

## FROM ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE, [15 OCTOBER 1781]

To Marquis de Lafayette<sup>1</sup>

Sir,

[Camp before Yorktown, Virginia, October 15, 1781]

I have the honor to render you an account of the corps under my command in your attack of last night, upon the redoubt on the left of the enemy's lines.

Agreeable to your orders we advanced in two columns with unloaded arms, the right composed of Lt. Col Gimat's<sup>2</sup> batalion and my own commanded by Major Fish,<sup>3</sup> the left of a detachment commanded by Lt Col Laurens,<sup>4</sup> destined to take the enemy in reverse, and intercept their retreat. The column on the right was preceded by a van guard of twenty men led by Lt. Mansfield,<sup>5</sup> and a detachment of sappers and miners, commanded by Capt Gilliland<sup>6</sup> for the purpose of removing obstructions.

The redoubt was commanded by Major Campbell,<sup>7</sup> with a detachment of British and German troops, and was completely in a state of defence.

The rapidity and immediate success of the assault are the best comment on the behaviour of the troops. Lt Col Laurens distinguished himself by an exact and vigorous execution of his part of the plan, by entering the enemy's work with his corps among the foremost, and making prisoner the commanding officer of the redoubt. Lt Col Gimat's batalion which formed the van of the right attack and which fell under my immediate observation, encouraged by the decisive and animated example of their leader, advanced with an ardor and resolution superior to every obstacle. They were well seconded by Major Fish with the batalion under his command, who when the front of the column reached the abatis, unlocking his corps to the left, as he had been directed, advanced with such celerity, as to arrive in time to participate in the assault.

Lt. Mansfield deserves particular commendation, for the coolness firmness and punctuality with which he conducted the van guard. Capt Olney,<sup>8</sup> who commanded the first platoon of Gimats batalion is intitled to peculiar applause. He led his platoon into the work with exemplary intrepidity, and received two bayonet wounds. Capt Gilliland with the detachment of sappers and miners acquitted themselves in a manner that did them great honor.

I do but justice to the several corps when I have the pleasure to assure you, there was not an officer nor soldier whose behaviour, if it could be particularized, would not have a claim to the warmest approbation. As it would have been attended with delay and loss to wait for the removal of the abatis and palisades the ardor of the troops was indulged in passing over them.

There was a happy coincidence of movements. The redoubt was in the same moment envelopped and carried on every part. The enemy are intitled to the acknowledgement of an honorable defence.

Permit me to have the satisfaction of expressing our obligations to Col Armand,<sup>9</sup> Capt Segogné,<sup>10</sup> The Chevalier De Fontevieux<sup>11</sup> and Captain Bedkin<sup>12</sup> officers of his corps, who acting upon this occasion as volunteers, proceeded at the head of the right column, and entering the redoubt among the first, by their gallant example contributed to the success of the enterprise.

Our killed and wounded you will perceive by the inclosed return.<sup>13</sup> I sensibly felt at a critical period the loss of the assistance of Lt. Col Gimat, who received a musket ball in his foot, which obliged him to retire from the field. Capt Bets<sup>14</sup> of Lauren's corps, Capt Hunt<sup>15</sup> and Lt. Mansfield of Gimats were wounded with the bayonet in gallantly entering the work. Capt Lt. Kirkpatrick<sup>16</sup> of the corps of sappers and miners received a wound in the ditch.

Inclosed is a return of the prisoners. The killed and wounded of the enemy did not exceed eight. Incapable of imitating examples of barbarity, and forgetting recent provocations, the soldiery spared every man, who ceased to resist.

I have the honor to be with the warmest este(em and) attachment Sir Yr. most Obed(ient and) humble (servant)

A Hamilton Lt Col

Camp before York Town

October 15. 1781

Major General The Marquis De la Fayette

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<sup>1</sup>ALS, George Washington Papers, Library of Congress; copy, Reel 188, Item 169, VIII, p. 249, Papers of the Continental Congress, National Archives.

<sup>1</sup> H, once again displaying the ability (or perhaps luck) to be at the place where history was being made, played an important role in the fighting at Yorktown.

The best brief account of the attack on the two enemy redoubts is, perhaps, still that written in 1876 by Henry B. Carrington, *Battles of the American Revolution* (New York, 1876) 638–39. Carrington described the attack as follows:

"The American light infantry, under the direction of General La Fayette, were assigned to the assault of the redoubt nearest the river, and the force was organized as follows: Colonel Gimat's battalion led the van, followed by that of Colonel Hamilton who took command, then Colonel Laurens with eighty men, to

take the redoubt in flank, and Colonel Barber's battalion as a supporting column.

"The French column, under the direction of Baron de Viomenil, was led by the German Grenadier regiment of Count William Fosbach de Deux Ponts....

"The attacks were made simultaneously, under rocket signals, according to agreement. The redoubt nearest the river was defended by a detachment of less than sixty men. Colonel Hamilton led the men rapidly forward with unloaded muskets, climbing over abatis as best possible, and in a very short time he was over the parapet. Laurens entered from the rear, and the occupation of the work was secured in a few minutes. Colonel Gimat and Colonel Barber, who came up with his reserve promptly and followed the advance, were both wounded. The American loss was one sergeant and eight privates killed, seven officers and twenty-five non-commissioned officers and privates wounded. The British loss was but eight killed, (the resistance having ceased as soon as the American troops commanded the position) and seventeen prisoners, including Major Campbell, who commanded the redoubt.

"The redoubt which was assailed by the French was defended by more than a hundred men. The French sappers removed the abatis deliberately, under fire, and when a path was cleared, a steady vigorous charge with the bayonet effected the result.... The redoubts were taken into the second parallel before morning...."

2. Lieutenant Colonel Jean-Joseph Sourbader de Gimat.

3. Major Nicholas Fish.

4. Following his mission to France, Lieutenant Colonel John Laurens had returned to America and rejoined the Army.

5. Lieutenant John Mansfield, Fourth Connecticut Regiment.

6. Captain James Gilliland, Sappers and Miners. He had been a first lieutenant in H's New York Artillery Company in 1776.

7. Presumably Major Patrick Campbell, 44th Regiment.

8. Captain Stephen Olney, First Rhode Island Regiment.

9. Colonel Charles Armand. His command was known as "Armand's Partisan Corps."

10. Captain Louis de Sigougné, Armand's Corps.

11. Jean Georges, Chevalier de Fontevieux, a captain in Armand's Corps.

12. Captain Henry Bedkin, Armand's Corps.

13. Printed below.

14. Captain Stephen Betts, Third Connecticut Regiment.

15. Captain Thomas Hunt, Ninth Massachusetts Regiment.

16. Captain David Kirkpatrick, Sappers and Miners.

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