
The British accept the Mississippi River
as the western boundary of the new republic**