



The Day Book

Volume 5, Issue 1

November-December 1998

A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

Hey, Whatever Happened to That De Grasse Fellow Anyway?

The Fate of America's Favorite French Admiral After the Battle of the Virginia Capes

by Hunt Lewis

Our Admiral is six feet tall on ordinary days, and six feet six on battle days," said one of his sailors. This six foot-two admiral, François-Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, Marquis de Grasse-Tilly, was increasingly known as the leader of the French fleet that repulsed the British in the Battle of the Capes. This victory blocked reinforcements being sent to Gen. Cornwallis's army at Yorktown; thus setting the stage for the Franco-American victory there a month later.

In most U.S. histories and U.S. Naval histories, the Comte de Grasse disappears after the Battle of the Capes. After all, in our often myopic view he is French, therefore, after he ceased to be of help to us, what happened to him is not our concern. But it should be. His later misfortune during another sea battle gave him a chance to be instrumental in bringing about the Treaty of Paris on Sept. 3, 1783, which ended the almost world-wide war between France and Britain and their allies. It was in this treaty, that Britain

finally recognized American independence.

During the five days following the Battle of the Capes on Sept. 5, 1781, the British and French fleets continued to jockey for the weather gauge off the Virginia Capes, but the British avoid action. De Grasse's fleet reentered Lynnhaven Bay on the 11th. The British under Adm. Graves, withdrew towards New York the following day, having realized "the impracticability of giving any effectual succor to Gen. Earl Cornwallis."

On Sept. 17, Gens. Washington, Rochambeau, Henry Knox, the Marquis de La Fayette, Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton, and Governor Benjamin Harrison arrived aboard the flower-bedecked and freshly painted *Ville de Paris* to confer with de Grasse. On hearing de Grasse's greeting of "My dear little General" to Gen. Washington, some said that Henry Knox could not maintain the gravity of that first meeting, and laughed so hard that his rather rotund sides shoke.

After toasts to Independence

and to the King (King Louis XVI that is), everyone got to matters of

De Grasse continued on page 6



Adm. François-Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse as he appeared in a 1782 English newspaper. Though he was their enemy, de Grasse became a celebrity among the English royalty and was very well treated. (HRNM photo of a 1782 London Magazine engraving.)

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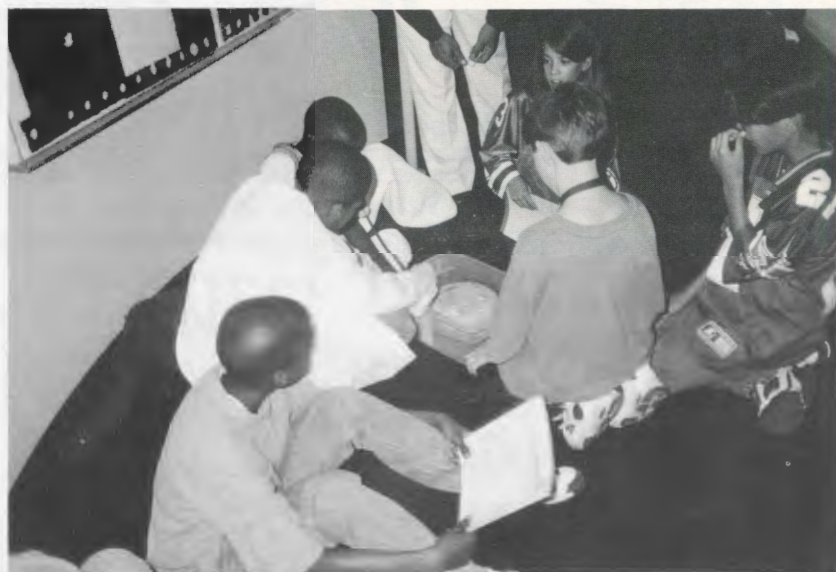
Dive into History

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

By the time you receive this issue of *The Daybook*, HRNM civilian, military, and docent staff will be undertaking their first go round at a new educational program for 3,000 sixth graders. Each one of the students are being taught on-site in the museum within a 30 day period. Yes, an average of 100 students arrive each morning in three groups. Museum staff are embarking on this program in conjunction with Nauticus, filling one thirty minute segment of the Center's three-part educational program that is loosely based on the *Henrietta Marie* travelling exhibit.

Our museum provides a direct Navy tie in with the late 17th century slave ship exhibit. As our current show "The Africa Squadron" demonstrates, it was the U.S. Navy's job to prevent slave ships from reaching this country. One of the Africa Squadron's flagships was the sloop-of-war *Cumberland*, which



Students from Azalea Gardens Middle School attempt to determine if the artifact is from the sloop-of-war USS Cumberland. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

later was sunk in Hampton Roads during the Civil War.

The *Cumberland's* connection to Hampton Roads and the museum's deep interest in preserving its artifacts provide the focus for this educational program. Underwater archeology is

"hot" right now with the release of the movie *Titanic*. With the help of education consultant Mike Taylor, we have created a program where the children join an underwater archaeology firm to find the *Cumberland*. Props and interaction are the key. Six graders are extremely intelligent and yet bore easily, requiring a fast paced format. Stop by the museum to see this program before it ends on Nov. 24.

Programs like this sixth grade endeavor would not be possible without the assistance of our volunteers. A big show of appreciation for their efforts comes on Jan. 28, 1999 when the Hampton Roads Naval Historical Foundation hosts a volunteer recognition dinner. Mark your calendars! A planning committee is working on an evening of elegant dining and entertainment. Bring your dancing shoes if you like swing music. See page 9 for more information. Look for your invitations right after New Years'. Till then, Happy Holidays!

Becky



Local History. World Events.

About *The Day Book*

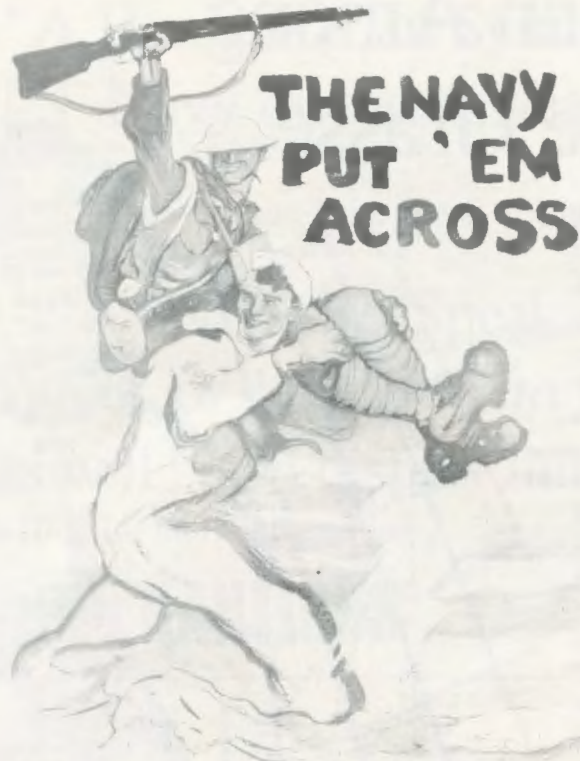
The Day Book is an authorized publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. The HRNM is a museum dedicated to the study of 220 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

The Day Book's purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by the staff and volunteers of the museum.

Questions or comments can be directed to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Day Book* can be reached at (757) 322-2993, by fax at (757) 445-1867, e-mail at gcalhoun@cmar.navy.mil, or write *The Day Book*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. The museum can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://naval-station.norfolk.va.us/navy.html>. *The Day Book* is published bi-monthly with a circulation of 1,200. Contact the editor for a free subscription.

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


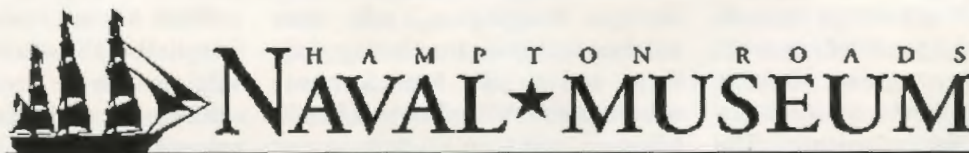
**THE NAVY
PUT 'EM
ACROSS**

**The Service for Travel
and
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**And Now You Have the Opportunity to
Tell the World About It!**

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum is currently looking for new docents. If you are interested in U.S. Naval history, the HRNM is the place for you. Classes start on February 16.

 Call Bob Matteson at 757-322-2986 for more information.



Local History. World Events.

An American Among the Great de Grasse

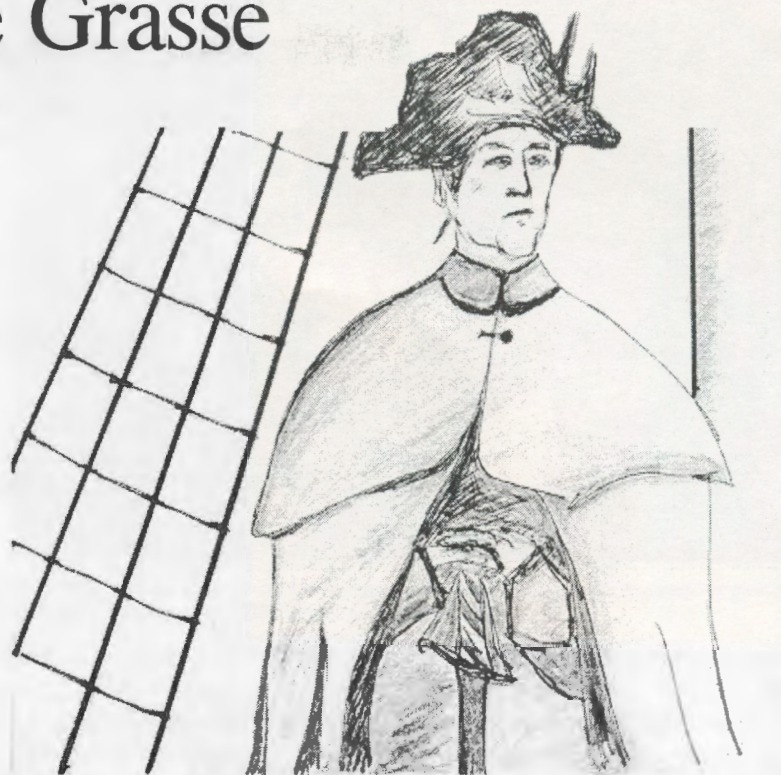
by Preston Turpin

Most among the discussions of the Virginia Capes' campaign and its larger than life personalities is a Virginia merchant captain by the name of John Sinclair. This Hampton Roads-native led a life that is usually only portrayed in novels. He was a merchant captain, a messenger, a pirate, and possibly a pilot in the American Revolution's most important naval battle.

John Sinclair was a native of what is now Hampton, VA, which at that time was part of one of the original counties of Virginia named Elizabeth City. His father was a sea captain and merchant. Like many colonists, Sinclair's father held a great dislike for the British and was an ardent patriot. It would follow that his son would also fall into that category. In 1776, the younger Sinclair was 22 years old and full of himself as a rather headstrong person. He was, however, to all accounts an extremely intelligent and quick-witted person.

At this time there was no money to establish either a Navy or persons to train a group to mount a defense against the mighty Royal Navy. Accordingly, individual states formed their own navies to act against the British. Virginia was one of the leading states in forming its own navy and one of the leading shipbuilding states as well. (See Vol. 2 Issue 3 of *The Daybook* for more information on the Virginia State Navy.)

The Governor of Virginia appointed Sinclair a captain in the state navy. The state also issued him a letter of marquee and reprisal, which permitted him to act as a privateer against British commerce, a common practice throughout the thirteen colonies. The marquee allowed Sinclair to capture British ships and their cargo and then bring them back to a friendly port to



Based on conversations with Sinclair's decedents and other research material, historian Claude Lanciano produced this drawing of Capt. John Sinclair. (1974 drawing used with permission from Claude O. Lanciano, jr.)

sell at a profit. Sinclair spent most of his time, however, sneaking cargo out (specifically indigo) of the Caribbean on his ship *Molly*. He later left *Molly* and took over the schooner *Nicholson*.

Sinclair continued his privateer career up to 1780. At this time, the young French general Marquis de Lafayette and American leader Gen. Nathaniel Greene were falling back through North Carolina before the forces of Lord Cornwallis. When Cornwallis turned away from the allied forces and headed towards Yorktown, Lafayette sensed a golden opportunity. He needed to get a message to Gen. George Washington, who was watching the British army in New York City, and to the French naval commander Adm. De Barras in Rhode Island.

Since ground communications were notoriously slow, Lafayette asked the Virginia government to provide a ship

and crew to deliver the urgent message. Virginia officials turned to Sinclair to accomplish this mission. Sinclair's blockade-running activities had earned him a very good reputation throughout the colony as a natural choice. Sinclair reported to Lafayette. They immediately took to one another. Lafayette shared all the messages with Sinclair and cautioned him to jettison them should he be approached by the British. Lafayette had little to worry about as Sinclair traveled from Hampton Roads to New York in a very speedy three days, a truly remarkable time.

With his mission successfully completed, Sinclair returned to Virginia with de Barras' reply. The exact content of the messages are still unknown. One can assume it had something to do with the movement of the French fleets from Rhode Island

Sinclair continued on page 5



**“A Humanitarian Symbol:
The U.S. Navy on the Africa Station”**
 Now on Display on the Third Floor Accompanying
**“A Slave Ship Speaks: The
Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*.”**
 Both exhibits will be on display through January 4
 Call 322-2993 or 664-1000 for more information



Local History. World Events.

THE NATIONAL MARITIME CENTER





This is a picture of the gift sword presented to Sinclair by the French. Lafayette had personally recommended to de Grasse that Sinclair receive the gift in recognition of Sinclair's contribution to the victory at Yorktown and the Battle off the Capes. The sword disappeared from a museum in Hampton, VA and is still missing. (Illustration provided by Claude Lanciano, jr.)

Sinclair continued from page 4

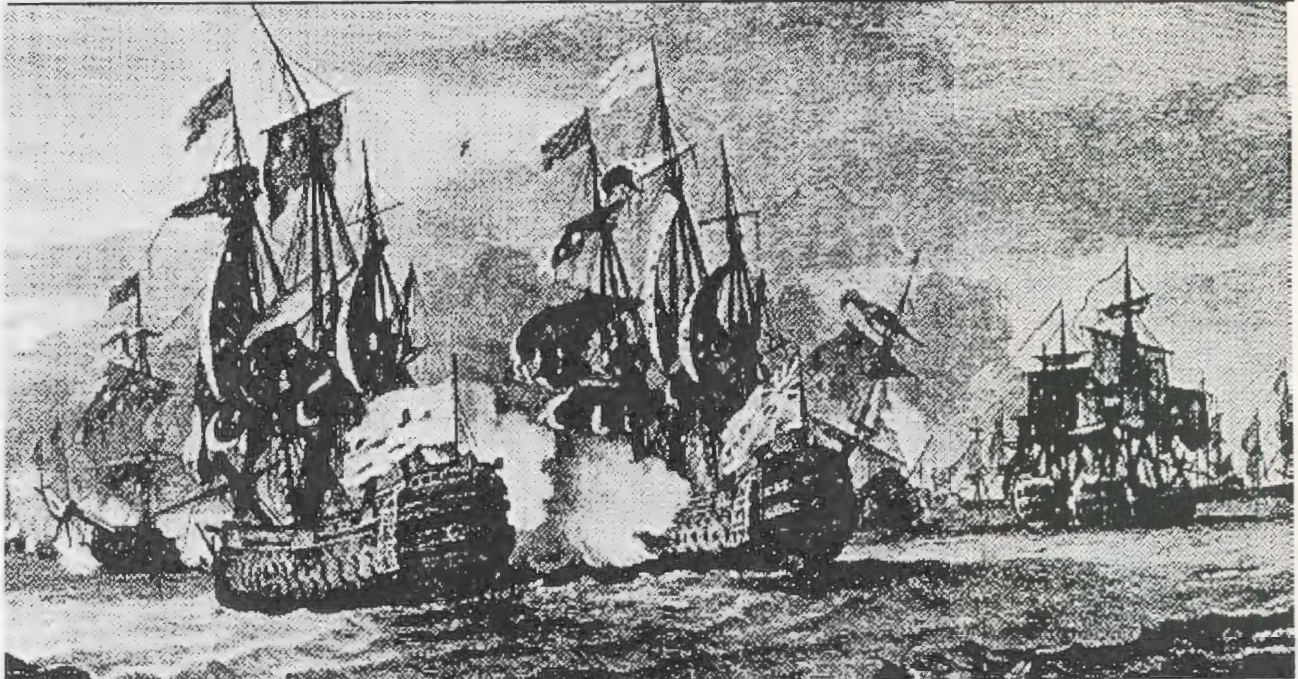
and the Caribbean to Virginia. The overall French naval commander, Adm. de Grasse, soon after arrived with thirty four battleships. While in the Virginia area, the French hired 25 pilots to assist them in navigating the local waters. We do know for sure that two of the pilots were from the Hampton Roads area. One was named Capt. John Pasteur and the other was a slave from the Norther Neck named Caesar Tarrant. Sinclair more than likely was one of the 25, but definitive proof has not been found.

Pleased with Sinclair's contribution to the French victory, Lafayette petitioned de Grasse to present the Virginia captain with some kind of reward for his service. Lafayette, specifically had an official sword in mind. De Grasse agreed with the young general and personally made the presentation. The sword itself remained in the family's possession for five generations until they turned it over to the Syrus-Eaton Museum in Hampton. It disappeared in 1974 and has been missing ever since.

As for Sinclair's ships, *Molly* does not appear on the list of ships in 1781 and more than likely was lost. *Nicholson* did survive the war and earned a proud record.

Sinclair continued to have an adventurous life after Yorktown. His adventures included service as a privateer for the French during the Napoleonic Wars. To read more about him find a copy of *Capt. John Sinclair of Virginia* by Claude O. Lanciano, jr.

The editor would like to thank Claude O. Lanciano for his assistance with this article.



On April 12, 1782, de Grasse elected to turn his fleet around to recover the ill-fated and struggling ship-of-the-line *Zélè*. His fleet soon encountered a large British fleet under the command of Adm. Sir George Rodney near The Saints island group north of Martinique. Largely because of insubordination from his two subordinate admirals, de Grasse was decisively defeated by Rodney. The British captured both de Grasse and his flagship *Ville de Paris*. (Engraving taken from *25 Centuries of Sea Warfare* by Jacques Mordal, copyright Souvenir Press Ltd. Used with permission.)

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importance. Although under previous instruction to depart for the Caribbean by the 15th of October, de Grasse agreed to Washington's request that the fleet remain through the end of that month.

Another "Battle of the Capes" almost developed at the end of the month but violent winds prevent it from happening. The British returned to the area with 25 ships-of-the-line, two 50-gunners, and eight frigates, even though en-route they learned of Cornwallis's surrender. De Grasse wrote Washington, "If the British continue to remain before the Bay, I owe it to the Flag to chase them off. I would have sailed out yesterday had not the winds been from the east." The British possibly suffered from those same winds as they departed for New York the afternoon of the 30th.

On Nov. 4, the French fleet sailed for the Caribbean. The Caribbean during the American Revolution was a valuable economic prize that the French hoped to gain total control over during the war. Before his departure, de Grasse received a letter from Gen. Washington saying, "The triumphant manner in which Yr. Excellency has maintained the mastery of the American Seas, and the glory of

the French Flag, leads both nations to look to you as the Arbiter of War," and that "Public and Private motives make me most ardently wish that the next campaign may be calculated to crown all your former victories."

De Grasse wrote to his naval minister (e.g., Secretary of the Navy) requesting a replacement due to illness. "My illness," he wrote "grows worse each day and I have no idea when it will end. The longer I live the more I am convinced a man of sixty has no business being in command of a fleet such as this." Unfortunately, there was no one to replace him.

Beginning January 1782, British possessions began to fall to de Grasse's fleet. Soon the only islands still under British control in the West Indies were Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, and St. Lucia.

On April 8, de Grasse sailed from Fort Royal, Martinique with his entire fleet of 33 ships-of-the-line headed for Saint-Domingue (present day Haiti). According to plan, the French would join with 12 Spanish ships-of-line and 15,000 troops for an attack on the British colony Jamaica. Ahead of him was an immense

convoy of almost 150 ships filled with the richness of the French possessions. The intended course would take the fleet and convoy through the passage between Dominica and Guadeloupe, where the convoy part of this French armada would break off for France.

Almost immediately, problems began to afflict the French fleet. The 80-gun *Saint-Esprit* dropped out because of an incompletely repaired leak. As the task force worked its way northward, it was beset with light airs and calms. The 74 gun-*Zélè* collided with a 64-gun, forcing her to drop out for repair. The *Zélè*, herself damaged, becomes the fleet's albatross, that struggled to keep up with the other ships. De Grasse's effective fighting force dropped to 30 ships-of-the-line.

As de Grasse readied his forces at Fort Royal, Adm. Sir George Rodney arrived in Barbados from England with 12 ships-of-the-line. Six days later, he took overall command of the forces of Adm. Sir Samuel Hood and Adm. Drake (two of the three British admirals at the Battle of the Virginia Capes). Rodney's force now had an aggregate

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strength of 36 ships-of-the-line.

Rodney anticipated the movements of the French and positioned his scouting frigates to watch their movements. On learning of the French fleet's departure, Rodney set off in pursuit. Over a period of days, the fleets closed for battle.

On the night of April 11, the *Zélé* collided for the 14th time during her thirteen month cruise by running into the *Ville de Paris* and, in so doing, she lost her bowsprit and mizzenmast. *Zélé* had to be taken in tow by a frigate. De Grasse's remarks to the skipper of the *Zélé* were not translated in one French account of the battle because of their content.

On April 12, after he ordered the convoy to anchor at Basse-Terre, de Grasse attempted to rescue *Zélé* and her escort, which were being chased by four British ships. The two fleets engaged at close range on opposite courses near a group of small islands north of Martinique known as The Saints. Adm. Bougainville had the van, de Grasse the center, and Adm. Vaudreuil the rear. As the French van approached the British rear, de Grasse signaled his fleet to reverse course so that the action could continue on parallel courses, but the signal was disobeyed by his squadron commanders.

The botched course reversal together with a wind shift opened gaps in the French line-of-battle. Rodney split the French line into four parts. Bougainville's squadron sailed away out of the battle and Vaudreuil's sailed out of firing range. Vaudreuil attempted to return, but was too late to be of much use. The British concentrate on the abandoned French center. Vaudreuil and Bougainville later claimed the signal was impossible to execute. Had it been executed, the British would not have been able to make the decisive maneuver of the battle.

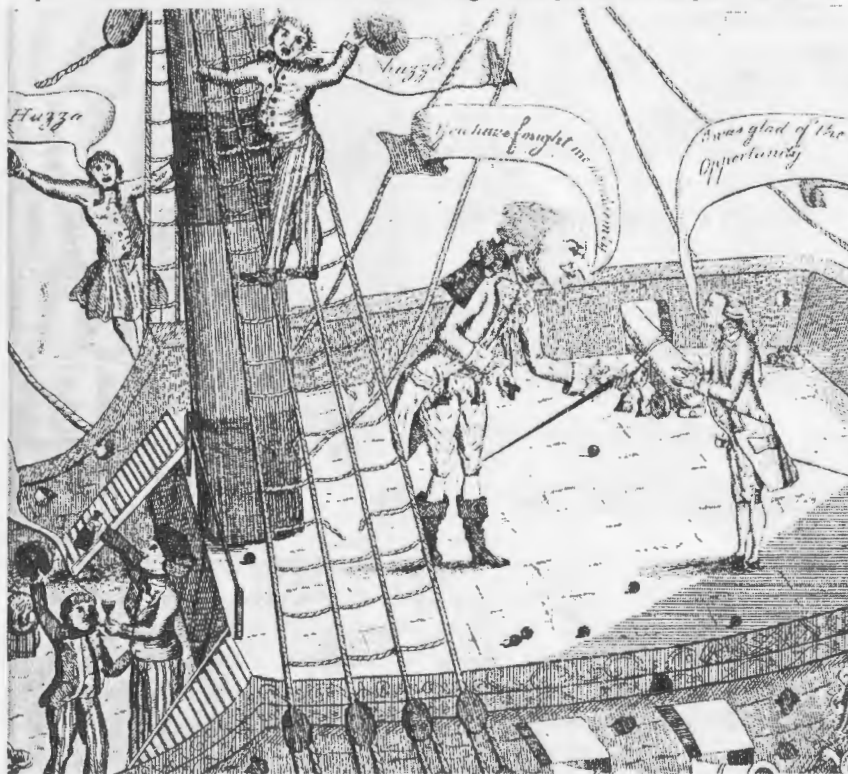
The battle rose and fell in intensity as the wind changed. De Grasse unsuccessfully tried to reform his line-of-battle. As the afternoon dragged on,

four heavily damaged French ships hauled down their flags. Finally, *Ville de Paris* herself struck her colors. The French flagship had no cartridges for her cannon. As a result, French gunners had to load gunpowder into the cannon muzzles literally by the spoonful. De Grasse was said to have ordered his personal silverware cast into cannon balls.

The next morning, amidst the carnage of dead and wounded on the quarterdeck of *Ville de Paris*, de Grasse surrendered his sword to Capt. Lord Cranston who had been directed to take possession of the flagship. Although he was on the exposed deck throughout the battle, de Grasse had suffered only a bruise to his loins from a splinter. Of the *Ville de Paris*'s crew

Jamaica, de Grasse had hoped to be taken directly to France, but Rodney designated the HMS *Sandwich* to take him to England because it was "elegantly and commodiously fitted for the passage." The French admiral arrived in England on Aug. 2 where the British invited him to lodge in the Palace of St. James. He declined, indicating that he did not wish to be separated from his officers. On Aug. 9, he was presented to King George III who returned his sword to him and struck up a conversation on naval matters. The British king carefully avoided talking about the current war out of courtesy.

During the ten days, he was in England, de Grasse became quite the rage. His portrait was painted and all



Shown here is a 1782 British cartoon of de Grasse surrendering to Rodney shortly after the Battle of the Saints. De Grasse took his criticism of his subordinate admirals public and blamed them for the defeat. His public criticism created a major falling out with the French royal court. The king of France eventually forgave de Grasse, but only a year before the admiral died. (Drawing copyright The British Museum, London. Used with permission.)

of 1,300, approximately 400 were killed and 800 wounded.

Cranston took de Grasse aboard Rodney's flagship, HMS *Formidable*, and was treated more as an honored guest than a prisoner. After arrival in

the high-born ladies competed for miniatures while their husbands waited in line to meet him.

The cascading events that started with the Battle of the Capes, followed
De Grasse continued on page 8

His Majesty would well suppose that you did all in your power to prevent the misfortunes of that day, but he is not able to have the same indulgence regarding acts which you have imputed unjustly to those officers of the navy who have been acquitted of the accusations. His Majesty, displeased at your conduct in that respect, forbids you to present yourself before him."

-The French Minister of Marine to Adm. de Grasse, 1782

De Grasse continued from page 7


by Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown had caused the downfall of the British Prime Minister Lord North. The English people had had enough of the costly American war. The Prime Minister Lord Shelburne held several conversations with de Grasse as to the terms on which the great powers could find agreement. De Grasse became so convinced of British sincerity that on his return to France as a paroled prisoner of war he had his nephew orally pass the secret terms on to the French Minister of State, the Count de Vergennes. Vergennes was favorably impressed, and from then on Britain and France negotiated, although on a somewhat

prolonged basis, toward peace. Britain and America had arrived at a separate peace, but it was not to take effect until the overall peace treaty took effect. After the two countries signed the treaty, Lord Shelburne wrote de Grasse "This is the least tribute which is due you for having been so good as to open the door by your mediation for negotiations which have so happily ended the war."

De Grasse's return to France was not so happy. The Parisian ladies were jealous of the attention he received in England and jokes at his expense made the rounds. His diplomatic efforts won the favor of the Court, but because of his after-action report on the Battle of

the Saints, he fell back out of favor. That report contained severe accusations against many of his subordinates for not following orders, and for not supporting the flagship. Worse, de Grasse went public with the accusations. Though the Navy was being rebuilt to a greater strength than before the battle, the accusations were bad publicity. Ultimately, a four and a half month "Conseil de Guerre" or court martial convicted many officers.

The courts reprimanded Bougainville. Other officers' sentences varied from prison to reprimand. Since de Grasse himself was never tried, he remained the scapegoat for the loss in the eyes of many, neither convicted nor exonerated. De Grasse asked the King to pass judgment on his actions. In reply, the Minister of Marine, Castries, wrote, "His Majesty would well suppose that you did all in your power to prevent the misfortunes of that day, but he is not able to have the same indulgence regarding acts which you have imputed unjustly to those officers of the navy who have been acquitted of the accusations. His Majesty, displeased at your conduct in that respect, forbids you to present yourself before him."

The admiral left naval life to become a gentleman farmer at his Château de Tilly about forty miles northeast of Paris. There he improved agriculture, landscaped a park, and added a tower to the local church. While his own people shunned de Grasse, in the United States he was still a hero. A group of American veterans elected the admiral to be one of the founding members of the Society of the Cincinnati in 1783, an organization honoring those who helped the United States to gain its independence. The following year, the King permitted de Grasse to receive four cannons from the Battle of Yorktown, sent to him by the American Congress. Sometime in 1786, the Court restored its favor to him, and he was again able to enjoy Parisian society. But his restoration was short, for he passed into history in January, 1788 at the age of sixty-six. 

Volunteer News & Notes

Docent Recognition Party

We are please to announce that a Docent Recognition Party will be held on **Jan. 28, 1999** at 6:30 p.m. This year's party will be held on the Snug Harbor Club (also known as the Officers' Club) at the Little Creek Amphibious Base. This festival will include a sit down feast of steak and the club's speciality fresh butterfly shrimp. It will feature background music as entertainment. The party will also include an awards program to

recognize those docents who have put in long hours of volunteering. Look for more information in the mail sometime after New Year's.

Third and Sixth Grade Program

As a reminder the joint HRNM/NAuticus sixth grade program continues throughout November. Check the schedule for dates and times. Many thanks to those who are participating, but we still could use


more help. The third grade "Life at Sea" program starts up in January.

Next Docent Training Class

The museum will convene a new docent training class on Feb. 16. The class will last to April 6. If you know somebody who you think would be interested in becoming a docent, have them call Bob at 322-2986.

Many thanks to those who have agreed to help Bob teach. If you have forgotten when your session is, contact Bob.

The End of This Section





This will be the last *Daybook* with a regular volunteer news and notes section. The newsletter will change to a quarterly format starting with the next issue. Timely information to the volunteers will be become impossible under the new format. This makes it more important than ever to watch for the calender mailings which will include needed information. The new format will continue to recognize the volunteers and all the good things they do for the museum. 



Museum director Becky Poulliot shows six graders from Azalea Gardens Middle School an artifact from the sloop-of-war USS Cumberland. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

Coming in February...

A New & Improved *Daybook*

-  Larger Format in Living, Breathing Color
-  Expanded Coverage of the U.S. Navy's
Legendary History in Hampton Roads
-  Reviews of the Latest Books in U.S. Naval History
-  Plus Continued Insightful Commentaries on U.S.
Naval History from the Museum Sage



The Museum Sage



Putting the Victory Of the Virginia Capes in the Grand Scheme of the Cosmos

By now, you are no doubt familiar with the 1781 Battle of the Virginia Capes. In case you are not, The Sage highly recommends *Block the Chesapeake* by the museum's very own Jack Robertson. If we take one step back from the actual battle and look at its consequences, we see how Washington and Rochambeau were able to win at Yorktown because the big, bad British were cut off from the outside world by the French fleet. As a result, Cornwallis surrenders and we win our independence two years later. It was a glorious victory.

Or was it?

If we take another step back and look at the overall history of the conflict between the French and English navies, we find some disturbing facts. Between 1340 and 1815, the French won two major naval (two and 1/3 if you wish to get technical) battles over the British. One of them is the Battle of the Virginia Capes. Here is a review:

June 24, 1340-**Battle of Sluys** (The Hundred Years' War) **Setting:** Attempting to intercept an English invasion, a French fleet sails out and meets an English fleet under the command of King Edward III in the English channel.

Result: English victory. French fleet is destroyed. English are able to ship troops over to France without any hindrance for the rest of the war and go on to conquer half of France.

July 10, 1690-**Battle of Beachy Head** (The War of the League of Augsburg. Also known by three other names) **Setting:** After an alliance is made between England and Holland, the French send a fleet of 70 ships-of-the-line into the English channel to put a more friendly English king back on the throne. The allies counter with 57 battleships.

Result: French victory. Thanks in large part to superior training and greater numbers, the French drive the Allies from the channel and destroy a large part of their fleet. This is the only other major battle which the French Navy defeats the English. The French, however, do not exploit their command of the Channel.

May 28-June 2, 1692-**Battle of La Hague** (The War of the League of Augsburg) **Setting:** The French assemble an invasion force to restore a pro-French king to the English throne. The British and the Dutch assemble a fleet almost twice the size of the French to prevent an invasion.

Result: English victory Despite being outnumbered, the French ships attack and fight well at first. Eventually, however, the battle turns against them and they retreat back to French ports.

August 24, 1704-**Battle of Malaga** (War of the Spanish Succession) **Setting:** The French dispatch a large fleet (51 ships-of-the-line) to recapture Gibraltar from a joint British-Dutch fleet.

Result: English victory The battle itself is bloody but indecisive. The French fail to force the allied fleet from the area. This allows the British to hold on to Gibraltar which they still hold to this day.

February 22, 1744-**Battle of Toulon** (War of the Austrian Succession) **Setting:** A British fleet of 28 battleships encounters a joint Franco-Spanish fleet of 27 battleships near Toulon, France.

Result: Indecisive. Both sides maneuver throughout the day, but few ships are able to get into firing position and eventually break off from the battle with minor losses.

November 20, 1759-**Battle of Quiberon Bay** (The Seven Years or French and Indian War) **Setting:** A British blockade fleet of 27 battleships sites a French fleet of 21 battleships and 2 frigates heading for Quiberon Bay in France and closes to intercept.

Result: English Victory. The British catch the rear of the French fleet and destroy it. The remaining French ships either run aground, flee southward towards Rochefort, or flee into the Vilaine Estuary.

April 17, 1780-**Battle of Martinique** (The War of American Independence) *The Sage rambles some more on page 11*

The Sage continues from page 10

Independence)- **Setting:** A British fleet under the command of Adm. Rodney encounters Adm. De Guchien off the French colony of Martinique.

Result: English victory. The English win this battle but only by blind stupid luck. Rodney orders his fleet to attack the rear of the French line. Because of a miscommunication in flags, (a la Battle of the Virginia Capes) the British fleet engages the entire French fleet, not just the rear. Rodney's flagship is badly shot up and unable to maneuver, drifts through the French line. De Guchien sees this as a brilliant English battle maneuver, panics, and orders a retreat.

September 5, 1781-**Battle of the Virginia Capes** (The War of American Independence)-**French victory.** For details, find a copy of *Block the Chesapeake*.

January 25-26, 1782-**Battle of St. Kitts** (The War of American Independence)-**Scene:** A British fleet of 22 battleships under Adm. Hood sights and engages a fleet of 24 battleships under de Grasse near the British colony of St. Kitts. Hood orders his ships to drop anchor and attack. **Result: English victory, but not by much.** De Grasse launches two attacks over a course of two days. Seeing that he is starting to lose the battle, he orders his ships to call off the attack and retreat from the area. Hood also leaves the area to join up with Adm. Rodney.

April 12, 1782-**Battle of the Saints** (The War of American Independence)-**English Victory** see front-page article.

April 12, 1782-**Battle of Providen** (The War of American Independence)-**Setting:** Off the coast of what is now known as Sri Lanka, a British fleet of 11 battleships under the command of Adm. Huges and encounter a French fleet of 12 battleships under the command of Commodore Suffern. **Result: Indecisive.** After heavy exchanges, both sides withdraw. Over the next five months, Huges and Suffern fight several more engagements including three major battles. The fighting stops only because word of peace finally arrives from Europe. The campaign was one of the bloodiest in the Age of Sail. Historians do credit Suffern for fighting an extended campaign without the help of proper shore facilities.

May 28-June 1 1794-**Battle of Ushant**, also called "The Glorious First of June" (The War of the French Revolution) **Scene:** In an attempt to head off a severe famine, the French revolutionary government places a large order of grain with American merchants and farmers. A 120-ship convoy arrives in Hampton Roads to receive the grain. The British catch word of the convoy and send a fleet to intercept it. The French dispatch a fleet from France to meet the convoy half-way.

Result: English victory. Both sides are badly bruised, with seven British ships heavily damaged and eight French ships

lost. The French withdraw. However, the Hampton Roads convoy arrives in France unscathed.

August 1, 1798-**Battle of the Nile** (The War of the French Revolution) **Setting:** Upon hearing of a French invasion of Egypt, the British send a fleet to sweep the French from the Eastern Mediterranean.


Result: English victory. The British Fleet under the command of Adm. Nelson destroys most of the French Fleet and cuts off the French invasion force.

July 22, 1805-**Battle of Cape Finisteere** (The Napoleonic War)-**Setting:** A joint Franco-Spanish fleet returns from the West Indies only to run into a British fleet off the northwest coast of Spain.

Result: Indecisive. However, the French give up invasion plans of England as a result of the battle. The British capture two Spanish ships, but fail to decisively defeat the allied fleet. The British admiral in charged is later dismissed. The Allied fleet retreats to Cadiz.

October 21, 1805-**Battle of Trafalgar** (The Napoleonic War) **Scene:** Ordered to sail into the Mediterranean, the joint Franco-Spanish fleet attempts to break out of Cadiz. Warned by his frigates, Adm. Nelson intercepts the enemy fleet off the coast of Cape Trafalgar.

Result: English victory, by a wide margin. Nelson's fleet wins the most decisive naval victory of the Napoleonic Wars. Most of the French and Spanish fleet are captured or sunk. French naval power in Europe is broken once and for all.

Now for those of you keeping score, out of 14 major battles, the English won nine of them. Three of them ended in a tie. It is somewhat remarkable for that long a stretch, the French people would build their navy a new fleet every time the English destroyed or humiliated one. We should count our lucky stars, that the French decided to win a battle when it mattered most to us. 

A U.S. Navy Toast For the Holiday Season

While finding items for the museum's display at the Norfolk Airport, we found a 1912 Thanksgiving dinner menu/program from the long since closed St. Helena Naval Training Station. This Norfolk installation was one of the Navy's first "boot camps." In the program is a little poem and toast. It goes something like this:

OUR NATIONAL BIRDS

*The American Eagle,
The Thanksgiving Turkey,
May one give us peace in all our States,
The other, a piece for all our plates.*



On that note, The Sage wishes you Happy Holidays. 