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THE CARIBBEAN LANDS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

Consuela Mary McKee

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

June

1951

LIFE

Consuela Mary McKee was born in Chicago, Illinois, November 16, 1919.

She was graduated from the Academy of Our Lady High School, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1937, and from Chicago Teachers College, February, 1942, with the degree of Bachelor of Education.

Upon graduation, the author began teaching in the Chicago elementary schools. Taking late afternoon classes, she began her graduate study at Loyola University in March, 1943.

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WEST INDIES

Statute Miles

100 0 100 200

Taken From a

RAND McNALLY MAP

MONTSERRAT (BR)

GUADELOUPE (Fr.)

DOMINICA (BR.)

St. Pierre

MARTINIQUE (Fr.)

Sta. Lucia Channel

STA. LUCIA (BR.)

BARBADOS (BR.)

GRENADA (BR.)

TOBAGO (Br.)

TRINIDAD (BR.)

Port of Spain

TORTUGA

WINDWARD IS.

16°

12°

64°

66°

68°

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study was made for the purpose of investigating the part played by the colonies in the Caribbean area in the revolt of the thirteen British colonies of our Atlantic seaboard from the mother country. The Spanish, French, and Dutch possessions of the West Indies and the British colonies had important commercial products. They were far from the direct control of their respective mother countries and were in the American scene. This paper will attempt to show precisely how much and in what manner some of these colonies helped or hindered the North American revolutionaries.

The lack of material and the limitation of space and time have narrowed this study to the influence of St. Eustatius, the role of the French West Indies, the action of the French West Indian fleet, and the aid, both secret and open, sent by France to the North American colonists, without which the Revolution would have failed.

A brief historical background of the West Indies is necessary to the understanding of the situation.

Near the end of the sixteenth century Sir Richard Grenville and Sir Walter Raleigh, and a little later Captain John Smith and others, in the hunt for eligible sites for colonies, paid special attention for awhile to the Orinoco region, lured partly by the enticing legends of El Dorado. In their wanderings from South to North America, where they founded the Virginia colony, they were wont to pause among the Caribees, and they did not forget the prospect for colonizing thereabouts. Such adventurous spirits had no respect for the Spanish title of possession or fear of the native inhabitants. For a time, however, Englishmen were kept busy in Guiana and after the turn of the century on the North American coast at Virginia and New England. The French had made rough beginnings still farther north in Canada and had been feeding an appetite for possessions in newly discovered lands. They grew desirous of a share in the tropical islands with whose charms the corsairs had already made intimate acquaintance. The Netherlands had begun operations with a trading company which first took possession where now the city of New York stands. Dutch smugglers had long been prowling about the Spanish islands with a special headquarters in the island of St. Eustatius, from which they were driven, only to return. A so-called admiral of the Dutch took San Juan de Puerto Rico in 1615, but was killed for his pains and no advantage came of it. In 1621 the Dutch West India Company was incorporated, which had colonizing, as well as

trading, purposes.[1]

The Spanish colonization had been confined virtually to the Greater Antilles. A few settlers had taken possession of the islands adjacent to the Spanish Main, including Trinidad and Curacao. They were practically left undisturbed in Trinidad until near the close of the eighteenth century, except for the unceremonious call of Sir Walter Raleigh two hundred years before. The Dutch, whose title was altogether one of conquest (acquired during the war between Spain and the Netherlands), captured Curacao and its neighboring islands, Buenes Aires and Aruba, in 1634, and slowly colonized them. Spain retained the rest of what she called the "Sotavento," or Leeward, group of islands, the finest of which was Margarita, until they went with Venezuela upon the achievement of her independence.[2]

The first official English settlement in the West Indies was made in 1624 by Sir Thomas Warner and his associates. They first took possession of the island of St. Christopher, extending their claim to Nieves, which was close by, and which was Anglicized into Nevis. At this time there was one of those French

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1 Amos Kidder Fiske, The West Indies, New York, 1899, 72-73.

2 Ibid., 73.

adventurers generally called corsairs, by the name of Esnambuc, prowling around. In a tussle with a Spanish galleon which he had failed to capture, his vessel was crippled, and he put in at St. Christopher for repairs. The English and French were then on friendly terms, and as Warner was having a hard time with the natives, he struck a bargain with Esnambuc for a combination against the Caribs and an equitable division of the island. This was in 1625. They had a hard struggle with the pagans, who persisted in trying to hold their own, but finally succeeded in quelling, killing, and driving them out. In 1629, the Spanish from Hispaniola, who regarded this as an intrusion upon their neglected preserves, made an unexpected visit and broke up the settlements, driving the colonists away. St. Christopher was always called the "Mother Colony" by the English and the "Mere d'Antilles" by the French. When the colonists returned after the first expulsion, England and France were having a quarrel, and each claimed exclusive possession. The island passed from one to the other several times, and was finally confirmed to Great Britain.[3]

The French refugees of 1629 from St. Kitt's, as it came irreverently to be called, joined with other outcasts and

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3 Nellis M. Crouse, French Pioneers in the West Indies, 1624-1664, New York, 1940, 10-35.

adventurers to seize upon the small island of Tortuga near the north-western extremity of Haiti. This piratical island was the means of finally wresting all the western part of Hispaniola from Spain. Sir Thomas Warner's colonists, who were recruited from time to time, had strayed over to Barbuda in 1628, and some who were associated with him were among the settlers of Barbados even earlier, though the main colony there came out from England in 1625. In 1632, Warner took possession of Antigua and Montserrat, but a formidable rival was looming up. After the death of James I, the sham alliance with Spain was ended, and in 1627, King Charles presumed to grant the whole range of the Caribees to the Earl of Carlisle. This led to conflicting claims, till the Cromwell regime intervened to suspend them. Antigua, Barbuda, and some of the other northern islands were uninhabited when first taken, and others were the resort of smugglers and freebooters with whom these waters were infested. The infant colonies first planted here did not thrive, and after the Restoration a new settlement was made in Antigua under Lord Willoughby (to whom the island was granted by Charles II), and the Earl of Carlisle. In 1680, Barbuda was given to the Codrington family.[4]

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4 Fiske, The West Indies, 75.

Dutch settlers took possession of St. Eustatius in 1635, and, although it did not escape attack in the wars which followed, that and the neighboring island of Saba were finally confirmed in the possession of Holland. Dutch smugglers were the first to occupy Tortola, but they were not colonists, and were succeeded by some English Quakers who held peaceful possession, but were ruined by emancipating their slaves. St. Martin in 1638 was a headquarters for French rovers, or corsairs, but the Dutch smugglers divided its possession with them, and in 1638 an amicable division of the island between French and Dutch was effected. The same year French colonists settled in St. Bartholomew. All this northern part of the Lesser Antilles was sparsely peopled and feebly held by the aborigines, and after one or two spasmodic efforts Spain gave up all attempt to exclude other nations from them.[5]

Early in the seventeenth century, Spain's exclusive right to possession in the West Indies came to be seriously contested. By 1658 the Pope formally gave up the problem and in 1670 claims were abandoned by Spain herself. For nearly two centuries there was almost continuous war in which one or the other of the colonizing powers was engaged. There were frequent contests for

5 Ibid., 75-76.

the possession of these islands, especially those of the Lesser Antilles. As we have already seen, some of the original colonies were established by conquest.[6]

The nine years truce ended in 1618, and hostilities were renewed between Spain and the Netherlands. England made a treaty with the latter power in 1625 which brought her into conflict with Spain again. It was in 1629 that the Spanish fleet made the attack upon St. Christopher and drove out both English and French settlers. In 1632 the Dutch took Tobago, and in 1634, Curacao. After the French took nominal possession of Guadeloupe, Dominica, and Martinique in 1635, France was at war with Spain, which had previously made peace with England. In 1638 the Spanish made a descent upon St. Martin, which was jointly occupied by the French and Dutch, and took forcible possession. It was afterwards recovered and formal division of the island between Dutch and French was made in 1648. Although Spain and England were nominally at peace in 1638, an English expedition attacked and plundered the town of Santiago de la Vega in Jamaica. In retaliation a Spanish fleet from Havana cleared out the infant settlement at New Providence in the Bahamas.[7]

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6 Ibid., 92.

7 Ibid., 92-93.

During the Commonwealth, the royalist sentiment was strong in the British West Indies. There was almost a revolt under Governor Willoughby in Barbados; but a fleet came out with Admiral Ayscue and settled the trouble, incidentally capturing some Dutch vessels on the way. Cromwell adopted a vigorous policy in dealing with the pretensions of Spain, and it was at this time that the fleet was sent against Hispaniola and compromised by capturing Jamaica, which Spain tried in vain to recover in 1658. There was a treaty of peace between France and Spain in 1660. The restoration of Charles II also brought peace between England and France; but in 1665 England fell out with the Dutch, who were joined the next year by France. Then the English and French in St. Kitt's took to fighting. The French got the upper hand and drove the English out, but a fleet came up from Barbados and reversed the process. At the same time the French captured Antigua and Montserrat, but by the treaty of Breda in 1667 they were restored to England, and the old division of St. Kitt's was re-established. Trouble kept up for some years with privateering and plundering upon the thriving trade of the Dutch. No further changes of possession among the islands took place until the war between France and Holland in 1688, when the accession of William of Orange brought England into the contest on the Dutch side. The French again drove the English out of St. Kitt's and seized St. Eustatius, while the English made unsuccessful attacks upon

Guadeloupe. The peace of Ryswick, 1697, restored the old condition, the Dutch retaining St. Eustatius and the French and English still dividing St. Christopher.[8]

From 1702 to 1715 there was a war, with England and Holland on one side and France and Spain on the other. Much privateering and plundering went on, but there was no change of territorial possession, except that the English drove the French out of St. Kitt's this time. By the treaty of Utrecht the island was finally ceded to Great Britain. Jacques Cassard, the famous French corsair, in the guise of a patriotic privateer, captured St. Eustatius and Curacao, but only for the purpose of extorting a ransom. There was a fierce contest between France and England for the possession of the Caribees during the Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763. In the meantime, Spain and Holland had been losing prestige and were no longer rated as formidable powers.[9]

It was in this contest between France and England that Admiral Rodney and Sir Samuel Hood first came to the front as British naval commanders. At the beginning, the French were in possession of all the southern Caribees, leaving Barbados and

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8 *Ibid.*, 93-94.

9 *Ibid.*, 94.

Trinidad out of the category. The English captured Guadeloupe in 1759, before the arrival of the home fleet, and held it till the end of the war. Rodney sailed from Barbados for Martinique in January, 1762, with eighteen ships of the line and a considerable force of soldiers. The island capitulated, and the conquest was followed up with that of Grenada, Dominica, Tobago, St. Vincent, and St. Lucia in succession. Spain was involved in the quarrel at the time, and in May, 1762, Admiral Pococke laid seige to Havana. In a month Morro Castle was reduced, and soon after the Governor-General of Cuba capitulated when Lord Albemarle took possession with land forces. These naval victories contributed powerfully to the peace of February, 1763. By the treaty of Paris, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Lucia were restored to France, and Cuba was left to Spain in exchange for Florida, while Dominica, St. Vincent, Grenada, and Tobago were ceded to Great Britain.

The next contest for the possession of islands in the Lesser Antilles came after France had joined the United States in 1778 in their struggle for independence from Great Britain.[10]

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10 Ibid., 95.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF ST. EUSTATIUS

At the outbreak of the American Revolution the colonists were far from being self-sufficient. It was evident from the beginning that outside help would be necessary if independence was to be won. Where was this immediate help to be obtained? Since the colonists had already established illegal trade relations with the West Indies, it seemed only logical to continue this trade to obtain the supplies needed.

Gunpowder was one of the greatest needs. Because of this lack of powder, the different colonial governments, the Continental Congress, and even private individuals attempted to import saltpetre and powder as well as manufacture them at home. Georgia was the only colony which did not import either of these before the fall of 1777.[1]

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1 Orlando W. Stephenson, "The Supply of Gunpowder in 1776", American Historical Review, January, 1925, New York, 1925, XXX, 277.

Almost all the powder imported during the first two and a half years of the war came from France by way of the West Indies. Many of the carrying ships, following legalities, merely touched at those islands on their way to colonial ports. These supplies were obtained in exchange for colonial products, some of which went no farther than the West Indies, while some were forwarded to France. Probably eighty per cent of the imported saltpetre and powder reaching our shores came as a direct result of the efforts put forth by authorities in the different countries and by the Continental Congress.[2]

During this period, over one hundred different ships brought supplies to our shores. From this we conclude that the patrol of British war ships along the Atlantic coast fell far short of establishing an effective blockade, and that full advantage was taken of the chances of getting through. Furthermore, the arrival of so many vessels suggests that the French government both secretly encouraged, and, at times, openly connived at the illicit business carried on by her merchants in France and in the West Indies. Had there been a serious inclination on the part of the French government to do so, doubtless it could have put a

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2 Ibid., 279.

stop to the shipping of military stores to the Americans. The total quantity of powder and other munitions allowed to come here from France and from ports under French control helps in a way to measure the desire of the French government to break up the British colonial empire and secure a part of it for France. It helps also to measure her disappointment at not being able to retrieve her losses of 1763.[3]

Because of the close association of the fortunes of St. Eustatius with those of the American Revolutionary War, and the important part which it played in aiding the colonists to continue that difficult and unequal struggle, the story of this tiny island is worth telling. J. Franklin Jameson has written an article entitled "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution" which appeared in The American Historical Review of 1903. Some of the material on St. Eustatius used in this study is based on this article.

Located near the northeast corner of the West Indian chain, St. Eustatius is neither large nor fertile. It is less than seven square miles in area, and did not produce more than six hundred barrels of sugar a year at the time of the Revolution. Its fortifications were never important, and it had only one

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3 Ibid.

landing-place. However, its position among the West Indian islands was such as to give it, in the hands of the Dutch, exceptional advantages. Under the old system of colonial management, typified by the Navigation Acts, each country endeavored to monopolize the commerce of its colonies. The Dutch, however, had been converted to the principles of colonial free trade. Accordingly, St. Eustatius, a free port belonging to a highly commercial nation and located in the middle of rich and prosperous English, French, Spanish, and Danish colonies managed under a restrictive system, had, even in times of peace, the opportunity to become an important mart of trade.[4]

When war existed between England and France or Spain, and the prohibitions of mutual intercourse between the islands were enforced by vigilant cruisers and eager privateers, the neutral trade of St. Eustatius flourished still more, and drew a far larger population than it had in peaceful days.[5]

Let us go back to the beginning of the war, and especially to the days before the French alliance, when it was merely a conflict between Great Britain and her revolted colonies and had

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4 J. Franklin Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," The American Historical Review, New York, 1903, VIII, 683-684.

5 Ibid., 684

not widened into a European war. The war, and the non-importation which preceded it, had cut off at one blow the supply of British manufactures to the American colonies.

> It was true that the native American inventiveness would in time supply their place. The mute inglorius 'hired men' who would do anything with a jack-knife, the versatile Jonas of Mr. Abbot's fancy, would blossom forth as the Yankee inventor. But this would take time; and, in the meanwhile, it was very convenient to have in the neutral islands of the West Indies a means of temporary supply and a market for American exports.[6]

The trade ventures of states as well as of individuals were often carried on in this way. For instance, Abraham van Bibber, agent of the state of Maryland at St. Eustatius, was taking care of cargoes sent or underwritten by the state, as early as March, 1776. There are letters from him, addressed to the Virginia committee of safety in the archives of Virginia. In June of the same year, Van Bibber of St. Eustatius and Richard Harrison of Martinique announced that they had formed a partnership, and solicited a portion of their custom from the Virginia committee.[7]

When France entered the war on the side of the Americans, French islands like Martinique and French carriers became ineligible to conduct such a trade, and the position of the Dutch

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6 *Ibid.*, 684-685.

7 *Ibid.*, 685.

neutrals became doubly profitable. British merchants stored their goods at St. Eustatius to keep them safe in case of an attack by the French. John Adams, in 1779, wrote to the president of Congress saying that closer diplomatic relations with the republic of the United Netherlands would be justified because of the growing trade through the island of St. Eustatius.[8] British armed vessels were enabled to cruise off the Azores and in other situations well adapted for checking the voyages of French and Spanish vessels to the West Indies because of the close diplomatic relations between Portugal and Great Britain.[9] This threw West Indian commerce more and more into the hands of the Dutch and of St. Eustatius. Jameson offers two examples. He tells of a Dutch rear admiral who, during thirteen months there, reports that over thirty-one hundred vessels sailed from the island during the time of his stay. An English observer reports that in 1779 some twelve thousand hogsheads of tobacco and one and a half million ounces of indigo came to it from North America, to be exchanged for naval

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8 Ibid., 685-686.

9 Francis Wharton, ed., The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Washington, 1889, III, 717-718

supplies and other goods from Europe.[10] British traders, supposedly bound for St. Christopher, would embark on trading ventures to St. Eustatius. They were careful, however, to take out separate insurance policies on the two voyages from England to St. Christopher and from there to St. Eustatius. This trade with the neutral islands was encouraged by an act passed in 1780, although the trade with the revolting colonies was not approved.[11]

During the Revolutionary War, St. Eustatius was the quickest and safest, and at times the most important, means of communication between American representatives abroad and the Continental Congress at home. In March, 1777, Lord Suffolk was informed by an agent at Rotterdam that Messrs. Willing and Morris of Philadelphia had written to a Rotterdam merchant that he could write by way of St. Eustatius, because they would have regular communication with that island.[12]

Ordinarily the enrichment of the Dutch West Indies would not have grieved the British. British resentment against St. Eustatius was aroused to such a violent pitch by the fact that the

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10 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 686.

11 _Ibid_.

12 _Ibid_.

island was made the means of an enormous export of military supplies to the American armies, and later of naval supplies to the maritime forces arrayed against England in the Caribbean. On March 20, 1775, at Yorke's insistance, the States General of the United Netherlands issued a proclamation forbidding the exportation of warlike stores or ammunition to the British colonies in America or to any other place without the permission of one of the Colleges of Admiralty. The tremendous increase in trade from St. Eustatius had been noted as early as the end of 1774. All during that winter there were two agents from Boston at Amsterdam buying stores and gunpowder. The Dutch prohibition was constantly evaded even after it was published. The "admiralties" were not too vigilant about executing the prohibition of the States General and the Council of State. Because of the lack of gunpowder, the Second Continental Congress, in October, 1775, recommended that the various states export provisions to the West Indies in order to obtain arms and ammunition.[13]

A merchant at Campveere informed Yorke early in March, 1776, that a favorite way to take ammunition to the Americans was to load for the coast of Africa but then to go to St. Eustatius,

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13 *Ibid.*, 687.

where "their cargoes, being the most proper assortments, are instantly bought up by the American agents."[14] The high price of powder proved a great temptation to the Dutch merchants. Jameson reports that in April, the profit on gunpowder at the island was one hundred and twenty per cent.[15]

Lord Suffolk received a report from a Rotterdam merchant that powder which cost forty or forty-two florins a hundredweight in Holland sold for two hundred and forty florins a hundredweight at the island. This was sent disguised in tea-chests, rice barrels, and the like. The report continues, eighteen Dutch ships had gone out by May with powder and ammunition for the American market.[16]

Most of the powder used by the American army in 1776 came into its hands in this way. In May Yorke informed Eden that "St. Eustatius was the rendezvous of everything and everybody meant to be clandestinely conveyed to America. It was easy to get oneself carried thither, and military adventurers of all nations have congregated at the island."[17] Holland and especially Amsterdam remained the chief source of supply.

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 687-688.

16 Ibid., 688.

17 Ibid., 688-689.

These underhand dealings did not go unnoticed by the British ambassador. He urged increased activity on the part of the British cruisers, elicited resolutions from the States General's committee of foreign affairs condemning such traffic, and urged the pensionary of Holland to do all that he could. Moreover, the Dutch constitution was so complicated and cumbersome that nothing could be accomplished. Large numbers of people were interested in this trade, although most people supposedly condemned it. The city of Amsterdam was especially interested in it. Van Breckel, the pensionary of that city, constantly worked to thwart the British ambassador.

When the Dutch prohibitions expired in autumn, the British government sent a memorial of protest to the States General. That governing body issued a proclamation forbidding the exportation of warlike stores or ammunition to the revolted colonies for one year from October 10, 1776. Nothing much was expected from this proclamation. This is evident from the fact that Suffolk suggested that the amount of military stores sent to the Dutch West Indies should not be larger than the average export in the years before the war, and that the Dutch colonial governments be compelled to give an account of their expenditure. Yorke suggested to Eden that, since the Dutch did not make the proper use of the gunpowder they manufactured, they should not be allowed to take home any saltpetre. The trade, however, went on. At

intervals the trade did slacken because of the action of the British cruisers, or because of the glad tidings from Long Island, or because of overstocking by the Amsterdammers.[18]

These satisfactions were short-lived. For instance, a British captain reports that he stopped a Dutch ship sailing home from the island to Flushing with one thousand seven hundred and fifty barrels of gunpowder. The Dutch sailing master admitted that he had already sold seven hundred and fifty stands of arms and three thousand barrels of gunpowder at the island; but that he was taking the remainder home after waiting seven months to sell it. The British captain thought that he was going out beyond the range of British cruisers to meet a vessel to which he would transfer his stocks. There was a vessel found sailing in the neighborhood without cargo, the occupants of which said that they were cruising for pleasure.[19]

In the middle of the year Johannes de Graaff, the secretary, replaced the governor of the island, but he did no better. The port was opened without reserve to American ships. On November 5, 1776, Van Bibber wrote to the Maryland council of safety to urge them to send all their vessels to St. Eustatius rather

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18 Ibid., 689-690.

19 Ibid., 690.

than to any other island, "as the Dutch have discovered that their laws when put in force must ruin their Merchants. I am on the best terms with His Excellency, the Governor, and have his word and promise relative to some particulars that gives me great satisfaction and puts much in our powers. I was not so happy taking the Command, but we are as well fixed with him now as we were with the former." Two weeks later he wrote: "Our Flag flys current every day in the road. The Merchants here are always complaining of Government until they would give as much Protection and Indulgence here to us as the French and Spaniards do. . . . The Governor is daily expressing the greatest desire and intention to protect a trade with us here. Indeed they begin to discover their mistake and are now very jealous of the French's running away with all their trade."[20]

On November 16, 1776, an event occurred which brought British resentment to its highest point. A vessel of the new Continental navy, the _Andrew Doria_, under Captain Isaiah Robinson, flying the new flag of thirteen stripes, anchored off St. Eustatius, and saluted Fort Orange with eleven guns; and the salute was returned. This was thought to be the first time the American flag was saluted in a foreign port. However, on the preceding

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20 _Ibid._, 690-691.

October 27th, an unnamed American schooner on leaving the Danish island of St. Croix with a small cargo of powder saluted the fort and had the compliment returned.[21]

However, the affair at St. Eustatius was more noticeable. The arrival and reception of the Andrew Doria roused the indignation of the president of St. Christopher. Commenting very severely on the salute, and summing up the many violations of neutrality he had observed from his island, he sent the document to DeGraaff. Simultaneously, he sent an indignant account to the secretary of state in London. In this account, President Greathead commented severely on the open encouragement and protection which the rebels received at the Dutch island, and the constant equipping and fitting-out of privateers to prey on British commerce. He was especially angered by the incident of the sloop Baltimore Hero, flying the flag of the Continental Congress, which, on November 21, almost within range of the guns of Fort Orange, had taken a British brigantine and then returned to the road of St. Eustatius, with flag flying, and there received every sign of aid and protection.[22]

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21 Ibid., 691.

22 Ibid., 691-692.

As Lord Suffolk stated, the greatest offense was the honor paid a rebel brigantine carrying the flag of the rebel Congress. The governor's reply that he was "far from betraying any partiality between Great Britain and her North American colonies," was insolent and not to be overlooked. The secretary of state sent to Sir Joseph Yorke a memorial which he presented to the States General. After giving an account of DeGraaff's connivance at the illegal trade and the fitting-out of privateers, and the outrage of returning the American salute, the minister declared that he was ordered

> "to expressly demand of your High Mightiness a formal disavowal of the salute by Fort Orange, at St. Eustatius, to the rebel ship, the dismission and immediate recall of Governor van Graaff, and to declare further, on the part of His Majesty, that until satisfaction is given they are not to expect that His Majesty will suffer himself to be amused by mere assurances, or that he will delay one instant to take such measures as he shall think due to the interests and dignity of his crown."[23]

Appropriate measures had already been taken. The lords of the Admiralty ordered the commander-in-chief on the Leeward islands station to post cruisers off the road of St. Eustatius, search all Dutch ships for arms, ammunition, clothing, and send violators to some port of the Leeward Islands, to be detained

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23 Ibid., 693.

until further orders; and these injunctions were to be maintained for six weeks.[24]

The Dutch Republic could not resent the tone of the English memorials because of its complicated machinery. In their reply they disavowed their governor's action and ordered him to come home to explain his actions. Pleading age, fear of seasickness, and the recent illness of himself and his family, he was more than a year coming home. In the meanwhile the salutes went on. Count Bylandt, who succeeded DeGraaff in marine matters, watched more closely over the execution of the neutrality laws, although he was accused of treating the Americans with the same civility as the citizens of other nations. The ambassador was notified that the British would not take any more Dutch ships unless they had naval or warlike stores on board because St. Eustatius proved very useful to the Windward Islands in time of scarcity.[25]

DeGraaff reached home in July, 1778. He presented this defense in February:

> He declared that he had never connived at trade in munitions of war; that the Baltimore Hero had not been fitted out at the island but by the council in Maryland; that her prize was not made within range of his guns, but much nearer to

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 694.

St. Christopher, that the salute of the Andrew Doria had, by his orders, been returned with two less guns than she had fired, that this was the usual return salute to merchant vessels, and implied no recognition of American independence; that on accusation by Vice-Admiral Young against Van Bibber, as concerned in fitting out privateers, he had placed the arrival of a demand backed by proper affadavits; that it had been his custom to require incoming American vessels to give bonds for due observance of neutrality while in the port; that he had compelled all persons on the island possessing gunpowder to take oath that they would not export it to North America; that he had appointed a customs clerk visitor of ships in order to find arms if any were illegally carried.[26]

His defense was declared entirely satisfactory, and it was reported that there were more grounds of complaint against the British commanders than against the Dutch. DeGraaff was again appointed governor, and his actions were so acceptable to the Americans that two privateers were named after him and his lady.[27] A neutrality which was so completely satisfactory one belligerent and so unacceptable to the other could not have been perfect.[28]

In the spring of 1780, when Sir George Rodney arrived to take command of the British fleet in the West Indies, the situation was still very strained. After an unsuccessful battle with Guichen off Martinique, April 17, 1780, Rodney declared that two

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26 Ibid., 694-695.

27 Godfrey Basil Mundy, The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, London, 1830, II, 46.

28 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 695.

vessels sailed from St. Eustatius, loaded with naval stores and cordage and filled with carpenters. These vessels joined the French fleet, and, because of their help, eight French vessels, which otherwise must have dropped out, were able to stay with the fleet.[29] Rodney seems to have conceived a deep feeling of hostility against the island. He later wrote, "This rock of only six miles in length and three in breadth, had done England more harm than all the arms of her most potent enemies, and alone supported the infamouse American rebellion."[30]

By this time the war had become a European one as well. Because the Dutch had become the chief neutral carriers in the war which England was now waging against France, Spain, and the United States, and also because of the dispute over the doctrine of "free ships make free goods", the feeling between England and Holland was becoming worse and worse. At this time the northern European powers were uniting against England in the Armed Neutrality of 1780. The Dutch would probably agree. If the break with the Dutch came, all the northern powers would unite in a common cause against England. A pretext for starting a war with

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29 Mundy, The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, II, 30.

30 Ibid., II, 97.

the Dutch came with the discovery of a proposed Dutch-American treaty among the papers of Henry Laurens, when he was captured by the British. The draft was signed only by an agent of Congress and an agent of the city of Amsterdam. Sir Joseph Yorke, in two memorials presented to the States General, demanded a formal repudiation of the conduct of the Amsterdam magistrates. The tone was so threatening that insurance to St. Eustatius rose to twenty or twenty-five per cent.

The repudiation was promptly sent, but, because of the Dutch constitution, it was difficult for the States General to punish the officials of one particular city. Their reply was unsatisfactory, and on December 20, 1780, England declared war on the Netherlands. Unable to prepare rapidly for war, Holland became an easy prey. In fact, before Yorke left The Hague two hundred Dutch ships, with cargoes valued at fifteen million florins, were seized.[31]

Even before his first memorial Yorke saw the advantages of taking the Dutch colonies in America. Their loss would affect the Netherlands the most, would stop the rebels' trade and supplies, would close a channel of correspondence and connection with

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31 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 696-697.

North America. The British could use St. Eustatius as a depot till satisfaction is given for the past, and security for the future.[32] Yorke urged immediate action because he had heard that ten or eleven Dutch men-of-war were preparing to sail for the West Indies.

When Yorke's letter relating to St. Eustatius was referred to the admiralty, Stormont informed Yorke on December 5, that he was preparing "to send secret orders to seize the Dutch settlements in the West Indies."[33] Orders to conquer the Dutch islands, beginning with St. Eustatius and St. Martin, were sent to Rodney and to Major-General Vaughn, the commander of British land forces in the West Indies, on the day that war was declared. Lord Stormont also declared that "he was persuaded, upon best information, that we should never have been in our present situation were it our good fortune that St. Eustatius had been destroyed or sunk in the ocean."[34]

Rodney arrived at Barbados on December 6. Rear-Admiral Sir Samuel Hood joined him before the end of the year. About the middle of January, Rodney made his useless attack upon St. Vincent. He received the declaration of war and his secret orders

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32 _Ibid._, 697-698.

33 _Ibid._, 698.

34 _Ibid._

on the 27th of January, sailed from St. Lucia, after embarking Vaughn's troops, on the 30th. On February 3, he appeared before St. Eustatius and demanded the instant surrender of the island and all that it contained.[35]

There was no possibility of defense, so Governor DeGraaff surrendered unconditionally in an hour. Count Frederick van Bylandt, commander of the lone Dutch frigate, after firing two broadsides for his honor's sake, also surrendered. A large body of American sailors, after a show of resistance, were forced to surrender because of hunger and Vaughn's troops. A detachment of British troops captured the islands of St. Martin and Saba. The Dutch flag was kept flying over the town and fort so that Dutch, French, Spanish, and American ships might be decoyed into the harbor and seized as the spoils of war.[36]

Rodney, surprised at the stores of materials, wrote to his wife, "The riches of St. Eustatius are beyond all comprehension. . . . All the magazines and store-houses are filled, and even the beach is covered with tobacco and sugar."[37] By March 26, the admiral reported that about fifty American vessels, loaded with tobacco, had been captured. According to Lord George

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35 Mundy, _The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney_, II, 9-27.

36 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 700.

37 _Ibid_.

Germain, the island was a vast magazine of all kinds of military stores. Although Rodney had been told that there was none to be had, several thousand tons of cordage were found. Some authorities estimated the value of the capture at more than three million pounds sterling. The admiral wrote to his wife, with understandable pride, that "There never was a more important stroke made against any state whatever."[38]

John Adams, who was in Holland at the time, in a letter to Secretary Livingston, reports the reaction of the Dutch people to this disaster.

> You can have no idea, sir, no man who was not upon the spot can have any idea, of the gloom and terror that was spread by this event. The creatures of the court openly rejoiced in this, and threatened, some of them in the most impudent terms. I had certain information that some of them talked high of their expectations of popular insurrections against the burgomasters of Amsterdam and M. VanBreckel; and did Mr. Adams the honor to mention him as one that was to be hanged by the mob in such company.[39]

There was great exultation in England. Government stocks rose one and one-half per cent. Lady Rodney wrote to her husband:

> Your express arrived on the morning of the 13th (March). My house has been like a fair from that time till this. Every friend, every acquaintance came. I went to the drawing-room on Thursday following. It was more crowded than on a birthday; and the spirits which every one was in were

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38 *Ibid.*, 701.

39 *Ibid.*

> enlivening to a degree, and the attention and notice I received from their Majesties was sufficient to turn my poor brain. . . . This glorious news has been a thunderbolt to the opposition, very few of whom appeared in the House of Commons. Negotiations towards peace had been talked of for some time before its arrival, and it cannot fail to produce a favorable effect upon them.[40]

As a reward for what he had done, Rodney was raised to the peerage and was given an annual pension of two thousand pounds.[41]

What would Rodney and Vaughn do with their great prize? Rodney left no doubt as to his opinion of the island when he called it:

> A nest of vipers, a nest of villains; they deserve scourging and they shall be scourged. . . . An asylum for men guilty of every crime, and a receptacle for the outcast of every nation; men who will make no scruple to propagate every falsehood their debased minds can invent. We thought that this nest of smugglers, adventurers, betrayers of their country, and rebels to their king, had no right to expect a capitulation, or to be treated as a respectable people; their atrocious deeds deserve none, and they ought to have known that the just vengeance of an injured empire, though slow, is sure.

He wanted to leave the island, "instead of the greatest emporium on earth, a mere desert, and only known by report."[42] His anger was greatest against the British merchants of the island, particularly those who became Dutch citizens in order to

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40 Mundy, <u>The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney</u>, II, 51.

41 <u>Ibid.</u>, II, 62.

42 <u>Ibid.</u>, II, 13, 97.

carry on the illegal trade. In fact, Rodney doubted the patriotism of most of the British who lived in the West Indies.

His desire for personal gain was mingled with his righteousness. His earliest letters state that all is the King's and he is entitled to nothing.[43] Three days later he sends to the admiralty this request; "If His Majesty is graciously pleased to bestow any part of the spoil between the navy and army, he will dictate in what manner his gracious bounty may be bestowed, that all altercations and disagreements may be prevented between" the two services.[44]

Started in the spirit of anger, Rodney's measures were very comprehensive. He ordered that all the inhabitants of St. Eustatius were to be considered prisoners of war, and that all property was to be confiscated for the King. Burke branded Rodney's action as;

> a general confiscation of all the property found upon the island, public and private, Dutch and British; without discrimination, without regard to friend or foe, to the subjects of neutral powers, or the subjects of our own state; the wealth of the opulent, the goods of the merchant, the utensils of the artisan, the necessaries of the poor, were seized

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43 Ibid., II, 13, 16.

44 Ibid., II, 21

on, and a sentence of general beggary pronounced in one moment upon a whole people.[45]

The admiral's other orders were equally drastic. There should be no plundering; no one, not even the officers, was to go ashore; the English inhabitants of the Leeward Islands were ordered to stay away from the island; all naval stores were to be sent to the government shipyards at Antigua; supplies intended for St. Domingo should be sent to Jamaica; all goods sent from Europe should be sold publicly for the King; all goods produced in the West Indies and in America were to be sent in convoy to England; the "lower town" should be destroyed or unroofed, and the materials sent to Barbados, St. Lucia, and Antigua.[46] Communication with the Windward Islands under flags of truce was forbidden.[47]

The execution of these orders caused much hardship. Prisoners of war were at the mercy of the admiral. Samuel Curzon, an agent of Congress, and Isaac Gouveneur, Jr., his partner, were sent to England as prisoners of war. They were convicted of treason, but, after serving only thirteen months, they were

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45 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 703.

46 Mundy, The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, II, 11-13.

47 Ibid., II, 33, 35.

released by the Rockingham ministry.[48] The French merchants were treated better than the others. They were sent to Martinique and to Guadeloupe, and were allowed to take with them their household furniture, plate, linen, and even their slaves. The governor, the Dutch, American, Bermudian, and British merchants were to be permitted or forced to retire, taking their household goods with them. The sugar-planters were the only ones to be treated with favor.[49]

Since most of Europe was either at war with England or sympathized with her enemies, the devastation of St. Eustatius aroused a storm of protest. In London the merchants of the West

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49 Ibid., II, 32, 44-46.

Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 704-705, states that the execution of these decrees caused much hardship. Warehouses were locked, and merchants were denied permission to take inventories. All of their books and papers were seized, and their cash was taken from them. The captain of a Dutch supercargo, in a sort of diary, gives a vivid picture of the searchings of portmanteaus and pockets, the digging in gardens for hidden specie, the destruction of houses, the seizing of negroes, the appropriation of riding horses by the officers, and the daily work of shipping goods and sending away the inhabitants in companies, nation by nation. Rodney treated the warnings of the assembly of St. Christopher with contempt.

The Jews were the most severely punished. They were deprived of their property, banished without their wives and children, and given only one day's notice. One hundred and one of them were confined in a weighhouse and stripped of their clothing which was ripped and the linings were searched. The British obtained eight thousand pounds sterling in this way.

India Company presented a useless petition to the Crown. The Amsterdam merchants sent a protest. It also became the subject of debate in the House of Commons during the month of May, 1781. The debate was reopened in December when Rodney and Vaughn, who were members of the House, were able to be present at an inquiry into their conduct. Edmund Burke led the opposition. He argued that Rodney's confiscation of private property was illegal and without precedent, and that the inhabitants, entitled to royal protection, could not all be punished for the crimes of the few. Moreover, the properties were sold at auction at far less than their value.[50]

More important to his professional career was the accusation that Rodney, excited by the tremendous value of his prize, stayed at St. Eustatius eagerly supervising the disposal of the spoil and in this way lost the chance of important naval successes offered him by the temporary weakness of the allies in the Caribbean. While he was spending more than three months at the island, De Grasse slipped around Martinique, watched only by Hood's squadron, and joined the rest of the French fleet off Fort Royal. If this juncture of the French had not been accomplished, the battle of Yorktown would never have happened. If Rodney had been to the windward of Martinique, where Hood wanted him to be, the juncture

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50 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 705.

of the French fleet would not have occurred.[51] Thus, St. Eustatius and its supplies, before and after its capture, was of great positive and indirect aid.[52]

After careful preparation, a large fleet of thirty merchantmen was sent to England with the most valuable part of the spoils, under convoy of Commodore Hotham. A French admiral, LaMothe Piquet, attacked the convoy about twenty leagues west of Scilly Islands. Hotham ordered the convoy to disperse and save themselves and the warships to draw closer. The French, instead

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51 Ibid., 706-707.

52 Ibid., 707. Although Lord North's majority might stop a Parliamentary inquiry, it could not halt legal proceedings. There appeared in the courts no less than sixty-four claims, amounting to more than the value of the property. Rodney was put to a great deal of expense. The books and papers could not be found. In the six years following the capture only thirteen cases were settled and judgments of restitution were handed down in nine of these cases. Because the King had granted all of the spoils to the captors, Rodney and Vaughn should each have received a sixteenth of the spoils. Vaughn, however, told the House of Commons that he had made nothing by the transaction, and Rodney did no better. They made conflicting arrangements which angered their captains and retarded the settlement.

of fighting, made after the convoy and captured twenty-six of them. The warships and only eight of the merchantsships succeeded in reaching Berehaven Bay.[53]

St. Eustatius was taken by the French before the end of the year. The chief French merchant of the island and Marquis de Bouille planned the recapture of the island. At an unguarded part of the coast, the marquis, governor of Martinique, landed a force of fourteen hundred men and quickly overcame the six hundred and twenty-eight men commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Cockburn. In 1783 it was brought out at Cockburn's trial that, although he had been offered reeinforcements, he had refused them; and, even though he had been warned of the French attack two days before, he had ignored the information. Rodney's money, instead of being sent to England, was confiscated and detained because of the mismanagement of his agents. Jameson sums up Rodney's career in these words:

> The conquest on which he had prided himself as 'the greatest blow that Holland and America ever received' ended in disappointment and vexation for him, reversal and odium for his country. But it was left for him, by the memorable victory

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53 Ibid., 707-708. Jameson and Randolph G. Adams, "A View of Cornwallis's Surrender at Yorktown," American Historical Review, New York, 1915, 33, disagree on the number of ships sent by Rodney to England. Since Adams's article is based on Rodney's own record, we have used his figures.

of the twelfth of April, 1782, to show that, despite mistakes of public policy and faults of private character, he possessed a professional greatness that could lift his name to height of glory as a naval commander. [54]

The story of St. Eustatius has been told in some detail because its contribution to the success of the Battle of Yorktown seems to warrant it. If Rodney had not been occupied with his conquest, he probably would have intercepted the French fleet. Without the support of this fleet Washington could never have been successful in his siege of Yorktown.

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54 *Ibid.*, 708.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF THE FRENCH WEST INDIES IN DETERMINING FRENCH POLICY, 1775-1781

Haiti, too, played an important part in the Revolutionary War. The fear of losing it and other islands in the West Indies helped to bring France into the war as an ally of the revolting colonies. It was through Haiti that French aid came to the Americans.

The history of Santo Domingo and Haiti has been greatly influenced by geography and climate. On December 6, 1492, Columbus discovered the island during his first voyage and named it Hispaniola. Except for Cuba, Haiti, the western end of this island, is closer to the United States than any other of the Caribbean lands. Mole St. Nicolas is located on a peninsula which juts out into the Windward Passage, one of the most important of the world's trade routes. Permanent residence by white men has been made difficult because of its tropical climate. However, it has been made a leading producer of subtropical products because of that same climate. The importation of slave laborers, used by

the white colonial settlers to exploit its resources, was to make the history of this part of the island different from any other European colony.[1]

The first permanent settlements were made in the southeastern part of the island. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, and others fought for land and booty in the western third, Haiti, which soon became an international frontier. Slowly the French pirates gained enough control to have Spain, by the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, recognize French sovereignity over a vaguely defined western third. For the sake of clarity and accuracy, this study will refer to the part controlled by France as Saint Domingue.

In the trade wars of the mercantilistic age Saint Domingue gradually became the prize possession. The French minister to Spain, Ossun, in a memoir dated February 10, 1774, declared: "It (Saint Domingue) is the finest and richest colony that remains to the French after the inconsiderable losses that they sustained in America; and it is their principal resource for the maintenance of a navy that becomes more necessary every day to counterbalance the formidable power of the English." [2] To illustrate the

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1 Rayford W. Logan, _The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 1776-1891_, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1941, 1.

2 _Ibid_., 2.

importance of this trade, Logan states;

> On the eve of the French Revolution Saint Domingue exported to France commodities valued at two hundred and five millions of livres in the currency of Saint Domingue and imported from France articles valued at sixty-nine millions. In this lucrative trade were employed 1,282 ships of three hundred and sixty-three thousand tons, manned by fifteen thousand sailors. In addition, trade between the colony and the United States had become so important that many French chambers of commerce were protesting against it.[3]

If Saint Domingue were threatened, Spain would also be concerned since she was bound by the Family Compact to come to the aid of France in case of war, and was to share any losses which would occur as a result of war. Spain's immense American empire, including Santo Domingo on the same island as Saint Domingue, offered a strong temptation to the enemy, who would probably be Great Britain, if Spain went to war to support France.[4]

British policy in the Caribbean encouraged this fear of a possible British attack on Saint Domingue. Having taken Jamaica in 1655, the British sought to capture Hispaniola under Cromwell. Instructions were sent to the British governor of Jamaica during the War of the Spanish Succession to encourage Santo Domingo to drive the French out of Saint Domingue. The capture of St. Louis on the southern coast, in 1748, was the only British attempt at

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3 Ibid., 2-3.

4 Ibid., 4-5.

invasion after the French had acquired possession of their part of the island. However, British diplomacy gave serious consideration to Saint Domingue throughout the eighteenth century.[5] As early as 1738 some British statesmen began to realize the importance of the Windward Passage, between Cuba and Saint Domingue, to British commerce with Jamaica and Portobelo. By the end of the eighteenth century Mole St. Nicolas came to be called the "Gibraltar of the Caribbean." Finally, sugar from Saint Domingue was the principal competitor with that commodity from the British sugar islands. By the end of the Seven Year's War there was a strong tradition in the French foreign office that in future wars the British would surely attack Saint Domingue.[6]

This island became a troublesome region which British, Spanish, and French would have to consider carefully in their war plans. It was more than a potential danger spot to the Thirteen Colonies. It was a source of important trade.

The contacts between the English colonies in North America and Saint Domingue began when William Phips recovered a pirate treasure off the coast of the island as early as 1686-1687.

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5 Richard Pares, War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763, Oxford, 1936, 31, 180, 182, 301.

6 L. G. Wickham Legg, editor, British Diplomatic Instructions, 1689-1789, France, 1724-1744, VI, Camden Third Series, London, 1930, XLIII, 210-213.

In 1717 the French government, recognizing their commerical interdependence, and in spite of the mercantilistic theory, authorized a trade that consisted largely of an exchange of New England fish for molasses from Saint Domingue.[7] Soon there were sixty-three distilleries in the Massachusetts Colony along, for the manufacture of molasses into rum. During the next ten years the North Americans had smuggled so many unauthorized articles into Saint Domingue that France complained to Great Britain. By the Molasses Act of 1733 the British hoped to levy such high duties on molasses from the French West Indies that the colonists would find it more profitable to trade with the British islands.[8] The two mother countries could not put a stop to the smuggling and contraband trade even when they were at war because both the direct and triangular trade had readed such proportions.

The attention of the three commercial powers and of the Thirteen Colonies was focused upon Saint Domingue at the outbreak of the American Revolution. In order to prevent an attack on Saint Domingue and other French possessions, many competent historians conclude, France secretly aided the colonies and eventually

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7 Samuel E. Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, Boston, 1921, 19.

8 Pares, War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763, 79-82.

signed the Treaty of Alliance, and a Treaty of Amity and Trade of 1778 with the United States.[9] This point is disputed, however, by equally competent historians. Let us examine, first, the opposing points of view in the controversy; second, Logan's conclusions, based on new materials; and third, the extent of aid through Saint Domingue.[10]

Van Tyne offers evidence to show that France aided the colonies and signed the alliance with the United States because of fear of an attack on the French West Indies. As early as 1764, some colonists wanted to conquer Saint Dominque as an outlet for their products, according to Pontleroy, a French observer in the American colonies. In 1768, another French observer, De Kalb, was convinced that the American Colonies would join the

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9 Logan, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 1776-1891, 5-7.

10 Sources consulted for this dispute include:
Samuel Flagg Bemes, The Diplomacy of the American Revolution, New York, 1935, 19-20.

Edward S. Corwin, French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778, Princeton, 1916.

Edward S. Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution," American Historical Review, New York, 1916, XXI, 33-62.

Claude H. Van Tyne, "Influences Which Determined the French Government to Make the Treaty with America in 1778," American Historical Review, New York, 1916, XXI, 528-541.

mother country in an effort to capture the French West Indies should France attack Great Britain. Vergennes, French minister of foreign affairs, and Louis XVI recorded their fears of a British attack on the French West Indies. Caron de Beaumarchais, whose role in aiding the colonies will be discussed later, either on his own initiative or prompted by Arthur Lee, an American agent, in 1775 began to nag Vergennes with this refrain: "We must aid the Americans or they will be reconciled with Great Britain and attack the French West Indies."[11] The same idea was suggested by the minister of Prussia to France. Lord Stormont, the British ambassador to France, was told by Vergennes in August of 1777; "Your public papers, your pamphleteers, your orators and ours, repeat ceaselessly that if you do not regain your colonies, you will fall upon ours."[12]

In order to prevent reconciliation and joint attack on the French possessions in the Caribbean, Vergennes pushed the American alliance after the British considered a peace offer to the colonies following the battle of Saratoga. The American agents in Paris were reportedly carrying on secret negotiations

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11 Logan, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 1776-1891, 7.

12 Ibid., 8.

with British agents. The Americans cleverly kept the fires burning under Vergennes. The French foreign minister wrote to Ossun, the ambassador to Spain on December 27, 1777; "The question which we may have to solve is to know whether it is more expedient to have war against England and America united, or with America for us against England."[13] Van Tyne observes that Vergennes and other French statesmen recognized in the American Revolution an opportunity to weaken Great Britain and restore France to a dominant position in world affairs. However, he is convinced that France aided the colonies and signed the alliance with the United States in order to prevent an attack on the French West Indies.[14]

On the other hand, Corwin, largely on the same evidence consulted by Van Tyne, entirely rejects the latter's conclusions. He points out that Vergennes in order to win unwilling statesmen to his views would naturally use the argument of fear. Corwin further states that Great Britain had not attacked French and Spanish possessions in 1775 when the fleets of France and Spain were weak. Since the Bourbon fleets were ready in 1778, why should they fear a British attack? In 1775 the British opposition headed by Chatham had threatened the attack. Vergennes

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

argued that the danger came from the government of Lord North in 1778. In 1775 Vergennes argued that the bait of a joint attack on the French West Indies might have deterred the American colonists from revolution. In 1778 the argument had come to rest on the danger of the reconciliation of the United States and Great Britain. Corwin wonders if the Americans would have accepted the opportunity for spoils in 1777-1778 if Great Britain did not offer complete independence. Probably not, and, in Corwin's opinion, Great Britain was not ready to offer complete independence at that time. From reports sent by Noailles, the French ambassador to London, Vergennes knew that there was little likelihood of a settlement. Moreover, Vergennes insisted that the Spanish West Indies were in graver danger than were the French. Corwin concludes that Vergennes's concern "was not, primarily, the security of the West Indies."[15]

Some of Corwin's arguments are open to criticism. An attack on the French West Indies could have been good bait to prevent the revolution in 1775 and would have been equally good bait to bring about a reconciliation in 1778. Second, it was not at all strange to see the arguments formerly advanced by the opposition adopted by the party in power.

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15 Corwin, French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778, 141.

In the opinion of those who support the Corwin theory, the most conclusive argument was the fact that Vergennes knew there was no danger of a British attack in 1777. After the failure of Forth, a secret British agent, Lord Stormont, on September 2, 1777, offered to Vergennes a guarantee that if France did not send troops to her West Indies, Great Britain would not send troops to her Caribbean possessions. Corwin fails to record the reaction of French statesmen to this proposal. Maurepas and Louis XVI agreed with Vergennes that this proposal could not be accepted. Stormont could not hide his disappointment at not being able to get an agreement that would have given his court an advantage over the French which they would certainly have abused, when he received the French refusal. Vergennes also told Stormont that, if she wanted to, Great Britain could send ships and troops to the West Indies but, he recommended, they should stay out of the waters of the French colonies. On September 6, 1777, Vergennes wrote Noailles that France intended to exercise her right to send troops to the French West Indies for defensive purposes only.[16]

Two weeks later in a letter written to Ossun, Vergennes passed judgment upon the British course of action. According to Vergennes, the British were really trying to intimidate France so

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16 Logan, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 1776-1891, 7-10.

that they could prove to the Americans that they could not rely upon France in a time of crisis. He instructed Noailles in rather warlike tones to inform Weymouth that the French fleet would leave for the French West Indies in about a week. France recognized Great Britain's right to increase her West Indies fleet in proportions. Statesmen of the eighteenth century did not place faith in the official assurances of a rival nation. If he had accepted the pledge of any other nation at face value, Vergennes would have very naive indeed.[17]

Logan has examined this question at some length because it has been one of the major controversies in American diplomatic history. It would seem that later American historians have supported the Corwin theory. He has reopened the case because of some new materials which, combined with his own reading of the two principal sources used by other writers, shed new light on the problem but which do not completely solve it.

The new materials used by Logan are, first, the negotiations between France and Spain to settle the boundary between Saint Domingue and Santo Domingo and certain difficulties which arose during the period 1770-1777; second, the correspondence

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17 Ibid., 10.

between Vergennes and Count D'Ennery, the governor-general of Saint Domingue in 1775 and 1776.[18]

In August, 1773, D'Aiguillon, at that time the French foreign minister, wrote to Ossun that France had to exercise particular care in putting Saint Domingue in a state of defense in case of war with Great Britain. He did not say why war might be expected at that time. Because French military experts declared that the proposed boundary would make it impossible to defend Saint Domingue adequately, D'Aiguillon suggested that Charles III might abandon Santo Domingo to France in return for France's having given Louisiana to Spain in 1763. The French foreign minister proposed the fortification of the Bay of Mancenille as a necessary precaution against possible British Attack. In February, 1774, he declared that it was absolutely necessary for France to pass from one end of the island to the other in case of a British attack. He also suggested that the Spanish part of the island would surely fall into British hands without French aid. He argued that, since the British attack had been planned during the Seven Years' War, the project would more than likely be renewed. It, therefore, became necessary for the two Bourbon houses to settle their difficulties in the island.[19]

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18 *Ibid.*, 10-11.

19 *Ibid.*, 11.

De Arande, the Spanish ambassador to France, expressed no grave fear of a British attack when he told Vergennes that there was plenty of time to prepare for one. De Aranda taunted Vergennes by comparing the cession of Santo Domingo by Spain in return for Louisiana to the partition of Poland in 1772. However, he saw no inconvenience in permitting French troops to pass through the Spanish part of the island in the event of a British invasion. The Spanish ambassador contended that Spain's losses at the end of the Seven Years' War made Santo Domingo the key of her defense for Cuba and her mainland possessions and that it was impossible to grant France the boundary she wanted. He further contended that, since France was only interested in commerce and agriculture, extensive fortifications were not needed. In case of war with Great Britain, Vergennes insisted, on January 10, 1775, that the possession of Fort Dauphin by the French was absolutely necessary. However, it seems clear that he was thinking only of an eventual war. Vergennes' desire to keep the knowledge of Bourbon difficulties from Great Britain may have been the result of general policy rather than an immediate attack by the British in the Caribbean. Logan sums up this correspondence in this way: "On the whole, this correspondence left the impression that there was no real alarm on the part of either France or Spain. Indeed, the documents suggest rather that both sides were willing to

resort to any argument in order to obtain the best boundary possible."[20]

On the other hand, in Vergennes' letter to Ossun, dated February 14, 1775, there is a convincing note of sincerity. Moreover, it is Vergennes' first reference to the coming revolution in the Thirteen Colonies. Because of their difficulties with the colonies, the British, in Vergennes' opinion, would hardly urge the Portuguese to cause trouble for Spain in the Rio de la Platte region. Then he concludes:

> But the more their embarrassment increases and compels them to undertake serious measures, the more it is necessary for us and for Spain to take precautions so that the counterblow will not fall upon us at a time when we least expect it. I am not without worry (Je ne suis pas tranquille), I confess to you, Sir, when I see the British sending to America such large military and naval forces.[21]

The expression, "I am not without worry," seems to be the best statement of the attitude of both Vergennes and D'Ennery during the next twenty-two months. On June 23, 1775, Vergennes wrote to the French ambassador in London that the British might be tempted by the French possession in the Caribbean and that the French might have to reenforce her colonial garrisons if the British increased their fleet to America. However, only three battalions were sent to Saint Domingue and three to Martinique in

20 Ibid., 12.

21 Ibid.

September of that year. D'Ennery, in replying to a missing dispatch of September 22, further expressed this anxiety when he described the sad state of the colony's defenses with special reference to the lack of ammunition, powder, and rifles. However, on October 27, 1775, Vergennes wrote a long dispatch to D'Ennery in which no reference was made to the situation in the Thirteen Colonies. A letter from the French charge d'affaires in London written in October stating that the French West Indies need not fear a British attack may have prompted this silence. According to a letter written on March 28, 1776, D'Ennery states that only an enormous sum of money would make Saint Domingue secure against attack.[22]

An analysis of two treaties signed by D'Ennery and Count de Solano, the governor of Santo Domingo, on February 29, 1776, supports this attitude of anxiety rather than panic. Article X of the boundary treaty provided for the passage of French and Spanish troops through each other's colony. Article II of the treaty for policing the frontier provided:

> In case of war or unexpected attack on one of the two parts of the colony, the nation that is not attacked will furnish to the other all the help possible in men, money, arms, ammunition, and supplies. . . .[23]

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22 *Ibid.*, 13.

23 *Ibid.*

No great importance was attached to these provisions in the correspondence of Vergennes with D'Ennery, Ossun, and Sartine. However, Vergennes did complain to Ossun that the new boundary did not permit greater facility of communication between the northern and southern parts of Saint Domingue to the French. The Council of State which considered these treaties did not make any reference to the value of the permission to pass through Santo Domingo. Since this was the time that the French decided to send secret aid to the colonies, one might think that this silence had some significance. Just about this time Vergennes told D'Ennery that there was no real danger of a British attack. On May 19, 1776, the governor-general replied to Vergennes: "I think as you do; there is nothing to be feared at this moment on the part of the English; they are much too occupied with their colonies."[24] However, he thought that a British success or reconciliation should be feared. For that reason, he goes on:

> It would be necessary to be in some measure of defense here; if they (the British) believe that we are able to defend ourselves, certainly they would attempt nothing; it is only the ease with which an expedition could be made and the assurance of success that would tempt them. It would, therefore, be very wise to prevent any effort since we have time.[25]

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24 *Ibid.*, 14.

25 *Ibid.*

This same attitude of "watchful waiting" prevailed even after the French decided to aid the colonies secretly. D'Ennery, on June 15, 1776, was instructed by Vergennes not to leave on his planned vacation "until calmer circumstances dispel all the anxieties against which it is very difficult to defend ourselves."[26] He believed the British would not cause France any trouble in her colonies because of the many difficulties with their own colonies. Although the safety of the French colonies might be assured by these difficulties:

> It would be more prudent, I think, to owe it (the safety) only to ourselves. That is the doctrine that I preach here, but you can better establish the necessity (for defense). You are on the ground. We need your advice.[27]

According to the Corwin theory, one wonders if it was really advice Vergennes wanted or additional arguments with which he could convince Spain and his ministers of the danger of a British attack. In either case, D'Ennery reluctantly agreed to stay at his post.[28]

At the end of August Vergennes received word of the American declaration of independence through the British newspapers. This news seemed to strengthen his opinion that there

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26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 15.

was little danger of a British attack. For example, on August 28, 1776, he wrote to D'Ennery that an administrator gifted with his foresight was required by the critical situation in America. Vergennes expressed the fear that British "despair" might "bring about a catastrophe against which it is wise to be prepared."[29] He felt that the establishment of a number of posts, held by small detachments, would be enough to hold off a large invading force until the deadly weather forced them to withdraw. Because there was little danger of a reconciliation between the United States and Great Britain such an invasion was not to be feared immediately. He also believed that the struggle would be long and bloody. Since fear is as powerful an argument as is love in politics, as well as in other matters, Vergennes had more faith in strong demonstrations.[30]

Not even the American defeat on Long Island in the summer of 1776 changed the attitude of D'Ennery or Vergennes. Vergennes informed D'Ennery toward the end of September that he could count upon the aid of Solano in case of attack and instructed him to ascertain the strength of the Spanish forces on the island. There were no detailed orders for planned action. D'Ennery

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

took the same attitude as Vergennes, that is, that the British were too busy elsewhere to attempt an attack on Saint Domingue, but that "it would be more prudent to owe our safety only to ourselves." On November 15, 1776, the King's Council drew up some instructions for Admiral du Chaffault de Besné, the commander of the fleet about to sail for the Caribbean, which coincide perfectly with this attitude. If the British were to attack Saint Domingue, he was to rush to its assistance with all his forces. However, he was not to leave the eastern Caribbean if he did not receive word of an attack on Saint Domingue. These instructions reveal merely the desire to take elementary precautions against possible attack rather than any serious alarm.[31]

Logan evaluates these documents in this way:

> Unfortunately, the failure of these colonial documents to reveal anything of value during 1777 prevents us from seeing more clearly the French policy on the eve of the American alliance. But the documents already printed by Doniol and Yela Utrilla show rather convincingly that during most of that year Vergennes was trying to prove to the Spanish chief secretaries, Grimaldi and Florida Blanca that neither wisdom nor necessity required the sending of twelve thousand troops to the Caribbean in order to prevent a British attack. Indeed, when Vergennes began, after he had received news of the American victory at Saratoga, to drive for an alliance of the two countries with the United States, the astute Florida Blanca harped upon France's refusal to accede to his request as a pretext for obstructing the proposed alliance.[32]

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31 Ibid., 15-16.

32 Ibid., 16.

In the light of this old and new testimony and these conflicting interpretations Logan draws these conclusions:

> First, the tradition of a British attack upon the French West Indies at the first favorable moment was so strong in the French foreign office that Vergennes and most of the Council of State expected an attack in the early days of the American Revolution. Second, as the struggle revealed each of the contestants increasingly determined to achieve his objectives, Vergennes and his advisers acquired the conviction that the danger of attack was not imminent. They, nevertheless, remained alert. Third, after the American victory at Saratoga, Vergennes either sincerely or cleverly feared reconciliation and joint attack. The new materials do not help us definitely to solve the riddle. It is evident, however, from the documents already published that if he has deceived posterity, he also deceived contemporary French statesmen, for Louis XVI, Maurepas, and other members of the Council of State, and Ossun all agreed with him early in 1778, that there was a real danger of reconciliation and joint attack. Fourth, fear of an attack was not the primary reason for either French aid or the French alliance because a possibility is bound to be secondary to a certainty. There could be no doubt that the loss of the Thirteen Colonies would greatly weaken Great Britain. There was, on the other hand, only the possibility that Great Britain would attack the French West Indies. Even that contingency had to be guarded against because France would gain little, if while the Thirteen Colonies were being subtracted from the British scale, France at the same time lost her remaining possessions in the Western world.[33]

Whatever influence the French West Indies had in determining French policy from 1775 to 1778, probably the most entangling permanent commitment in the history of the United States "forever from the present time and against all other powers." According to Article XI of the Treaty of Alliance signed on

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33 <u>Ibid</u>., 16-17.

February 6, 1778, the United States promised to support France by military measures in defending the French West Indies from attack.[34] Some one might think that this guarantee reveals a real fear on the part of France of a British attack on her Caribbean colonies.

The desire to promote commerce between the United States and France, including the French West Indies, was another possible reason for French aid and the alliance. Logan states that one writer is of the opinion that the main reason for French policy was the desire to increase France's commerce with the United States. This interpretation seems a little far-fetched. As early as September of 1776 Vergennes obscured the importance of commerce between the United States and Saint Domingue. In a letter to D'Ennery he mentions that France had obtained permission from Spain to obtain supplies for her West Indian colonies from certain Spanish colonies, including Louisiana. However, since this would not be enough, American help "would be more abundant and more direct." He would recommend, therefore, that former restrictive measures be relaxed. He concludes, "our best friend is the one who helps us to live."[35] Late in December of 1776 he

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34 Hunter Miller, editor, Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America, Documents 1-40, 1776-1818, Washington, D. C., 1931, II, 39.

35 Logan, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 17-18.

expressed the hope to D'Ennery that many American ships would carry supplies, timber, and tobacco to Saint Domingue during the winter. Being very optimistic, he thought that D'Ennery might obtain a surplus from the Americans that he could send to France.[36] It is difficult to determine just how much commerce went to Saint Domingue during the war. "The first private banker in the United States," Stephen Girard started his enormous fortune by trading with Saint Domingue during the American Revolution and in the years which followed. The dependence of these ports upon foreign trade when France was at war is shown by the opening of colonial ports to foreign vessels in 1778. A competent French diplomat, Louis Guillaume Otto, at one time charge d'affaires in the United States, declared in 1797:

> In sacrificing so many men and millions (of francs) to sustain the United States, the Royal Government had in view making the United States the complement to our western colonies by finding in the United States at all times provisions for our West Indies or for our warships.[37]

In other words, in war as well as in peace, an independent United States could supply Saint Domingue, as well as other French possessions, with necessary provisions that British colonies would be prevented from doing. This argument was promoted at a time

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36 Ibid., 18.

37 Ibid., 19.

when some French statesmen were recommending a friendly policy toward the United States in the face of considerable opposition.[38]

The terms of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, signed on February 6, 1778, show that the desire for commerce between the United States and the French West Indies was only a secondary consideration. It granted to Americans the most-favored nation treatment but confined it to the French ports in Europe. Although she did not open any new ports, France promised to keep open the existing free ports in the Caribbean. The treaty sought to promote trade between the United States and the West Indies in only one way. By the terms of the original treaty molasses taken by the Americans from those islands was exempted from the payment of duty in the United States. In return, the Americans promised not to impose an export tax on goods taken by Frenchmen to those possessions from the United States. France did not insist upon these provisions being retained when southern interests and temperance advocates prevented the adoption of these clauses by the Continental Congress because it meant an increase in trade for the northern states. Although it does not seem to be the main reason for the French desire to help in the founding of an

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38 *Ibid*.

independent United States, commerce between the United States and Saint Domingue did assume a role of major importance.[39]

The opportunity for profits seen by some French friends of the United States must also be considered as one of the motives behind French policy. At the same time the importance of Saint Domingue in the plan of secret aid may be examined. The personal interest of some American officials in transactions conducted through the colony is also indicated.

It was reported by D'Ennery that Americans bought a lot of powder in Saint Domingue as early as September, 1775. He wrote to Vergennes, perhaps facetiously, "You understand how very difficult it is, even with the best intentions in the world, to prevent a merchant here from selling his powder to one who is obscurely the secret agent of some merchant from New England."[40] He also reported that the Dutch purchased powder at Saint Domingue, carried it to the island of St. Eustatius, and then would resell it to the American agents there. The part that island played in providing powder that helped the Americans to keep fighting has already been told. However, one can not entirely discount the powder which came to the United States from Saint

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39 Ibid.

40 Stephenson, "The Supply of Gunpowder in 1776," American Historical Review, 1925, XXX, 271-282.

Domingue either directly or by way of St. Eustatius.[41] The Continental Congress took full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Caribbean islands for buying the supplies so badly needed by the Americans. On October 13, 1775, the Committee of the Whole passed a resolution which recommended that the various revolutionary assemblies export certain products at their own risk to the West Indies in return for sal petre, sulphur, ammunition, and arms. The governor of Saint Domingue was sending munitions to the Americans, Lord Stormont complained. At the end of 1775, a French agent in the United States, Bonvouloir, reported that the Americans wanted to buy supplies in Saint Domingue and to receive two military engineers by way of that island.[42]

The plan by which France sent aid to the Americans through Saint Domingue developed in the brilliant mind of Caron de Beaumarchais. His love affair with the beautiful Pauline de Breton gave Beaumarchais a romantic interest in Saint Domingue. As a result of investments he had made there, he also had a financial interest. When he wrote his famous memoir, "Peace or War,"

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41 Jameson, "St. Eustatius in the American Revolution," 683-708.

42 Logan, Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 20.

which helped to form the ideas already in the mind of Vergennes, he might have had Saint Domingue in mind. At about the same time a confidential memorandum which Beaumarchais submitted to the king proposed the formation of a commercial house, Roderique Hortalez and Company, to handle the secret French aid. They could be absolutely sure of the transportation of munitions to Cap Francois, which had been chosen as the first port of deposit in America, if they used French vessels.[43] Using information given him by Beaumarchais, Arthur Lee, in the spring of 1776, wrote from London to the Secret Committee of Congress that France was ready to send five millions of livres worth of ammunition and arms to Cap Francois from where it would be sent to the colonies. In his Reflexions of April, 1776, Vergennes suggested:

> The colonists would send to our ports their ships laden with goods and take in return arms and ammunitions, paying the difference not in currency, but in goods delivered to either Saint Domingue or to one of our European ports.[44]

It became evident that the Americans would be expected to aid the French colony in return for aid sent to them through Saint Domingue.

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43. The Deane Papers, Collections of the New York Historical Society, New York, 1887, XIX, 106-113.

44 Logan , Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 21.

Briefly summarized, the following are the propositions of the French government to give secret aid to the American colonies:

1. The aspect of a speculation of an individual to which the French government were strangers, was to be maintained throughout.
2. To appear so, it must be so, up to a certain point.
3. The French government would give one million francs.
4. It would influence Spain to give an equal sum.
5. Beaumarchais would ask other parties to subscribe to his enterprise.
6. Beaumarchais would establish a large commercial house, and, at his own risk and peril, he could supply America with arms, ammunition, etc.
7. The French arsenals would deliver to this company arms and ammunition to be replaced or paid for.
8. Beaumarchais and his company were not to demand money of the Americans, but produce of their soil; such pay was to be distributed throughout the kingdom and the enterprise would become self-supporting.
9. The French government was to reserve the right to favor or oppose the company, according to political contingencies.
10. Beaumarchais was to render to the French government an account of the profits and losses of the enterprise.
11. The French government was to decide whether to grant new contributions or discharge the company from all obligations previously sanctioned.[45]

This plan will be discussed more fully later in this study.

Only exhaustive research could establish just how much aid went to the Americans by way of Saint Domingue. Two British

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45 Blanche Evans Hazard, Beaumarchais and the American Revolution, Boston, 1910, 19-20.

frigates stationed off Mole St. Nicolas early on 1776 hindered trade relations. The British protested against the sale of powder in Saint Domingue to the Americans in June. Four months later Vergennes wrote D'Ennery that the contraband trade between the colony and the United States was probably not as great as Stormont thought it to be. Nevertheless, he recommended that the contraband trade be completely stopped in order to convince Great Britain of the French desire to stay on friendly terms with her.[46]

Vergennes and Beaumarchais were perfecting their plan of secret aid beneath this cloak of friendship. The first ship of Hortalez and Company did not set sail for the United States by way of Saint Domingue until the end of the year. In December Beaumarchais informed Vergennes that the _Amphitrite_ was ready to carry a regiment of Irish soldiers and supplies to the United States. Since France had the right to send reenforcements and supplies to her own colony, the ship's papers were to show that the entire consignment was for D'Ennery. Beaumarchais kept Carabas, one of his agents, in Saint Domingue in order to supervise the operations there. Vergennes was notified by Beaumarchais on July 1, 1777, that the cargo of the _Amelie_, having reached

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46 Logan, _Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti_, 21-22.

Saint Domingue, was already on the way to the United States in several American ships. Beaumarchais wrote to France, his agent in the United States, on December 20, 1777, that a vessel containing more than one hundred cannon and uniforms for the American soldiers was being sent to Saint Domingue. The American ships were to lie off Cap Francais. They were to hoist the Dutch flag to the main mast and fire five shots after giving the preliminary signal. Then the French ship was to go out and allow itself to be captured and taken into an American port where, after a trial, it was to be released. In the meantime the Americans would have had the cargo turned over to them.[47]

The Americans were active in the meanwhile. William Bingham, the first purchasing agent in the Caribbean, went out to Martinique where he played an important part in sending supplies to the United States. Richard Harrison was sent in a similar capacity to Cap Francais, Silas Deane was informed by Richard Morris on August 11, 1775. However, there is no evidence that he fulfilled his mission. Morris suggested to Deane that they engage in a little private business for themselves through Saint Domingue at the same time. In another letter written a month later Morris states that the American purchasing agents were Stephen Ceronio and John Dupuy. Deane was instructed that, since

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47 Ibid., 22.

they were the safest routes, he was to continue sending supplies by way of Martinique and Saint Domingue. The French were urged by Deane in January, 1777, to speed up shipments by way of Saint Domingue. Nicholas Rogers, an American agent at Port-au-Prince, three months later informed Deane that eleven American ships were at the Cap and that five or six had just left for the United States. At the end of June, 1777, the ship, La Roche, in which Morris and Deane had an interest of one hundred thousand livres, arrived safely at Charleston, South Carolina, by way of Saint Domingue. A Captain Landais was advised by Deane to go to the United States by way of the colony in September. Any artillery officers which might be with him were to be disguised as sailors or passengers for Saint Domingue. A few days later, Deane, writing to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, expressed the hope that the Therese, a ship he had sent by that route, had arrived.[48]

One must be very cautius in any statement as to the value of the aid that the United States received through Saint Domingue. Ships did not always reach their ultimate destination even when they landed in the island. For instance, in 1779 Franklin informed the Continental Congress that the supplies from two large ships were still in Saint Domingue although they had arrived there many months before. Nevertheless, it is certain

48 Ibid., 22-23.

that the aid sent before and after the alliance was considerable.[49]

Some of the foreign volunteers used Saint Domingue as a means of assuring safe passage to the United States. Among the first was Voidke, a Prussian, who later attained the rank of brigadier general, and participated in the siege of Quebec, who passed through the colony in the fall of 1775 with a passport from Vergennes authorizing him to join the Americans. General du Portail, who served as chief of engineers at Valley Forge during that fateful winter and who built the defenses that saved Washington's army, came to Philadelphia by way of Saint Domingue. De Kalb, Lafayette, and their comrades on the La Victoire falsely swore to port authorities at Bordeaux in March, 1777, that they were going to Saint Domingue.[50]

Saint Domingue was not the scene of any important military or naval operations before the French alliance. The Continental Congress appointed a committee to arrange with Bajeu Laporte, a Frenchman, the terms of a contract for raising a regiment of French soldiers in Saint Domingue and Martinique on May 9, 1777. The records fail to show whether the contract was

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49 Ibid., 23-24.

50 Ibid., 24.

executed.[51] The Continental brig, Lexington, made a cruise to the Caribbean, but was captured on its return from Cap Francais.[52] Most of the privateers commissioned by the Americans confined their activities to the eastern end of the Caribbean.[53]

Most of the naval engagements, even after the French entered the war, took place in the eastern end of the Caribbean.[54] Saint Domingue became the base of operations when the French wanted to join the Americans in naval or military operations. In 1779 Admiral D'Estaing sailed from there for the attack on Savannah. About six hundred colored and Negro troops from Saint Domingue participated in this attack. They displayed conspicuous courage in covering the retreat of the French and American forces after a brave, but disorganized attack that had already been revealed in advance to the British. Even though the attack failed and the French fleet had to return to the West Indies, news of the expedition forced the British to abandon Naragansett Bay, in

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51 Worthington Chauncey Ford, editor, Journals of the Continental Congress, Washington, D. C., 1907, VII, 342.

52 Gardner W. Allen, A Naval History of the American Revolution, Boston, 1913, I, 159.

53 George F. Emmons, The Navy of the United States from the Commencement, 1775 to 1853, Washington, D. C., 1853, 40-47, 127-169.

54 A. T. Mahan, The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence, Boston, 1913, 99-115, 128-168.

Rodney's opinion, "the best and noblest harbor in America."[55] It may be that the yearning for their own liberty in the minds of the more intelligent Negroes and mulattoes like Christophe and Martial Besse was aroused by the experience of fighting for the independence of others.

On August 5, 1781, the French fleet sailed from Cap Francais under Admiral de Grasse. Through its victory in Lynnhaven Bay, the actual fighting, as far as the Americans were concerned, was brought to a close with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. A large part of the French fleet defeated by Rodney in the Battle of the Saints on April 9, 1782, was assembled at Cap Francais. The Windward Passage was closely watched by Rodney to the end of the war. The necessity of guarding the merchant fleet from Saint Domingue from the danger of a British attack limited the French naval assistance to the United States. This possible British attack caused great fear among French merchants.[56]

Logan has this to say of the part played by Saint Domingue in the peace negotiations:

> Although Saint Domingue was not mentioned in the treaty of peace between France and Great Britain, it had been

55 Ibid., 115.

56 Logan, Diplomatic Relations of the United States and Haiti, 26.

frequently discussed in the negotiations. One of the proposals looked to the exchange of Gibraltar by the British for certain French and Spanish possessions. Some British planters feared that France, in return for helping Spain in her efforts to recover Gibraltar, might be given Santo Domingo. In that event, they contended, France with her already vast sugar estates in Saint Domingue would be able to control the world sugar market. While this fear was not the only reason for Britain's refusal to relinquish Gibraltar, it indicates a vital interest in Saint Domingue that will help to clarify British policy during the quarter of a century in which the diplomatic history of the United States was most closely connected with events in Saint Domingue and Haiti.[57]

57 Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

FRENCH AID TO THE COLONIES

The aid which France sent to the colonies played a major part in the success of the revolution. Before the Treaty of Alliance was signed in 1778, France sent secret help to the revolting colonies. This aid, both secret and official, was sent to America via the French West Indies.

Confining our attention from the beginning to the question of what were the <u>official</u> motives of French intervention, we have to consider, in the first place, the Count de Vergennes's attempt to represent his program, which eventually became that of his government, as essentially defensive. In his "Considerations" of March, 1776, which led directly to the policy of secret aid to the Americans, Vergennes urged upon the king and his associates the argument that, whether England subdued her rebellious colonies or lost them, she would probably attack the French West Indies in order to use the large forces she would have assembled, and also, in order to indemnify herself. In his "Memoire" of July 23, 1777, urging an early alliance with the Americans, he took much

the same line. The policy of secret aid had been well enough in its day, but it had not secured the Americas for France and Spain. If England could not speedily crush the American revolt, she must make terms with the colonies. Those whom she had failed to retain as subjects she would make allies, in a joint assault upon the riches of Peru and Mexico and the French Sugar Islands.

There is, to say the least, something of an inconsistency in Vergennes's building an argument for an alliance with the Americans to protect French interests in the Caribbean upon the increase of danger resulting to those interests from his own policy of secret aid. This inconsistency affords a clue to a yet more striking one. In the summer of 1776, when he thought that France could count on the active assistance of Spain, Vergennes definitely proposed war with England and the proposition was tentatively ratified by the King and council. A little later, however, came the news of the defeat on Long Island and Vergennes beat a retreat from his own program. In other words, it would seem that the danger which, by the argument in "Considerations," would menace France if England should subjugate her rebellious colonies was one that could be safely awaited in quiet, but that the one threatening from the contrary contingency was one that must be met half-way. Yet it was the latter contingency precisely which the policy of secret aid was designed to make sure.

Again, a British attack upon the Caribbean possessions would, of course, have forced France to come to their defense. It may be gravely doubted whether French official opinion held these possessions, after 1763, in sufficient esteem to have warranted a policy that materially increased the likelihood of a serious war endangering their own security. Indeed, Vergennes himself declared on one occasion that the French West Indies could offer but slight temptation to English cupidity, that England already had enough such possessions. Finally, there is every reason to believe that both France and Spain could, at any time before 1778, have obtained from England, in return for a pledge of neutrality, a specific guaranty so long as peace continued on the Continent of Europe. None the less, Vergennes from the first consistently repelled all such proposals.[1]

Vergennes had been haunted with the bogey from 1776 on, that, as a result of America's struggle for independence, France and Spain would lose their West Indian possessions. It was Beaumarchais's fine Italian hand that first planted this thorn, which never ceased to worry Vergennes until the war was ended. Though

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1 Edward S. Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution," American Historical Review, XXI, 34-36.

Figaro was only a creature of Beaumarchais's fancy, the intriguing author was a remarkable embodiment of his own imaginary hero. He dwelt with comfort in the house of diplomacy, which has been called the chosen abode of lies. On his return from England after his curious adventure with the mysterious Chevalier d'Eon, Beaumarchais informed the king, by means of a memorial, that he had met an Arthur Lee in London, a representative of the Continental Congress, who had, in its name, offered France, for its secret aid, all the advantages of American commerce. However, Lee threatened, if France refused, America would send her first prizes into French ports, and force France either to admit or forbid them. Forbid, and America would accept peace and join with England in an attack on the French West Indies Islands; admit them and a rupture with England would follow anyway. Whether Lee or Beaumarchais invented this striking and terrible dilemma is not certain, but the menace of its horns never ceased to worry Vergennes. At least he never ceased to pretend to be worried by them.[2]

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2 Claude Van Tyne, "Influences Which Determined the French Government to Make the Treaty with America in 1778," American Historical Review, XXI, 534-535.

Frederick the Great, secret enemy of England, had even earlier planted at the French court a like insidious idea through his minister in Paris. He suggested that France and Spain "had best reinforce themselves, it (Great Britain) will seize the occasion, after subjugating its colonies, to attack the Spanish and French possessions there."[3] St. Germain in a memoir to Vergennes, March 1, 1776, declared his belief that when England was through with the American struggle, whether she won or lost, she would recoup her losses by seizing the French West India Islands. "The ease of conquest would suggest the idea and the excuses are easy to find."[4] Beaumarchais's suggestion had made its instant appeal to Vergennes's imagination, and in his next memoir to the cabinet, he dwelt upon it at length, and suggested secret aid and at the same time preparation for war. Even Turgot, in his reflections on Vergennes's memoir, thought it likely that if England failed she would wipe out the shame by an attack on Martinique and Porto Rico. Yet he suggests that England may be too exhausted financially. For Vergennes there was no such hope and for the next eighteen months his letters are filled with warnings of that danger. He was continually plying Spain with reasons for being ready for war, and,

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3 *Ibid.*, 535.

4 *Ibid.*

indeed, any time after 1776 he would have plunged France into war with England, if Spain would have joined her.[5]

Spain saw in the American Revolution a possible opportunity for safeguarding her American interests, in weakening the dominion of the English race through the revolt of the colonies. Spain gave secretly to France one million of the three million francs handed by the French in 1776 to the American Commissioners. As the war progressed and the issue was clearly independence, Spain was no longer inclined to help in a movement which would be a dangerous precedent to her own colonies. If successful, it would build up on her borders a sovereignity in its political principle very hostile to her traditions, and occupied by a people whose energy and aggressiveness would be made more formidable by a successful war. This was the second attitude assumed by Spain to our Revolution; an attitude of annoyance, of displeasure, of anxiety, causing her to repel any advance made by us with a sullen though adroit persistence.[6]

Van Tyne mentions many of the rumors which were widespread. Early in 1775 colonial journals spread the tale of forty

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5 Ibid.

6 French Ensor Chadwick, The Relations of the United States and Spain: Diplomacy, New York, 1909, 15-16.

ships of war building in Sweden for the French government with an eye to the quarrel between England and America. In May an imaginary French fleet had put to sea to give aid to American ships. By fall the papers carried the rumor that France and Spain had a greater sea force than Britain could muster in a year. That superior French and Spanish fleets were in the West Indies. That Choiseul was again in favor and would lead France and Spain at once into war with England. Algiers was attacked, and Gibraltar besieged by the Spanish, ran the wild rumors. By midsummer of 1776 the newspapers deluded Americans with a French general and an admiral in the West Indies ready to begin hostilities against England as soon as Congress decided upon independence.[7]

Since French finances seemed to shut out open war, secret aid was the one solution indicated. That would bring the fruits of a great victory without the danger of combat. Then, to clinch all other arguments Beaumarchais, after meeting Arthur Lee in London, audaciously wrote the king: "We must aid the Americans," to save our own West Indies. Lee had declared that the Continental Congress had authorized him to demand a treaty of

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7 Claude H. Van Tyne, "French Aid Before the Alliance of 1778," American Historical Review, XXXI, 34.

commerce with France in order that America might get from her the munitions of war without which defeat was certain. Should France refuse, Lee threatened, America must yield to England, and then, that the two parts of the empire might become reconciled by fighting side by side, they would unite in an attack on the French and Spanish West Indies. It is impossible to determine whether Lee or Beaumarchais invented this amazing threat, but it was just the menace to have the greatest effect with the French ministry. Over and over again that frightful portent had appeared in reports and "memoire" familiar to every member of the ministry. DeKalb prophesied it in his report in 1768. St. Germain twice raised the spectre in his "memoires" to the king. "The ease of conquest would suggest the idea," he wrote, "the excuses are easy to find." Only thus could England recoup her losses. Turgot had the same vision, fearing most for Martinique and Porto Rico. Only thus could the government hide its shame from the English nation. Indeed, John Adams had intimated as much in the Continental Congress, though that could not have been known to the French ministry.[8]

A letter without date, published for the first time by George Clinton Genet in the Magazine of American History, written

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8 Ibid., 39.

by Beaumarchais to the King, gives a clear statement of how he proposed to proceed in founding this new mercantile house, which should hide from all the world and even from the Americans themselves the connivance of the Government in the operations:

> To the King alone:
>
> While state reasons engage you to extend a helping hand to the Americans, policy requires that your Majesty shall take abundant precaution to prevent the secret succor sent to America from becoming a firebrand between France and England in Europe. . . . On the other hand, prudence wills that you acquire a certainty that your funds may never fall into other hands than those for whom you destined them. Finally, the present condition of your finances does not permit you to make so great sacrifice at the moment as passing events seem to require.
>
> It becomes my duty, Sire, to present to you, and it is for your wisdom to examine the following plan, the chief object of which is to avoid, by a turn, which is absolutely commercial, the suspicion that your Majesty has any hand in the affair.
>
> The principal merit of this plan is to augment your aid so that a single million. . . will produce the same results for the Americans as if your Majesty really had disbursed nine millions in their favor . . . . Your Majesty will begin by placing a million at the disposition of your agent, who will be named Roderigue Hortales et Cie: this is their commercial name and signature, under which I find it convenient that the whole operation shall be carried out. . . . One half million exchanged into Portugese pieces, the only money current in America, will be promptly sent there, for there is an immediate necessity for the Americans to have a little gold at once to give life to their paper money, which without means of making it circulate already has become useless and stagnant in their hands. It is the little leaven that is necessary to put into the paste to raise it and make it ferment usefully.
>
> Upon that half million no benefit can be obtained except the return of it in Virginian tobacco, which Congress must

furnish to the house of Hortales, who will have made a sale in advance to the Farmers-General of France, by which they will take the tobacco from them at a good price; but that is of no great consequence.

Roderigue Hortales counts on employing the second half million in the purchase of cannon and powder, which he will forward at once to the Americans.[9]

Here follows an exposition of the proceedings, with an explanation of how, supposing the king permits him to buy powder at the actual cost price from the magazines, instead of buying it in the market of France, Holland, or elsewhere, the money invested by the king will increase not in double progression, 1, 2, 4, 8, etc., but in triple progression 1, 3, 9, 27, etc.

Your Majesty will not be frightened at the complicated air that this operation assumes under my pen, when you remember that no commercial speculation is carried on or succeeds by any more simple or natural means than this.

I have treated this affair in so far, Sire, in the spirit of a great trader, who wishes to make a successful speculation and I have developed to you the unique secret by which commerce in bulk augments the prosperity of all states that have the good sense to protect it. . . .

If the return in tobacco and the sale of the product take place as I have pointed out, Your Majesty, soon will find yourself in a position to send back by the hands of Hortales et Cie, the three million provided for from the price and profits of these returns, to recommence operations on a larger scale.[10]

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9 Elizabeth S. Kite, Beaumarchais and the War of American Independence, Boston, 1918, II, 78-79.

10 Ibid., II, 79-80.

Then follow considerations upon the advisability of employing Dutch or French vessels for the transport of the munitions to Cape Francais, chosen by Hortales et Cie, as the first depot of commerce.

> Holding to the choice of French vessel charged to the account of Roderigue Hortales et Cie, Congress, or rather Mr. Adams, Secretary of Congress, will be alone forewarned by the agent in England that a vessel is carrying to him at Cape Francais both goods and munitions, which are to be returned in Virginian tobacco, so that he may send to the Cape upon a vessel loaded with tobacco an agent who will bear his power to receive both and to send back by the captain of Hortales et Cie., the entire return in tobacco or at all events a recognition that he owes Hortales et Cie. the balance of the amount for which he may not have been able to furnish return.[11]

So far, in Beaumarchais's mind, the mercantile undertaking was to be for the king, only cloaked by the appearance of a mercantile house. It seems, however, that the French government, anxious to evade all possible risk and wishing to deny all connivance in the transactions, decided to remain entirely foreign to the operation.

The government said:

> We will give you secretly a million. We will try to obtain the same amount from the court of Spain . . . with these two million and the co-operation of private individuals, whom you will associate in your enterprise, you will found your house and at your own risk and perils you will

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11 *Ibid.*, II, 80.

provision the Americans with arms and munitions, and objects of equipment and whatever is necessary to support the war. Our arsenals will deliver to you these things, but you will replace them or pay for them. You shall not demand money of the Americans because they have none, but you shall ask returns in commodities of their soil, the sale of which we will facilitate in our country. . . . In a word, the operation secretly sanctioned by us at the outset must grow and develop through its own support. But on the other hand, we reserve the right of favoring or opposing it according to political contingencies. You will render us an account of your profits and losses, while we will decide whether we should grant you new subsidies or discharge you of all obligations previously made.[12]

In this transaction, the responsibility of the agent to the United States had no consideration. The advances of the government were simply a guarantee to Beaumarchais against loss.

The difficulties and dangers of this undertaking, according to M. de Lomenie, were of a nature to cause any man other than Beaumarchais to hesitate. He, however, threw himself into this with all his usual courage. On the tenth of June, 1776, a month before the United States had published their Declaration of Independence, he signed the famous receipt which occasioned a suit lasting fifty years. The receipt read thus:

I have received of M. Duvergier, conformably to the orders of M. de Vergennes, on the date of the 5th of this month the sum of one million, for which I shall render count

12 Ibid., II, 81.

to my said Sieur Comte de Vergennes.
Caron de Beaumarchais.
Good for a million of livres tournois.
At Paris, this 10th of June, 1776.[13]

Two months later, Spain advanced a like sum. In addition to this Beaumarchais associated himself with numerous private individuals in France and elsewhere, so that his first sending to the Americans surpassed three millions.

Early in June the vast mercantile house of Roderigue Hortales et Cie was established at Paris, while agents, clerks, and employees of every sort were installed at the center of operations, as well as at the various sources of supplies and in the seaports. Beaumarchais remained the head and center of action in every place.

It so happened, that a complete change was being made in the equipment of the French army, so that the arsenals and forts were charged with munitions of war, which the government was willing to dispose of at a nominal price.[14]

Before the arrival of Beaumarchais on the scene of action the Comte de Vergennes had countenanced and furthered the operations begun by Franklin before he left London. Among the agents employed by the latter were the Brothers Mantaudoin of

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13 Ibid., II, 81-82.

14 Ibid., II, 82.

Nautes, who had undertaken the transportation of munitions of war to the Americans.

Another agent and intimate friend of Franklin was a certain Doctor Dubourg, a man more or less widely known as a scientist, but possessing as well, a decided taste for mercantile operations. He had entered heartily into the cause of the Americans, and was very zealous in forwarding munitions of war to the insurgents. He seems at the beginning to have possessed to a considerable degree the confidence of the French minister, who deigned to correspond with him in person, and to consult him on several occasions. As it became necessary "to act on a grander scale, the intervention of the friend of Franklin was no longer sufficient." The "faithful and discreet agent" spoken of in the _Reflexions_ had long been fixed in the mind of the Minister of War. The good doctor, who knew nothing of the relationship between the famous author of the _Barbier de Seville_ and the French government or of his interest and services in the cause of American Independence, all along had been secretly aspiring to a complete control of the transactions. What succeeded in convincing him that he was destined for the place was that early in June, 1776, Silas Deane, the agent of the Secret Committee of Congress, arrived in Paris charged with a letter from Franklin to his "dear good friend, Barbeu Dubourg," with express instructions to regard this latter

as "the best guide to seek after and to follow."[15]

Elated at this mark of esteem shown him by the colonies, Dubourg undertook to fulfill then to the letter the instructions of Congress and to prevent Silas Deane from coming in contact with anyone, but himself. Deane soon realized that though "inspired with the best intentions in the world," the doctor would be "a hindrance rather than the essential personage pointed out by Franklin."[16] He, therefore, insisted so strongly upon meeting the French minister that Dubourg was forced to yield. The meeting took place the 17th day of July, 1776.

Silas Deane at this important meeting fulfilled the intention of his mandate with intelligence, and with a reasoning, which could only come from a vigilant patriotism. All the impression, which he could desire to produce and which was hoped from his mission, flowed from his replies.[17]

The Count de Vergennes appeared to refuse to give the aid asked, but he led Silas Deane to understand that a confidential agent would take the matter in charge. This confidential agent was no other than Beaumarchais.

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15 Ibid., II, 82-83.

16 Ibid., II, 83.

17 Ibid., II, 84.

Four days before this interview, Doctor Dubourg had learned to his great disappointment where the confidence of the minister had been placed. Knowing nothing of the real situation, he thought to disuade Deane from his choice by attacking the private character of the man who had usurped his place. The effect of his letter upon the Comte de Vergennes can be judged from the fact that the latter immediately communicated it to Beaumarchais himself, who was charged with the reply.[18]

On the 17th of July, Silas Deane and Beaumarchais met for the first time. Both men recognized at once in the other, the man for whom each was looking. Both had warm, generous, and unselfish natures. Both had their minds fixed upon one object alone, the procuring and sending of aid as quickly as possible to the insurged colonies. In excusing himself to Congress for discarding the services of the "dear, good friend" of Franklin, Mr. Deane wrote: "I have been forced to discourage my friend on seeing where the confidence of M. de Vergennes was placed." At the same time he does ample justice to the kindness and interest manifested by Dubourg.[19]

Beaumarchais, finding Silas Deane empowered by Congress to act directly, ceased to communicate with Arthur Lee.

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18 <u>Ibid</u>.

19 <u>Ibid</u>., II, 87.

Already a change had come in their relationship. When he returned to France he found the government bent upon another form of offering aid to the Americans. It became necessary to break his connections with Lee. Unable to explain the true nature of the enterprise, because he was bound to absolute secrecy, Beaumarchais wrote on the 12th of June, 1776: "The difficulties, which I have found in my negotiations with the ministers, have forced me to form a company, which will cause aid to reach your friends immediately by the way of Cap Francois.[20]

Naturally enough, this meager information was very unsatisfactory to Lee. More than this, he himself had hoped to play a principal role in the enterprise.

From Beaumarchais he learned that Silas Deane had arrived from the colonies empowered to treat with the ministers, who had refused steadily to permit his own appearance at Versailles. He learned that Beaumarchais had entered at once into negotiations with the agent of Congress and that he, Arthur Lee, was being consulted by no one. Lee, enraged and disapointed hurried to Paris, where he tried to bring about a quarrel between Deane and Beaumarchais. Failing in this, he returned to London, angered in his disappointment and furious against Deane.[21] To

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20 Ibid., II, 87-88.

21 Ibid., II, 88.

avenge himself he wrote to the Congress that the two men were agreed to deceive both the French government and the Americans by changing what the former meant to be a gratuitous offering into a commercial speculation.

These letters arriving in Philadelphia before any report from Deane, predisposed Congress--(two of whose members were brothers of Arthur Lee)--against the measures Deane was taking with Beaumarchais. For the moment, however, no one interfered with their operations and both men were too intent upon the all-important matter in hand to speculate upon the possible results of the irritation of Doctor Dubourg, or the anger and jealousy of Arthur Lee.[22]

By the beginning of March, ten vessels of Roderigue Hortales et Cie. were floating towards America. The seventh of that month he announced that fact to Vergennes: "Never," he wrote, "has the commercial affair been pushed with so much vigor, in spite of obstacles of every nature, which have been encountered. May God give it good success."[23]

Beaumarchais, naturally, expected to receive very soon many expressions of gratitude from Congress, as well as much

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., II, 124.

Maryland and Virginia tobacco. He did not even receive a reply to his letters.[24] Nevertheless, he continued to send out ships laden with supplies, all through the spring and summer, receiving from his agents alone information of their safe arrival.

The failure of Congress to ratify the conditions offered by its commissioner would have brought to ruin the Commercial house of Roderigue Hortales et Cie, in spite of the subsidy of two millions with which it had been founded, had not the Government again come to its assistance. Though the ministers in general, and Vergennes in particular, never entirely deserted Beaumarchais, other and wholly different measures for aiding the Americans were now seriously occupying their attention. The colonies, in declaring themselves free from British rule, had forced upon France the necessity of coming to some definite decision. This she was slow in doing. It was inevitable that she should take an active part in the struggles. The measures necessary for the arming and equipping of her forces were already being discussed in her councils, while the nation, gone mad with enthusiasm, was urging her forward in the pathway, which could lead to nothing but open war.[25]

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., II, 125.

To be of service in giving France a chance to hurt her rival in secret without being forced to pay the penalty of making a war she could ill afford, was the aim which prompted Beaumarchais in aiding the American colonies financially in the Revolution.

Underneath was the desire for notoriety and applause. The first concrete aim was accomplished in 1776. The second was never fulfilled in America. Here he was never generally known even in name and never applauded, although he was sufficiently well known by the leaders of the Continental and later Congresses to be thoroughly suspected as a self-seeking trickster.[26]

This was, in part, due to the prejudiced statements of Arthur Lee, who made Beaumarchais's acquaintance in London in 1775, and to those of Dr. Dubourg of Paris. Both of these men were rivals of Beaumarchais, the former for fame or popularity, the latter for the commercial enterprise, which fell into his opponent's hands. Lee in his chagrin at not being able to claim that he had won the support of France, and his more or less sincere bewilderment over the secret dealings of the French government with Beaumarchais and the colonies, influenced the Continental Congress directly. Dr. Dubourg influenced Benjamin Franklin,

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26 Hazard, Beaumarchais and the American Revolution, 28.

whom he had met sometime before in England, and welcomed to Paris in 1776.

To put it briefly, Beaumarchais in 1775 used to question Arthur Lee adroitly about American conditions and, in the early days, when he was forming his vague schemes for commercial dealings, he discussed them with Lee. Since Lee got the impression then that the business firm was a mere envelope for the aid to be given to America by the French government, he always affirmed thereafter that the colonies were not indebted to the firm of Roderigue Hortales and Company. He could not influence Silas Deane, however, so he complained of him to the Continental Congress with enough force and grounds for that agent to be recalled from Paris. Meanwhile, Dr. Dubourg on finding that Beaumarchais in some mysterious way was being made an unofficial tool of the French government in helping the colonies, sent a letter of remonstrance to Vergennes on the plea of Beaumarchais's lack of business capacity or experience and his alleged immorality. He could not deter Vergennes from his plan nor force him to acknowledge that it existed, but although Vergennes and Beaumarchais had many a laugh at Dr. Dubourg's jealous intentions, they could not prevent his influencing Franklin, and through him, as America's "wise, practical man," influencing all the proceedings of the

Continental Congress in regard to their dealings with Roderigue Hortalez and Company.[27]

Of the three American commissioners with whom Beaumarchais had to deal, he made a favorable impression upon only one, Silas Deane. He had shown himself throughout all his life very shrewd and successful in reading the minds, understanding the temper, and influencing the judgments of his fellow Frenchmen. He did not seem to understand the American colonists, especially the Yankees. He did not even suspect the role he ought to assume to gain their confidence. He could not realize that to these non-theatre-goers, a playwright must be in close touch with the devil himself. He could not have suspected that his facetious and unbusinesslike letters condemned him again and again--Lomenie, his biographer, understood the character of the colonists better.

> Only imagine serious Yankees, who had nearly all been traders before becoming soldiers, receiving masses of cargoes, which were frequently embarked by stealth during the night, and the invoices of which consequently presented some irregularities, and all this without any other letters of advice than the rather fantastic missives signed with the romantic name of Roderigue Hortalez and Company in which Beaumarchais mixed up protestations of enthusiasm, offers of unlimited service and political advice, with applications for tobacco, indigo, or salt fish, and ended with such tirades as this one, which we may take as typical:
>
> Gentlemen, consider my house as the head of all operations useful to your cause in Europe, and myself as the most zealous partisan of your nation, the soul of your successes,

27 Ibid., 28-29.

and a man profoundly filled with the respectful esteem with which I have the honor to be,

Roderigue Hortalez and Company[28]

Hazard has quoted this vivid and sympathetic explanation from Lomenie for it seems to be the key to much of the misunderstanding of Beaumarchais's troubles with the Continental Congress. This fantastic, popular hero in business, though not a real merchant, was no fool. By 1777, he had come to the point of understanding that the colonies would not pay their debt to him unless he appealed to something more than their honor. He sent De Francy to obtain justice from Congress for the past, and prevent his future cargoes from being gratuitously delivered. The new contract made with the United States in 1778 sounds thoroughly businesslike but "does not calm the troubled waters. Shipments continued under its provisions but payment for them is not made by Congress." Beaumarchais's efforts remained unappreciated and his financial outlays were not reimbursed.[29]

On February 6, 1778, Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee, as commissioners of the Thirteen Colonies, concluded a treay of alliance with the French government. The three articles, which are most important to this study, are Articles VI, VII and XI.

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28 Ibid., 29-30.

29 Ibid., 30.

Article VI states:

> The Most Christian King renounces forever the possession of the Islands of Bermudas as well as any part of the continent of North America, which before the treaty of Paris in 1763, or in virtue of that treaty, were acknowledged to belong to the Crown of Great Britain, or to the United States heretofore, called British Colonies or which are at this time or have lately been under the Power of the King and Crown of Great Britain.[30]

Article VII states:

> If his Most Christian Majesty shall think proper to attack any of the island situated in the Gulph of Mexico, or near that Gulph, which are at present under the Power of Great Britain, all the said Isles, in case of success, shall appertain to the Crown of France.[31]

Article XI guarantees the possession of the French West Indies to France "forever from the present time and against all other powers." The article states:

> The two Parties guarantee mutually from the present time and forever, against all other powers, to wit, the United States to his most Christian Majesty the present possessions of the Crown of France in America as well as those which it may acquire by the future Treaty of Peace: and his most Christian Majesty guarantees on his part to the United States, their liberty, Sovereignity, and Independence absolute, and unlimited, as well in Matters of Government as commerce and also their Possessions, and the additions or conquests that their Confederation may obtain during the war, from any of the Dominions now or heretofore possessed by Great Britain in North America, conformable to the fifth and

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30 Miller, Treaties and other International Acts of the United States of America, Documents 1-40: 1776-1818, 38.

31 Ibid., 38.

sixth articles above written, the whole as their Possessions shall be fixed and assured to the Said States at the moment of the cessation of their present War with England.[32]

At the same time another agreement known as the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed by the representatives of the two nations.

The clauses of this proposed agreement contained ideas far in advance of the exclusive system of commercial legislation, with which every country was fettered in the eighteenth century. The most important were the first two clauses. The first of these provided that the subjects of France were to pay no other duties in American ports than Americans paid, and were to enjoy all the rights and privileges in navigation and commerce between the two countries, which the Americans themselves enjoyed. The second clause secured these same rights to the citizens of the United States in the ports of France and any west India Islands, which might be secured by France as a result of the war.[33]

The proposed plan was adopted by the two nations in the treaty of February 6, 1778. The treaty when signed, however, contained two clauses, which, had they remained, would have been

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32 _Ibid._, 39-40.

33 George F. Zook, "Proposals for a New Commercial Treaty Between France and the United States, 1778-1793," _South Atlantic Quarterly_, 1909, VIII, 268.

of great importance to commercial interests. The first of these provided that no duty should ever be laid upon the exportation of molasses from the French West Indies to the United States. In return for this favor, which would have been so important to the Northern States, it was agreed that no duties should be imposed upon any kind of merchandise exported from the United States to the West Indies. Since the policy of taxing exports from the States was not contemplated, it seems as if the concession made by the French was a valuable gift. It was not so regarded by Arthur Lee, one of the American commissioners, and Ralph Izard, both prominent men from the South, who were disposed to think the bargain favored Northern interests at the expense of all others. The opposition of these men was so bitter that it was decided to sacrifice both exemptions, and the treaty as finally ratified did not contain these two clauses.[34]

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34 Ibid., 269.

CHAPTER V

FRENCH NAVAL ACTION IN THE WEST INDIES

When the French government, at last, resolved to take an active part in the war, a fleet under Charles Henry Count d'Estaing, was sent out from Toulon on the 13th of April, 1778, with orders to attack any fleet bound to or from America. At the same time they prepared to send out another fleet from Brest, under Count d'Orvilliers. The first hostility took place off the coasts of Brittany, the Arethura, of Keppel's fleet, having on the 17th of June begun the war by attacking the Belle Poule, a French vessel of equal force, commanded by the brave La Clocheterie, who distinguished himself in the first, to die fighting most gallantly in the last battle of the war. This led to a fiercely contested, but indecisive action off Ushant, on the 21st of July 1778, between the English fleet under Keppel, and

the French fleet under the Count d'Orvilliers.[1]

Meanwhile the Count d'Estaing ran across the Atlantic and began hostilities on the 30th of June, by capturing an English vessel off Bermuda. On the 5th of the next month, the frigate Engageante of his fleet took the English frigate Rose, the first real capture in the war. An unfortunate delay prevented his blockading Howe in the Delaware and he appeared off Sandy Hook July 11, to be abandoned by pilots, and outgeneraled by Howe, who prevented d'Estaing, misled too by Tory pilots, from entering when he might in fact have sailed up to the city and closed the war. D'Estaing then devised a plan with Lafayette and Sullivan to take Rhode Island. He ran into Newport and compelled the English to destroy their vessels there. Just as operations were about to begin Howe appeared, D'Estaing went out to meet him. Howe avoided an action, a storm came on, d'Estaing's fleet suffered, and abandoning the seige of Newport to the great dissatisfaction of Sullivan, he sailed to Boston to repair.

Leaving Boston he allowed Hotham's squadron from New York to go, almost before his eyes, to Barbadoes. Proceeding to Guadaloupe, in December he engaged Barrington, but failed to capture his small squadron, and saw his arms repulsed with loss in his attack on St. Lucia, December 18.

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1 J. D. G. Shea, The Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count De Grasse, in 1781-82, New York, 1864, 15.

The next year, having been reinforced by four vessels under de Grasse, he reduced the islands of Saint Martin, St. Bartholomew, and St. Vincent. On the last day of June, he sailed from Fort Royal with twenty-five vessels of the line, and two frigates, and early in July, after a sharp action, reduced Granada. On the sixth, a very sharp engagement took place between d'Estaing and Byron, in which the latter suffered severely.

The next operation of Count d'Estaing was another attack on an English post in the United States. Savannah was assailed on the 9th of October, by American and French troops, the former under Lincoln, the latter led by d'Estaing in person. In spite of the valor of the allies, they were repulsed with heavy loss. Thus ended the naval and military campaign of d'Estaing, from which the Americans had expected much and obtained nothing.[2]

The campaign carried on in the West Indies had no special effect on the progress of the war. D'Estaing was a man of much bravery and of some energy, but he could not handle ships with the skill of one whose life had been spent on the sea. Little was accomplished for some months. D'Estaing certainly did not overestimate his successes, and he was never afraid to tell the truth about himself. He wrote home in January, 1779, that he had gone from one misfortune to another, and the King's

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2 Ibid., 15-17.

squadron had not even been able to retake Saint Lucia. "If I do not entirely succumb under the weight of misfortune, which has characterized the events of this ruinous campaign, I am none the less filled with extreme regret not to have been more useful in the service of the King."[3]

In the summer of 1779 he was somewhat more fortunate. The French captured Granada and Saint Vincent, and d'Estaing defeated the English under Lord Byron, who was by no means as great an admiral as his nephew was a poet. Even then d'Estaing was criticized, and perhaps justly, because he did not utilize his victory to the utmost; apparently, if he had possessed greater talent as a sailor, he might have destroyed the English fleet. "If he had possessed as much sea-craft as bravery," wrote an officer, "we would not have allowed four disabled vessels to make their escape."[4]

The Count de Guichen, who succeeded to the command of the French fleet in the West Indies, brought Rodney to action, April 17, 1780, but the battle produced no result, and a similarly indecisive action took place May 19.

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3 James Breck Perkins, France in the American Revolution, Boston, 1911, 271-272.

4 Ibid., 273.

In 1781, the Chevalier Destouches sent a part of his fleet from Boston to the Chesapeake, under M. de Tilly, who captured the Romulus, and several transports, but most of the enemy's vessels ran up to Portsmouth. Destouches himself then sailed to the Chesapeake, and had a spirited action with Graves, in which he put three of the English vessels hors de combat. De Ternay, who brought another French squadron across the Atlantic, allowed an English squadron to escape from him, and died of mortification soon after his arrival.[5]

Such had been the main operations of the French navy in American waters up to the time of the campaign of the Count de Grasse. That such fleets were sent by both governments to operate in the dangerous waters of the West Indian Archipelago, and waste their strength on the reduction of petty islands, when a continent was at stake, is not easily explained. The time was spent in taking and retaking small and unimportant isles, the possession of which was of not strategic importance. In the war on the Continent, the operations at Newport and Savannah, both entire failures, and the operations of Destouches in the Chesapeake, alone show the intervention of our transatlantic allies,

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5 Shea, The Operation of the French Fleet Under the Count de Grasse, 17-18.

and it is clear that the assistance rendered by the French navy was of little moment, except in the fact that it gave occupation to all England's fleets.[6]

Francois Joseph Paul de Grasse-Rouville, Count de Grasse, Marquis de Tilly, Lieutenant-General des Armees Navales was born in 1723; but of his earlier career, even the biography published by his son gives us no particulars. At the commencement of the war with England brought on by the American Revolution, he was captain of the Robaste, and had been in active service, apparently in her, since 1775. With that vessel he took an active part in the naval engagement fought off Quessant in July, 1778. In the following year, still in the same vessel, he sailed as "chef-d'escadre", or commodore, from Brest with four ships of the line, and anchored in the road of Fort Royal, February 20, 1779. He shared in the triumphs and reverses of d'Estaing's campaign, in the reduction of Granada, in the seige of Savannah, after which he sailed to the West Indies with a portion of the fleet. Here he distinguished himself in 1780, under de Guichen, in his engagements with Rodney, rescuing the Sphynx and Artesien from a superior English force. Declining the command of the squadron on the ground of health, he returned to France, where he was raised by the king to the rank of lieutenant-general or admiral, and

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6 Ibid., 18.

invested with the command of the fleet in the West Indies, which d'Estaing and de Guichen had hitherto directed with judgment, though not with brilliant success. The elevation of de Grasse gave offense to many officers in the navy, and involved him in difficulties which ultimately dimmed by a fateful reverse, the laurels won in the earlier part of his naval campaign.[7]

The West Indies were the chief object of de Grasse's cruise, and any expedition to the United States was regarded as of secondary interest. As a matter of fact, the fleet accomplished little during its first stay among the islands, and met with s serious disaster the following year, while the expedition to the Chesapeake ended a long and momentous contest.[8]

The King's fleet, commanded by Lieutenant-General Count de Grasse-Tilly, set sail on Thursday, March 22, 1781, with a convoy of two hundred and fifty ships valued at thirty million livres.[9]

The following account of the action of the French fleet in the West Indies is based on "A Journal of the Cruise of the

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7 Ibid., 20-21.

8 Perkins, France in the American Revolution, 357.

9 Shea, Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count de Grasse, 30.

Fleet of His Most Christian Majesty, under the command of the Count de Grasse-Tilly, in 1781 and 1782, by the Chevalier de Goussencourt," edited by J. D. G. Shea in the book, The Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count De Grasse in 1781-1782.

On Sunday, April 29, 1781, a French fleet of twenty ships of the line sighted an English fleet of eighteen ships of the line and five frigates off the shores of Martinique. The French vessel, the Languedoc, fired on the enemy, but missed. Having seen the strength of the French, and losing hope of capturing any vessels, the English came on a tack similar to the French. The French gave chase, but were becalmed. Four English vessels ran afoul of each other and became separated from the fleet. Some of the French commanders thought they should be captured but M. de Grasse paid no attention to it. No other officer would take the responsibility. The French then anchored at Fort Royal, Martinique. All efforts to engage Admiral Hood failed. The action lasted five and a half hours. The French lost one officer killed, one dangerously wounded, and one hundred and fifty men killed or wounded. Hood tried in vain to enter St. Lucia, but was prevented from doing so by the French. Rodney was then engaged in pillaging St. Eustatius. The French pursued the English ineffectually for three days. The fact that M. de Grasse let four vessels escape which might have been capture led to a dispute at St. Pierre between several French naval officers. This was the origin of an ill feeling that afterwards prevailed in the fleet.

The chase of the English having taken them quite some distance to the leeward, it took the French until May 6 to regain the island of Martinique. They set sail on the eighth for the channel of St. Lucia. On May 15, they anchored in the roadstead of St. Lucia, in Gros Islet Bay, where the battery kept up an ineffectual fire.

On the morning of the 16th, the long boats and barges went ashore to bring off the troops there and the prisoners they had taken amounting to one hundred and fifty men and two officers. M. de Bouille saw that the siege of Morne Fortune would require an army of twenty thousand men. The English made no greater opposition to their reembarkation than they had to the landing of the French troops.

At daybreak on the 29th, having discovered Tobago on one side, and seven English vessels and five frigates on the other, the French gave chase but to no purpose. In the evening the Aigrette asked leave to give chase, and took a brig of ten guns.

On the 31st, being near Tobago, the French sighted several ships. They hoisted the English flag and the ships threw themselves into their hands. A slaver, with two hundred and fifty negroes on board, and several smaller vessels were captured in the same way.

Late in the afternoon of June 2, the fleet anchored off Tobago. This island had surrendered the previous evening to M. De Bouille, who had landed with eight hundred men three days before. The capture of Tobago cost the French only three men. They took ten officers and three hundred and sixty men, and left a garrison of eighteen hundred men, arms and money.

The next afternoon they set sail again, the Glorieux and the St. Espirit having discovered the enemy fleet. It was Rodney coming to the relief of Tobago, but learning that it was taken, he would not hazard an action that could result only in mutual slaughter, because the fleets were of equal force. M. de Grasse, on the contrary, sought to engage the English; but being to leeward, he could not overtake them.

The chase of the English having made them fall considerably to leeward, on the morning of June 8, the French admiral asked for the bearings of several vessels because little attention had been paid to the route they had taken. At noon they discovered that they were near Granada, where they anchored on the tenth of June.

On June 13, the fleet again set sail and lay to before St. Vincent, where they waited for the general of the troops, who had gone there the day before.

On July 5, the fleet and its convoy of over two hundred vessels set sail for Granadina in search of the Hector and a convoy of fifteen sail. After making the junction, they steered for Cape Francois, while the English, coming from Barbadoes, steered for Jamaica, from which Rodney sailed with his treasure to England.

On the 14th, Commander de Glandevese was detached with four vessels to cruise around St. Domingo and the small isles adjacent to the leeward, and to relieve the Actionnaire which was blockaded by two English ships of the line and two frigates.[10]

The following account of the preparations for the Yorktown affair is written in diary form and is based on "A Journal of the Cruise of the Fleet of His Most Christian Majesty, Under the Command of the Count de Grasse-Tilly, in 1781 and 1782 by the Chevalier de Goussencourt," edited by J. D. G. Shea in the book, The Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count De Grasse in 1781-1782.

July 30th, order to hold ourselves in readiness to sail and to ship cannons, mortars, and all necessary to make a regular siege. The same day we took on board our vessel the regiments of Gatinon, now Royal Auvergne, Agenois, Touraine, and a detachment of Lauzun's legion.

August 5th, all being ready, the signal was given to unmoor, and on the 6th at 4 A.M., to loose sail. Our fleet numbered twenty-four vessels, and the wonder is that everybody, the English included, knew where we were going, while we had not even conjecture as to the operation that our admiral was about to take.

On the 7th, the commander, de Glandevese, who had sailed around the island to leeward, joined us with the Burgoyne and the Hector. The Actionnaire, which had come with the commander's five vessels, anchored on the 8th at the cape.

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10 Ibid., 42-55.

On the 10th, the light squadron gave chase to the English frigate which had chased the Fee and forced her to put in at the Mole St. Nicolas, after she had fought three times; first with a frigate, which she sunk; next with a fifty gun vessel, which she cut up considerably by a maneuvre which excited the admiration of the enemy.

On the 11th, we entered the old channel and took in a Spanish coast pilot coming from Baracao, a town lying on the northern coast of the island of Cuba. The passage of this channel is justly considered a very dangerous spot. We were so happy as to spend three days in the narrowest part of the pass, which is surrounded by reefs on every side, experiencing an unsupportable contrariety of winds.

At this period we flattered ourselves that we should behold the superb city of Havanna, the capital of the island of Cuba, and the richest and strongest place in America; the Spaniards having added considerably to its fortifications since the last war. The Aigrette alone went there, and brought off four millions, which served as an excuse for the seventeen men of war there, not to accompany us on the expedition we had on hand. Is it not a shame for these vessels to be rotting two years in port? It is only a nation as cowardly as the Spaniard that can wallow so in inaction, leaving its allies to bear the brunt of the war.

On the 18th, we lay to off Matanzas, three leagues from that town, and about thirty from Havanna. We sent our pilots ashore, and entered the Bahama channel, into which the currents carried us. At this point, being in order, we learned that the projected expedition was to the Chesapeake. Here the charming maritime ill-temper displayed itself in all its beauty, for they closed the council-chamber door on the gentlemen of the Royal Auvergne, commanded by M. de Tourville, who could not help taking up the silly remarks they passed on the Count d'Estaing.

On the 24th, we took three English vessels; one of which, commanded by a lieutenant in the navy, carried sixteen six-pounders and eight eighteen-pound howitzers. . . . The smaller of the other two was carrying to England a general officer who had commanded at Savannah and Charleston, which he had left a week before, and who enjoyed the highest reputation. All these vessels, and those subsequently taken off this coast were loaded with merchandise for Europe.

On the 28th, the fleet anchored three leagues from the roadstead of the Chesapeake, according to the advice of the coast pilots whom we had on board. We had not yet seen any land, which here lies very low.

On the 29th, we anchored in three columns, in the entrance of the roadstead, after chasing a number of vessels that we could not make out. You will not perhaps be astonished to learn in what security the English live. Having anchored and displayed our flag, we were approached by a boat in which was one of the principal citizens of Virginia, who asked where Lord Rodney was. The sailors on deck hailed, and one of them who spoke English well, told them to come on board, which they did at once. But what was their surprise to see only infantry in white uniforms. They were taken to the main cabin where we were at dinner, and where the captain informed them that they were prisoners, ordering them to be well treated. The boat was taken, and found to contain excellent melons and many other refreshments, which were eaten in honor of Lord Rodney.[11]

The greatest French contribution to the success of the American Revolution was the naval support which the French fleet, under the Count De Grasse gave to the land forces, under Washington and Rochambeau in the Battle of Yorktown. This action will be discussed later in this study.

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11 *Ibid.*, 61-65.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROLE OF THE FRENCH WEST INDIAN FLEET IN THE SURRENDER AT YORKTOWN

Before the campaign at Yorktown the French West Indian fleet accomplished very little in a military way. It served merely to keep the British fleet occupied and away from colonial shores.

A large share of the credit for the capture of Yorktown belongs to the Count de Grasse who performed his part with great exactitude. He prevented the English from relieving Cornwallis, and brought an important reenforcement to the land forces. If his fleet had not arrived promptly and remained until the work was done the capture of Yorktown would have been impossible.

Rochambeau wrote in the spring and early summer telling of the needs of the American army and asked for prompt cooperation against the common foe. De Grasse proceeded to take energetic steps to answer these calls for help. There was no definite plan worked out for him. He acted upon his own responsibility in

transporting a body of soldiers to Virginia to the West Indies. He had to negotiate with the Spaniards who had not interest in the American allies of France. He even had to risk the disapproval of his own government.

When he arrived at Cape Haytien on July 16 he found the letters of Rochambeau and the French minister stating the importance of prompt aid to the American cause. At once he tried to meet these requests to the best of his ability. A large force of French troops was stationed at Saint Domingue, but the French government had agreed that they should be at the disposition of Spain and were to be used for an expedition to Florida. The Spanish admiral was not ready for the Florida campaign and wanted to postpone it until winter. De Grasse took advantage of this and asked the French governor to lend him these troops in the meantime. This was a bold step. If the troops he borrowed were not returned to Saint Domingue in time to embark for Florida when the Spanish asked for them, de Grasse had to incur the risk of severe censure by his own government. He was able to persuade the governor that these troops could be spared for two or three months.

It was decided that thirty-four hundred men could be spared from Saint Domingue until November, although this was not the five thousand suggested by Rochambeau. They were borrowed from the governor with the express promise that they should be

returned by that time. Since Spanish ships were to keep guard of the island, the Spanish indirectly were rendering assistance to the colonists whose allies they had refused to become.[1]

De Grasse found it hard to obtain any money, and the amount Rochambeau asked for was utterly impossible to raise. He tried, unsuccessfully, to borrow from some of the merchants at Santo Domingo, even though he offered to pledge his own estate as security for repayment. He then went to Havana to see if he would be more successful there. He found seventeen Spanish men-of-war lying peaceably at that port, with the customary inactivity of Spanish warfare. Perkins quotes an earlier historian, in this way:

> Is it not a shame for these vessels to lie rotting two years in port? It is only a nation as cowardly as the Spanish that can wallow so in inaction, leaving its allies to bear all the brunt of the war.[2]

If the fleet remained inactive, the Spanish furnished de Grasse four million livres in cash, which was more useful than the cooperation of their ships. It furnished the needs of his fleet and left a large surplus which he gave his associates in

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1 Perkins, France in the American Revolution, 376-378.

2 Shea, The Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count de Grasse, in 1781-1782, 63.

America. Having obtained the necessary money and having the fleet off Havana, their destination was publicly announced.

After a voyage of twenty-three days, de Grasse's fleet anchored off the roadstead of Chesapeake Bay on August 28. The The troops were landed at Jamestown Island on September 4 and 5. Cornwallis made no attempt to prevent the landing. An enterprising general might have attacked the French in the confusion of disembarking, but the British left them undisturbed. They joined the forces under Lafayette, who now had an army of seven thousand men.[3]

In the meantime, Clinton was puzzled as to how to meet Washington's threat against New York. In a letter written to Germain in London, Clinton remarked that, since Admiral Graves had taken the fleet away from New York, he would write to Admiral Rodney, the British commander in the West Indies, to watch de Grasse. He feared that the French fleet would slip away from the West Indies and come north to cooperate with Washington in an attack on New York. Clinton adds this prophetic remark: "For I must beg leave to repeat to your Lordship that if the

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3 Perkins, France in the American Revolution, 378-379.

Enemy remain only a few weeks superior at sea, our insular and detached situation will become very critical."[4] One must understand "insular" in its older meaning of "isolated." He complains to Germain that he has not heard from London for four months. No wonder he felt "insular."

In the early summer of 1781 the royal navy had many notable admirals, but none was available at New York. Hyde, Parker, Kempenfelt, Darby, and Shaldhamwere kept busy defending the homeland because of threats upon the coast of England by France and Holland. The next most important work was in the West Indies. Admirals Rodney and Hood were responsible for defending the Sugar Islands, where so many English families had heavy investments. Besides, they had to watch de Grasse, New York was relatively unimportant.

Admiral Rodney at the West India station, as was explained earlier, had been busy for some time with the combined pleasure and duty of looting the Dutch island of St. Eustatius. The consequences of this act proved very annoying because Rodney's ruthlessness made no distinction between British and enemy goods. When he finally sent thirty shiploads of plunder to England, the French naval commander, La Motte-Picquet, dashed out from Brest

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4 Randolph G. Adams, "A View of Cornwallis' Surrender at Yorktown," American Historical Review, New York, 1931 XXXVII, 29.

and captured twenty-six of the convoy. Therefore, Rodney had other things on his mind besides watching de Grasse.

Rodney learned, on July 7, that de Grasse, who was supposed to be at Martinique, had left there with thirty-six warships. His informant did not know where they were going. Adams gives this account of Rodney's attempt to justify his actions:

> In order to clear himself afterwards, Rodney said that upon receipt of this intelligence he had specifically warned the admiral at New York that de Grasse had sailed for Cape Francois (to pick up more troops and supplies), and was thence bound for the Chesapeake; therefore, let the admiral at New York beware. If any such dispatch had actually been sent, and had actually been received at New York, both Graves and Clinton might have been forewarned. But they were not--for two reasons. First, Rodney never sent such a message. What he really wrote on July 7 was that de Grasse had left Martinique, that Rodney did not know whether he had gone to Cape Francois, but that he was destined to sail to "America," without specifying the Chesapeake. This made a great deal of difference, because Clinton and Graves expected de Grasse to come north, but the word "America," instead of "Chesapeake" would simply confirm Clinton and Graves in their opinion that de Grasse was coming to cooperate with Washington in the attack on New York. The second reason that Clinton had not been forewarned was this: the dispatch, even in its vastly different form, was entrusted to Captain Wells of the sloop Swallow. Wells reached New York safely, but as the dispatch was addressed to the Admiral, and Graves was absent cruising off Boston, Wells started to follow him, when, off the coast of Long Island, an American privateer moved into sight. Wells could not resist the temptation to punish the impudent Yankee skipper. The result was precisely opposite of what Wells intended, because three more impudent Yankees sailed up, and Wells, carrying important dispatches, which he had no right to jeopardize, was compelled to destory them and beach the Swallow on Long Island. Graves did not receive Rodney's news until six weeks after it was sent.[5]

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5 Ibid., 33-34.

It has been observed that Rodney received information to the effect that de Grasse was bound for Santo Domingo. Two days later Hood was ordered by Rodney to take eight ships to Antiqua to refit and to sail with them to reenforce Graves at New York, because de Grasse was probably on the way to join Barras at Newport. Soon after this Rodney became very ill, and he ordered Admiral Drake to take command in the Leeward Islands while he returned to England for his health. Hood was sent to New York. When Rodney learned that a convoy of merchant vessels bound for Jamaica was nearby, he ordered Hood to take twenty-four ships, instead of eight, and conduct the convoy safely to Jamaica before going north to join Graves. A week later, Rodney, deceived by some discontented British subjects, sent Admiral Drake on a wild goose chase to Saint Lucia with six ships to attack a French force that did not exist. Rodney had only himself to blame if his conduct at St. Eustatius turned those who might otherwise have been loyal against him. He was forced by illness to return to England on August 1.[6]

It is probably fair to say that the British had no real idea of the Franco-American plans. They were as puzzled as the Americans in regard to de Grasse's purpose. They thought that the French admiral might come north, but they had no idea when or with

6 Ibid., 34-35.

what numbers. Unfortunately for them, they assumed that de Grasse was bringing only a few vessels. Clinton should have been thinking this out. On July 28 he sent a routine dispatch to Germain saying that he understood that de Grasse had left Martinique and might be expected off New York at any time, but, since Rodney was following him, there was nothing to worry about.

Admiral Hood, off Antigua, received some real news on August 3. Just before he sailed for England, Rodney had received the information that thirty American pilots for the Delaware and Chesapeake had arrived at Cape Francois, the French sector of Santo Domingo. It was there that de Grasse was going. Rodney informed Hood without comment. Hood, seeing how important this was, sent the sloop, Active, to warn Graves at New York. Luck was with the Americans, for the Active was captured and taken into Philadelphia. The significance of pilots for the Chesapeake was lost.[7]

In mid-August Clinton, somewhat recovered in spirits, suggested to Graves that, since de Grasse could not possibly arrive for another week or ten days, they might try again to attack Newport. Upon receiving this suggestion Graves decided that two ships needed repairs. He believed that the story of de Grasse's

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7 Ibid., 35-37.

coming was merely the product of a "heated imagination." Even if de Grasse did come, it would be only with a few vessels to replace those which Barras was sending back to France to refit. Clinton might get something done at last when Graves's ships were repaired. On August 18, he had three thousand men ready to embark, and could go to Newport on twenty-four hours notice. However, it took two days more to repair the ships. Then, on August 20, Clinton had an attack of blindness.[8]

On August 19, Adjutant General Delancy received three dispatches from the British scout Marquard. In the first, written in the morning, he announced that he had positive information from one of his woman agents that the French had struck camp and were marching for North Castle and that Washington was preparing to cross the Hudson at Dobbs Ferry. The second dispatch, written in the afternoon, confirmed the first but could not guess which way the Franco-American forces were going. The third dispatch, written when the female informant reached Marquard's headquarters in the evening, was equally confusing as to why and where Washington was going. On August 18, Lieutenant-Colonel Wurmb of the Jagers had positive information that "an American woman, who was the mistress of a French officer of distinction, had been instructed to go to Trenton."[9] Thus, although he had been warned

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8 _Ibid._, 37-38.

9 _Ibid._, 39.

from two directions, one of which was rather close to the French high command, Clinton took no action. On the twentieth, Delancey received three more notes. Wurmb reported that the Americans had certainly crossed the Hudson. According to Marquard, rebel baggage and heavy artillery were going across. Captain Beckwith could not be certain what the Americans were planning, but he was sure that their whole plan had suddenly undergone a drastic change. From this it seems that the British intelligence was working, but not very well. The information made very little impression at headquarters.[10]

Graves went on repairing his ships. On August 21, he reported to Clinton that he had just heard that Barras was preparing to leave Rhode Island. Clinton reported that he had reliable information that de Grasse was bringing only a few ships north. Neither Graves nor Clinton had any idea of Barras's destination. It seems odd that they could not have realized that Barras was going to join de Grasse. By August 22, Cornwallis, having reached Yorktown, was so busy digging in that he informed Clinton that he could spare no troops for another six weeks. Lord Cornwallis was alarmed because of three factors. First, Wayne and Lafayette had in some way been reenforced. Second, a mob of Loyalist refugees, who had been following him from

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10 Ibid., 39-40.

Portsmouth, were consuming his supplies more rapidly than he liked. Third, although Clinton had sent three thousand entrenching tools south, Cornwallis's engineer's records showed only nine hundred and ninety-two while less than four hundred could actually be located by the storekeeper.[11]

Admiral Hood arrived with his ships of the British West India squadron on August 24. He had seen nothing of de Grasse and did not know where he was. The British probably were congratulating themselves that Hood arrived at New York before de Grasse. Marquard, the scout, sent word to Delancey that the French had now crossed the Hudson, that for three successive nights they had moved their camp, and that Washington was carrying flatboats, for what purpose, the scout did not guess.[12]

Graves decided that, with the addition of Hood's fleet, his force was superior to the French. On August 31, he put out to sea to seek and punish Barras's little fleet, even though it might have been joined by a few vessels from de Grasse's West India squadron. Cornwallis, that same day, learned that between thirty and forty ships had come inside the capes of the Chesapeake, but he did not say what they were.

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11 Ibid., 40.

12 Ibid., 40-41.

Clinton was certain that Cornwallis need not fear the French fleet because Hood and Graves would take care of it. These two brilliant admirals, however, failed and failed badly. Believing de Grasse had only a few ships, they found him to have a fleet that outnumbered the combined fleets of Graves and Hood. A naval battle was fought off the capes of Virginia on September 5. Some authorities have called this battle "indecisive." However, Adams believes that few naval actions in history have decided more. Graves, handling his fleet badly, got only a part of his force into the action and was severely damaged by de Grasse. Both fleets maneuvered for position after the fight and it seems that Graves was actually nearer to Yorktown than de Grasse at one time. Graves put out to sea instead of taking advantage of his position to rush in and rescue Cornwallis. Hodd lost contact with de Grasse and, on September 10, wrote to Graves asking him if he knew where the French fleet might be.[13] Graves didn't know either. It was three days before he replied that the French fleet was at anchor in the Chesapeake and asked Hood's opinion as to what to do with the fleet. Hood's reply was equally futile: "Sir Samuel would be very glad to send an opinion, but he really knows not what to say in the truly lamentable state

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13 Ibid., 42.

we have brought ourselves."[14] It was decided at a council of war, held at sea, that, because of the damaged state of the fleet, the coming equinoxial storms, and the impossibility of helping Cornwallis, the British fleet should return to New York to refit. Because Barras had gone into the Chesapeake with the Newport squadron and de Grasse was stronger than ever, it was impossible to help Cornwallis now. Now Graves understood why Barras had left Rhode Island.

While Clinton waited, it took Graves two weeks to reach New York after the action off the Chesapeake. In the meantime, Commodore Affleck represented the navy at a council of war called by Clinton on September 17. The somewhat hysterical nature of this conference may be detected by reading between the lines of the minutes. Affleck wanted to take five thousand men and convoy them in a single ship of the line to Yorktown. How he proposed to get this last hope through the entire French fleet does not appear. General Leslie, frantic at the delay, wanted something, anything, done at once. General Robertson, objecting to haste, suggested that they wait not only for Graves, but for the added naval forces being sent from England under Admiral Digby. The traitor Arnold was called in to another war council which was called the next day. It was agreed that they should wait for Graves, Hood, and Digby, since Cornwallis had eight

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14 Ibid., 43.

thousand men with provisions for ten thousand to the end of October. On the fifteenth, Graves reported that his damaged fleet was on its way back to Sandy Hook. He added sadly that the French controlled the Chesapeake, and that nothing could be gotten into Cornwallis except at night. His fleet was huddled together for fear that the French cruisers might cut out the straggling vessels.[15]

Graves finally arrived back in New York with his badly damaged fleet on September 19. It certainly was in no condition to set sail immediately convoying troops to Cornwallis and to attempt to break through the entire French fleet in the process. Because it took ten days to determine what repairs were needed, it was not until the twenty-third that ten ships were sent to the yards and work begun. That same day another council of war for the general officers was called by Clinton. They reached the rather obvious conclusion that the only thing that could save Cornwallis was a direct move by the army and navy. This necessitated the calling of another council at which the flag as well as the general officers were to be present. They met the next day and decided to put the troops on the "King's Ships," that is, the royal navy not the transports, and send word to Cornwallis that they would start south by October 5.

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15 Ibid., 43-44.

Admiral Dibgy arrived that same day at Sandy Hook with a small naval reenforcement which included Prince William Henry, destined to become King William IV of England. Almost a week after he returned to New York, Graves discovered that there was no lumber with which to repair his ships. Clinton had to send over the wood which was to be used for barracks at St. Lucia. Then Graves found that he did not have the combustibles to prepare fire ships, so Clinton had to open up the army ordnance stores. On the wenty-sixth, Prince William landed and the next two days were wasted in parties, parades, receptions, and speeches.

A letter from Cornwallis stating that if he were not speedily relieved, Clinton might expect to hear "the worst," reached New York on the twenty-third. Clinton interpreted this to mean that Cornwallis would be forced to retreat out of harm's way. Three days later it occurred to him that the "worst" might have another meaning, and he called a council of his general officers. They expressed the opinion that the "worst" meant that Cornwallis could not retreat, but would be forced to surrender. Clinton suggested a raid into New Jersey toward Philadelphia in his anxiety to do something. This plan was wisely rejected on the ground[16] that the army should not be away when the ships should be ready.

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16 *Ibid*., 45.

Digby and Hood did not want the army and navy putting out to sea without some idea of what they were to do when they reached Virginia. Therefore, they sought out Clinton and began asking questions. Digby wanted to know if the navy were merely to take the army within striking distance of Cornwallis and then retire to a safe distance. Clinton rejected any such notion, for how was he to feed that army without the fleet? Digby asked again, how was the fleet to get out if by some miracle they could get through de Grasse's augmented fleet? They also doubted if Graves would be able to sail on October 5 as he had promised. Clinton called another council to discuss these points. They agreed on only one thing, that, since Graves would not be ready by October 5, Cornwallis should be notified to that effect. Graves, confirming their fears, said that he would not be ready before October 8.

Adams gives this picture of the discord at British headquarters at New York:

> Captain William Cornwallis of H. M. seventy-four gun ship Canada was storming around because Graves's delays were imperiling his brother, Lord Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown. Major Damer, Germain's friend, was one of the officers who had been embarked, disembarked, and reembarked until he was decidedly acid in his comments on Clinton's incapacity and his failure to anticipate Washington's plans. William Smith wrote that Clinton was a domineering trifler surrounded by a staff of third-rate sycophants. Arnold was disgruntled on many counts--the more so when he saw his advice being ignored by the British as much as it ever had been by the Americans. Old General Robertson relieved the tension by

being "abandoned to Frivolity--he has Parties of Girls in the Fort Garden in the midst of his own Fears, and the anxieties of this Hour."[17]

Clinton called another council of the flag and general officers on September 30, when he learned that Graves could not sail before October 8. It was agreed that, even though the whole French fleet were between them and Cornwallis, they must sail. The question was when. It became apparent that they would again be delayed until October 12. When the navy men withdrew, the army men held a separate council at which it was decided to inform Cornwallis of the new delays without telling the navy that they had done so.

While the Americans tightened their lines about Yorktown, the work on the ships at New York went on. On October 3, Washington was within eleven hundred yards of Cornwallis's works. When Graves discovered that there was no powder fit for use on board his own flagship, the London, Clinton again patiently opened up the army stores.

The next day, Clinton and Graves got into an unfortunate argument. Graves began it by reopening an old question of whether the Sixty-ninth regiment belonged to the army or the navy.

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17 Ibid., 45-46.

Graves declared that it was needed for marine duty on Hood's squadron, while Clinton insisted it was his. Then Graves asked what was to be done with the troops embarked on the war vessels if it were impossible to relieve Cornwallis and Hood should have to return to his West India station. Was Hood supposed to take with him the troops carried on his vessels? Leaving the West Indies unguarded meant criticism in Parliament from the British investing classes. This seemed to bother Graves more than Hood, but then Hood, in Adam's opinion, was probably an abler man than his superior.[18]

On October 7, Clinton, writing to Graves, suggested that if Hood had to return to the West Indies in a hurry, empty transports should follow the fleet at sea. If they were unable to relieve Cornwallis, then Hood was to transfer the troops to the transport at sea. Graves said he would present the matter to a meeting of flag officers the next day. Digby and Clinton decided that a meeting of flag and general officers was necessary to iron out this difficulty. Digby was to see Graves and ask him to come to army headquarters the next day for such a meeting. Graves, apparently angered at what he thought was Clinton's attempt to order him around, had called a meeting of his own flag

18 Ibid., 46-47.

officers for that day. On the morning of the meeting, he sent a very stiff letter, written in the third person, in which he said to Clinton, "Don't wait the meeting for me, as I shall not be there."[19]

At this meeting, even Hood was convinced by Graves's behavior that he was going to make trouble and create difficulties for the army. Hood solved the problem of the troops on board his ships by saying that the relief of Cornwallis was of primary importance, and that the West Indies would have to take care of themselves. In reporting to a friend, Hood wrote this to a friend:

> I own to you I think very meanly of our present commanding officer (Graves). I know he is a "cunning" man, he may be a good theoretical man, but he is certainly a bad practical one, and most clearly proved himself on the fifth of last month to be unequal to the conducting of a great squadron.[20]

Clinton did not answer Graves's letter until the next day, when he answered with tact and civility that the apparent offense was a misconception.

Another council of generals was called to take up the question of what to do with an army and a fleet which the French would not permit to reach Yorktown. It was decided that they would land either at Newport News or on Monday's Point, on the

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19 Ibid., 47.

20 Ibid.

north shore of the York river. An examination of the map would show that it was impossible to land at either place. During the meeting, a shift in the wind made it impossible to sail, even if Graves had been ready.

The Americans were within six hundred yards of Cornwallis's works on October 11. They cut that down to three hundred yards on the twelfth. Heavy artillery was subjecting Yorktown to a furious bombardment. Clinton wasted the fourteenth in writing Cornwallis of his plans for landing the troops. He assured Germain that the army of relief had already embarked. On October 15, the fleet was still windbound at New York. That same day Cornwallis wrote sadly that it was too late, if Clinton came now he would risk losing his army too. Another council of war was held on the sixteenth at which the generals saw the futility of their landing plans. However, they were determined to see the matter through and land on the even more inaccessible Rappahannock. Cornwallis wrote to Washington the next day proposing a capitulation.

It was not until October 18 that the army and navy, Clinton and Graves, and the all important wind, decided to play together. The army for the relief of Yorktown proceeded only as far as Sandy Hook when the tide turned against it. The armament did not get to sea until the nineteenth. Clinton wrote to Germain, from Graves's flagship, that he would be in time to save

Cornwallis. However, in a private letter, he wrote in a way to show that he knew that he was embarked on a hopeless expedition. Even if they defeated de Grasse, whose fleet still outnumbered the British, they would still have to deal with the combined forces of Washington and Rochambeau. Clinton bitterly blamed Germain for failing to send men and supplies and for misleading him into believing that Rodney would take care of de Grasse.

Clinton and Graves reached the Chesapeake on October 24, only to find that Cornwallis had surrendered his army five days earlier.[21]

The French viewpoint of this campaign is described in diary form in The Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count De Grasse in 1781-1782, edited by J. D. G. Shea:

> September 1st, our troops got in boats and were landed without the slightest molestation from the forces composing the army of Lord Cornwallis, although he had a ship-of-the-line, three frigates, and several small vessels. The English general might have prevented us from doing anything, and even repulsed us, had he not despised our small army. At our first encampment it would have been annihilated if attacked. Three days after, it formed a junction with the army of M. de la Fayette, eighteen hundred strong, but who, at the same time, received a reenforcement of eighteen hundred more Americans, making in all seventy-six hundred. The English numbered eleven thousand men. When told that the French had landed, their general merely remarked that

21 Ibid., 48-49.

he had been long expecting them, and was glad that they had come. For all that, he soon had reason to repent it.[22]

The 2nd, the Aigrette arrived from the head of the bay with several prizes made by our different vessels, among others by the Glorieux, which gave chase to the Charon, of fifty guns, but could not get at her on account of the shoals, and which was burnt during the siege of Yorktown.

The 3rd, four of our vessels were detached, and stationed at the mouths of the rivers, by which we took a considerable number of merchantmen. We were in the greatest impatience in the consequence of the non-arrival of the Concorde, a frigate of M. de Barras' squadron, which was to announce to us the moment of the junction. In fact, we did not know what to make of the delay; and some of the navy officers, jealous of his merit, accused him of being a bad citizen, and of being unwilling to serve under M. de Grasse, because he had, he said, his option to remain at Boston or to join him. Already they wished to make him responsible for the blunders the admiral was to commit. In these circumstances M. de Barras will be seen giving a rare example of patriotism, which is unfortunately known only by name in France. We were in the greatest uncertainity as to what was to happen, when our two frigates on guard outside signalled sails in sight. These soon proved to be English, to the number of twenty-one men-of-war, two of them three-deckers, and five frigates. As a combat was deemed certain, orders were given to hoist sail.[23]

At half-past eleven, orders were given to slip our cables, and leave the bouy; at noon, to clear decks, and to form in order of speed. This, for a wonder, was pretty well executed, for every vessel had a hundred men in the boats, which had, as I have said, been landing our troops. The fleet formed in very bad order; for, to tell the truth, there were only four vessels in line, the Pluto, the Bourgoyne, the Marseillais, and the Diademe. The Reflechy and the Caton came next, half a league to the lee of the first, and the rest of the fleet a league more to the lee

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22 Shea, Editor, The Operations of the French Fleet Under the Count de Grasse in 1781-1782, 66.

23 Ibid., 67-68.

of the latter, the Ville de Paris in the centre; the English were in the best possible order, bowsprit to stern, bearing down on us, and consequently to our windward. Admiral Graves commanded, having under him Rear-Admirals Hood and Drake; they made an immense number of signals to each other before engaging us. The English vessel, the Terrible, which was pumping four pumps not feeling in a condition to take part in the action, kept to the windward of the enemy's line, athwart Drake, who signalled her to take her position, which she lost sometime in doing; but the rear-admiral soon persuaded her to take her place by sending her three cannon balls. Then it was that they tacked to the larboard as we did, and hoisted a great white flag astern; but they soon struck it and hoisted their own, It was then five minutes after three, and the head of our line was within rifle shot; and, in fact, entirely separate from the rest of the fleet; a disagreeable position. Then they poured their first broadside into the Reflechy, killing the captain. That vessel soon bore away, as well as the Cato, on which they kept up a brisk fire. Then M. de Grasse signalled to the vessels, at the head of the line, to bear away two points, which was impracticable, as they were fighting within gun-shot distance and would have got a very severe handing, had they presented the stern. The four ships in the van found themselves, consequently, cut off from the rest of the fleet, and constantly engaged with seven or eight vessels at close quarters; and the Diademe was constantly near Admiral Drake, who set fire to her at every shot, the wadding entering her side. This vessel was constantly engaged with two and sometimes three vessels. The English would not cut off our van, which they might perhaps have taken, and which they would, at all events, have rendered past repair. They contented themselves simply with cutting up that part of our fleet which kept up a distant fight, the sailors of the Ville de Paris having been the last to take part in the action. M. de Bougainville commanded our van; but he was too far to leeward and in no condition to relieve the Diademe, which could scarcely hold out, and was on the point of boarding the Princesse, commanded by the rear-admiral, who avoided her. Then he turned all his fire on the Terrible, which he riddled, so that the English had to sink her the next day. With all this, this vessel was utterly unable to keep up the fight, having only four thirty-six pounders and nine eighteens fit for use, and having all on board killed, wounded, or burnt. At this juncture M. de Chabert, commanding the St. Esprit, which had, for a long time, been engaged with the English admiral, and who was himself wounded, seeing the imminent

danger of the Diademe, hoisted sail and was soon in her wake then he opened a terrible fire that the gentlemen of Albion could not stand, and had to haul their wind. The contest was kept to the centre for half an hour longer. For our part we were so tired, that though within gun-shot, the vans no longer fired. At six, the battle closed.[24]

In this affair we lost four hundred men and twelve officers; the English came off with the loss of seven hundred men, and many persons of distinction. We had to go to the assistance of the Diademe immediately after the battle, as she had lost one hundred and twenty men and had no sails or rigging, having received one hundred and twenty-five balls in her hull, and twelve under the water line. We should have had to abandon her, had the sea run high, and do with as the English did with the Terrible. It is well to note that there were only twenty-two French vessels in this engagement, all badly manned. The enemy had twenty-one in line, one of fifty guns and some frigate.

The English committed a great fault in this action. As soon as we left the roads of the Chesapeake, they should have entered and anchored. They were before the wind, and by hugging Cape Charles they might easily have moored with a spring in the cable, before we were formed in line and ready to attack them; this would leave us no alternative, but to grapple them. Otherwise our army would have run the risk of being deprived of everything, perhaps have been captured even; our vessels, stationed at the York, Baltimore, and James rivers would have been taken, as well as all the boats of the fleet. Hood was in favor of running in here as we shall see him do at St. Christopher's, but Admiral Graves durst not. Another blunder that our enemies made was their neglecting to cut off our four vessels at the head, which they might perhaps have taken, or at least cut off from the rest of the fleet.[25]

There is no reproach to be made to M. de Grasse in this affair, except his not making in time the signals to take position in order of battle, and the blunder of not

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24 Ibid., 69-72.

25 Ibid., 72-73.

posting himself at the entrance of the bay and refusing to fight. He committed a grosser blunder of this kind afterwards; for, on this occasion, he might allege the fact that he was waiting for Commodore de Barras, and that he exposed him prodigously if he did not fight and force the enemy to open the entrance to the anchorage of the Chesapeake.

On the 6th, we did not lose sight of the English, and the wind having varied slightly, by maneuvering a great deal, and the English little, we gained the weather-gage.

The 7th we still kept them in sight. On this day they sank the Terrible. In the evening we lost sight of them, the sea beginning to run high and the wind increasing, our admiral made us steer for the Chesapeake. We did not, however, make Cape Henry till the eleventh; and at the same time we saw two English frigates, the Iris and Richmond, each of forty guns, chased by the Glorieux, as she came up with the former and engaged her at pistol shot distance; but she had to haul off, she got so hardly used. Seeing that they held out so, several of our good sailors got at their heels; the rest of the fleet joined, and we poured in over two hundred balls before they struck. We made the Count de Barras, who had been at anchor in the roads for two days, start out two vessels of his division, as he could not make out which nation we belonged to. He had witnessed the affair of the fifth, but being unable to distinguish the French fleet, he had anchored in the roads, where we found him. We dropped our anchors at six or seven in the evening, well satisfied with our prizes, and especially to get our boats again, which joined us this day, bringing back our best men.

The 15th there came on board our fleet M. de Custine, a colonel of the regiment of Saintonge, commanding the van of General Washington's army, composed of a thousand French grenadiers, and as many American volunteers. He proceeded to join M. De la Fayette, and announced the speedy arrival of the combined armies of France and America, with all necessaries of war, and provisions; for our troops suffered for want of the latter.

On the 18th, the vessels bearing our soldiers arrived by the Baltimore river, and the greater part of the army, coasting along, and bringing from Philadelphia all that was needed, and even more; for plenty always reigned in the

camps, although this country had been completely devastated by the English. The American general came on board the Ville de Paris, where he had a long conference with M. de Grasse, and the other two naval commanders. On his departure he was saluted with thirteen guns. He joined his army, twenty thousand strong, including Rochambeau's and Lafayette's armies. I think that when Lord Cornwallis was told of Mr. Washington's arrival, he did not say, "so much the better," and must have laughed on the wrong side of his mouth.[26]

The combined army having invested the English, they retired to Yorktown, posting a large detachment at Gloucester, a town on the other side of the river, and immediately opposite York. The enemy had already put these two places in a respectable state of defence, and four redoubts protected the approaches. They thought proper, however, to evacuate the smaller two, which were, too, farther off. On the 20th, Lord Cornwallis wished to cross the river, but was prevented by the fire of our frigates and other small craft, chiefly prizes taken on that coast. As the wind became very violent, M. de Grasse ran his fleet into the bay and anchored on a line, with springs on the cable. We all made our repairs then more at ease and got water more conveniently. It is worth remarking that we got it only by diggin four or five feet in the sand. This country is so well wooded that I saw on board the Diademe a piece of timber costing twenty-eight francs, measuring thirty feet long and twenty inches square. You may judge from this that we all made our repairs easily and without sparing.

On the 30th, M. de Grasse disembarked six hundred marines from the vessels to reenforce M. de Choisy's corps. They repulsed the enemy, and compelled them to retire to Gloucester. The commanders had established such good communication that we heard from the camp every day, and were even near enough to see what was going on; for we witnessed the spectacle of the conflagration of an English fifty-gun ship, set on fire by the French battery.

On the 18th of October, M. de Barras was sent to the camp in the admiral's place, and took part in the capitulation of the positions of Yorktown and Gloucester, and of

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26 Ibid., 73-76.

Lord Cornwallis's army, composed of eleven thousand men, an army which had committed atrocities.[27]

The surrender at Yorktown cannot be traced to any single cause. Adams states it in this way:

> No one who has surveyed these sources can fail to be impressed with the fact that the surrender at Yorktown, like most historic events, can not be traced to any single cause. It was the result of interacting causes. Germain's wrong-headed favoritism and his failure to support his principal commander; Cornwallis's mistaken belief that a British victory was an American defeat; Clinton's failure to divine the plans of Washington in time; the condition of Graves's fleet after the battle with de Grasse off the capes of the Chesapeake; Rodney's illness; Clinton's blindness; Graves's incompetence; Hood's failure to keep track of de Grasse--all these explain something. Nothing, however, can detract from the extraordinary patience and strategy of George Washington, who after watching ill luck for five years, at the last managed a campaign in which every essential element functioned on time and in time. This story might well be entitled, 'When Britain failed to muddle through.'[28]

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27 _Ibid_., 76-78.

28 Adams, "A View of Cornwallis's Surrender at Yorktown," 49.

CHAPTER VII

THE TREATY OF PARIS, 1783

By the terms of the Treaty of Paris, 1783, which ended the War of the American Revolution, the islands of the West Indies were returned to their former owners. The one exception to this was the tiny island of Tobago which was ceded by the British to France. This seems to be very little compensation for the aid sent through them to the American rebels.

The secret of American success in the War of the Revolution was cooperation. More specifically, it was Franco-American cooperation. No permanent success was possible, no permanent success was achieved, until practical coordination of effort was brought about between the allied enemies of Great Britain.[1]

The treaties signed in 1783 affected primarily four nations: Spain, France, England, and the United States. From

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1 Elizabeth S. Kite, "The Significance of the Treaty," _The Treaty of Paris_ of 1783, Washington, D. C., 1935, 25.

the first, Spain had lacked the necessary faith, disinterestedness, and consequently the vision, to enter wholeheartedly into the Alliance. At the peace, signed by her and France with England, she was forced to forego the chief object that had brought her to tardy entrance into the war. That cherished object was the reconquest of Gibraltar.[2] To compensate her for this loss Spain was allowed to retain Minorca and have all Florida, east and west, and Great Britain would keep Gibraltar.[3]

Before the Dutch could arrive at any agreement with the British, the other parties had long since arranged final terms. In vain, the Dutch, with only perfunctory support from the French were clamoring for the restitution of all captured colonies, for outright recognition of the principles of the Armed Neutrality by Great Britain, and for damages for captures during the war in violation of them. The British, on their part, firmly demanded either Trincomalee, on the island of Ceylon, or Negapatan, on the southeast coast of India opposite; the right to navigate freely among the Dutch possessions of the East Indies; and the

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2 Ibid., 32.

3 Bemes, The Diplomacy of the American Revolution, 246.

humiliating salute of the British flag on the high seas by all the Dutch vessels, as before the war. Finally, Vergennes notified the Dutch plenipotentiaries that he could wait no longer for the relief from the financial expenditures that would come to France with a final peace, that France and her allies would sign the definitive treaties on September 3rd. The Dutch were forced to capitulate.[4]

Looking at the final texts of the French and Spanish treaties, we do not find that Great Britain, once accepting the inevitable loss of the American colonies, fared so badly. She was required tc cede the relatively unimportant island of Tobago to France, but she received back all the other conquered possessions: Granada and the Grenadines, Dominica, St. Christopher, Nevis, Montserrat. She yielded to France the slave-trading preserve of the Senegal River, but retained one on the Gambia. She relinquished St. Pierre and Miquelon to provide France with fishing bases in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but clouded the cession with declarations making it difficult to fit them for naval bases. She continued French fishing rights on stipulated coasts of Newfoundland, but in doing this she was recognizing, in new waters, no more than France already has possessed in others before

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4 *Ibid.*, 251-252.

the war. In India the articles of peace were astonishingly favorable to Great Britain. France gained no more than she had before 1778. In fact, the British were able to conclude peace on the principle that they first proposed, the independence of America and the Treaty of Paris of 1763 as a fundamental basis, with a few exchanges, and minor cessions in North America and the eastern Mediterranean. To Spain, Great Britain gave up Minorca and the two Floridas, and agreed that the British wood-cutting settlements on the "Spanish Continent" should be restricted to a certain portion of the Honduran coast, between the Belize and Hondo rivers, and this without derogation to Spanish sovereignity there; but George III retained Gibraltar and with it control of the entrance to the Mediterranean so valuable in those future wars when that sea was to be of vast importance to the preservation of the British Empire.[5]

The crowning result of the Treaty was England's unconditional acknowledgment of American independence. Because of conquests in the northwest under George Rogers Clark, the United States secured much additional territory, and though it took another short conflict, that of 1812, to shake loose England's

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5 Ibid., 253.

hold on those remote forts and to bring her to respect neutral shipping, yet for more than a century mutual goodfellowship has existed between England and the United States.[6]

As for France, restored self-respect, readmittance to her place of leadership in the councils of Europe, increased prosperity at home through a widened sphere of activity and more liberal trade regulations, compensated her for the sacrofoces made. Moreover, this heightened prestige, acquired by France through the happy peace of 1783, so consolidated the nation that she weathered the storm which threatened to destory her after 1789. After successfully repelling all invaders, she was able to reestablish herself on lines compatible with the advancing civilization of Europe in which she again took her place as leader.[7]

As a result of the peace of 1783 the age-old enmity of France and England gradually abated. Mutual respect took its place, and today we see the two nations facing together the problems that remain unsolved in the heart of Europe.[8]

As for the relations of America and France, the Comte de Vergennes from the first had worked not for gratitude, knowing

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6 Kite, "The Significance of the Treaty", 32.

7 Ibid., 33.

8 Ibid.

full well that this is never to be expected from any nation, least of all from republics. Instead, he worked for an abiding peace.

> It has been said that to understand is to prophesy. Looking back over a period of a hundred and fifty years may we not speak with confidence for the future? May we not say that no matter what passing clouds may lower, the peace and goodfellowship between France and the United States can never be broken by any war, because in the beginning the foundation stones were laid upon the eternal principles of justice and truth, and were cemented by faith, generosity, mutual understanding, and goodwill.[9]

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9 *Ibid.*

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

From the very beginning of the Revolutionary War, it was quite evident that no success could be achieved without outside help. Since the colonists could not obtain what was needed from England, they had to look elsewhere for supplies. When the Navigation Acts prevented them from openly trading with the neighboring islands of the West Indies, the Americans learned to carry on this trade illegally. It seemed only natural, therefore, that they should turn in their need to the French and Dutch West Indies.

One of the greatest needs was that of gunpowder. Because the colonies did not have the materials necessary for its manufacture, they had to import it from the West Indies. Almost all of the gunpowder imported during the first months of the war came through the island of St. Eustatius from Holland.

This tiny island, located in the middle of French and British possessions, was not restricted in its trade by the Dutch mother country. It was, therefore, able to trade with all

nations and became the Dutch emporium in the West Indies. Gunpowder and other supplies were sent to St. Eustatius and there agents of the Thirteen Colonies would buy them and send it where it was needed. The island was also used to relay messages from colonial representatives in Europe to the Continental Congress. Colonial ships were allowed to anchor and trade at the island. One of them, the _Andrew Doria_, saluted the fort on leaving the harbor and had the salute returned. This was more than the British could stand. When they received no satisfaction for this insult and for its protest against the illegal trade, England declared war.

Before they knew of the declaration of war, the Dutch on St. Eustatius were ordered to surrender by the British admiral, Lord Rodney. Because of his desire for reveng and profit, Rodney spent more than three months stripping the island of all its wealth. This worked to the advantage of the colonists, for it enabled De Grasse to join the rest of the French fleet which was going to the aid of Washington in the Battle of Yorktown.

The French West Indies, too, played a very definite part in the Revolutionary War. In the first place, it was the fear of losing her possessions in the West Indies which brought France into the war on the side of the colonists. Because the outcome of the war was very doubtful, the French did not immediately give official recognition to the Americans. For this

reason, it became necessary to devise an elaborate scheme for sending secret aid to the colonies. According to Beaumarchais's plan, help, both arms and money, was sent to the colonies under the name of Hortalez and Company. Supplies were to be sent to this company in the West Indies and then sent to the colonies. When, at last, success was assured, France signed a Treaty of Alliance with the colonies in 1778.

After the treaty was signed, France could send aid openly to the Americans. Part of this official aid was the French West Indian fleet. The fleet accomplished very little in the way of a major victory; its only accomplishment was that it engaged the British fleet in a few skirmishes and kept it away from the North American mainland. The greatest contribution of the French fleet to the success of the Revolution was the naval support it gave to Washington at the Battle of Yorktown. Without this support it is doubtful if the siege of Yorktown would have been successful.

With the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown British hopes of regaining the lost colonies vanished. The treaty which ended the war was signed at Paris in 1783. One would suppose that the British would want to punish the islands in the West Indies for the secret aid, as well as the smuggling and illegal trade, which they gave to the colonists. However, this was not the case. With the exception of the island of Tobago, the West

Indies returned to the status quo of 1776. This seemed very little reward for their great help.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Consuela Mary McKee has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

July 1, 1951
Date

J. W. Jacobsen
Signature of Adviser