

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

CROSSING THE PATAPSCO - 1781

April 19, 1781 - The Marquis de Lafayette was rushing his forces toward southeastern Virginia to aid General Washington in forcing British General Cornwallis to surrender. The forced march required Major General Lafayette's barefoot, ragged troops to cross the Patapsco River at Elkridge Landing. The spring rains had swelled the river and the ford was wider and deeper than normal. As the troops crossed, one scow sank and nine soldiers were drowned. Once all troops were on the southern shore, they camped within sight of the mouth of the Patapsco Canyon near the village of Elkridge Landing.

General Lafayette wanted to boost the morale of his ill clad army. At his own expense, he purchased shirts, overalls, shoes and hats from local merchants, and issued new outfits to his men. The General then arranged with local farmers and planters for the use of carts and wagons to transport his weary soldiers from Elkridge Landing to the Potomac River. This tactic

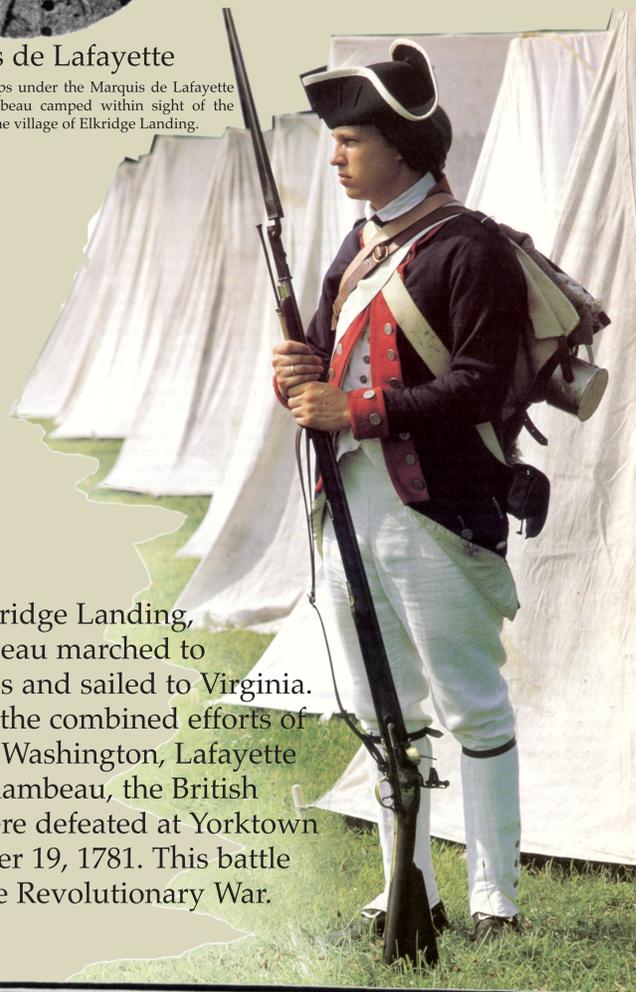


Marquis de Lafayette

Revolutionary War troops under the Marquis de Lafayette and Comte de Rochambeau camped within sight of the Patapsco Canyon near the village of Elkridge Landing.

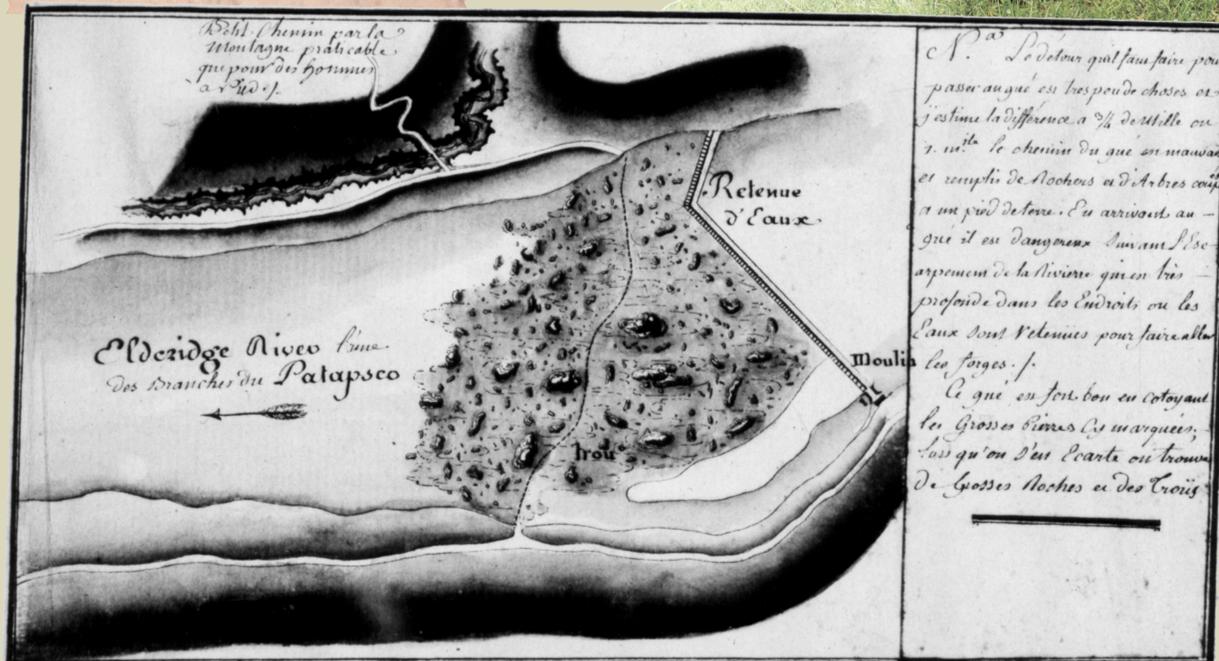
enabled the troops to rest and regain strength while they moved toward the fighting that lay ahead. To be sure, Lafayette was held in high esteem by his men and tranquility and discipline were restored.

September 12, 1781 - Once again the village of Elkridge Landing saw the passing of soldiers on the march south. This time it was French regulars under the command of General Comte de Rochambeau (RAHSH um boh) in route to Yorktown, Virginia, to assist Generals Lafayette and Washington in forcing the surrender of General Cornwallis. Not wanting to subject his soldiers to the turbulence of the Patapsco River, General Rochambeau scouted out a detour upstream from Elkridge Landing and forded just below the Hockely Forge Dam, about where the Thomas Viaduct crosses the river today. Below is a portion of the map of Rochambeau's 34th camp that noted the danger and difficulty in crossing the Patapsco.



Comte de Rochambeau

From Elkridge Landing, Rochambeau marched to Annapolis and sailed to Virginia. Through the combined efforts of Generals Washington, Lafayette and Rochambeau, the British forces were defeated at Yorktown on October 19, 1781. This battle ended the Revolutionary War.



Map of General Rochambeau's 34th Camp showing his route across the Patapsco River below the Hockely Forge Dam.

The Ages Play a Symphony of Sounds in the Patapsco Valley

The history of Maryland flows with the Patapsco River. Commerce, industry, agriculture, warfare and conservation have played parts in the pageant along this river's course. Past days echoed with now unfamiliar sounds: war shouts of the Susquehannocks; rasping of adzes and chisels shaping ships from hard oaks; roaring of iron furnaces; creaking of hogsheads on rolling roads, repeated chopping of the woodsman's ax; tramping of colonial and Civil War troops; clanging of iron works; blasts of bombs bursting above a fort, inspiring our National Anthem; groaning of mills, whirring of looms, and the metallic song of steel wheels on steel rails.