

WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS

Francois Jean, Marquis de Chastellux

1780

...At length, after riding two miles along the right flank of the army, and after passing thick woods on the right, I found myself in a small plain, where I saw a handsome farm; a small camp which seemed to cover it, a large tent extended in the court, and several wagons round it, convinced me that this was his Excellency's quarter; for it is thus Mr. Washington is called in the army, and throughout America. M. de la Fayette was in conversation with a tall man, five foot nine inches high, (about five foot ten inches and a half English) of a noble and mild countenance. It was the General himself. I was soon off horseback, and near him. The compliments were short; the sentiments with which I was animated, and the good wishes he testified for me were not equivocal. He conducted me to his house, where I found the company still at table, although the dinner had been long over. He presented me to the Generals Knox, Waine, Howe, &c. and to his family, then composed of Colonels Hamilton and Tilgman, his Secretaries and his Aides de Camp, and of Major Gibbs, commander of his guards; for in England and America, the Aides de Camp, Adjutants and other officers attached to the General, form what is called his family. A fresh dinner was prepared for me, and mine; and the present was prolonged to keep me company. A few glasses of claret and madeira accelerated the acquaintances I had to make, and I soon felt myself at my ease near the greatest and the best of men. The goodness and benevolence which characterize him, are evident from every thing about him; but the confidence he gives birth to, never occasions improper familiarity; for the sentiment he inspires has the same origin in every individual, a profound esteem for his virtues, and a high opinion of his talents. About nine o'clock the general officers withdrew to their quarters, which were all at a considerable distance; but as the General wished me to stay in his own house, I remained some time with him, after which he conducted me to the chamber prepared for my Aides de Camp and me. This chamber occupied the fourth part of his lodgings; he apologized to me for the little room he had in his disposal, but always with a noble politeness, which was neither complimentary nor troublesome.

At nine the next morning they informed me that his Excellency was come down into the parlour. This room served at once as audience chamber, and dining-room. I immediately went to wait on him, and found breakfast prepared....

Whilst we were at breakfast, horses were brought, and General Washington gave orders for the army to get under arms at the head of the camp. The weather was very bad, and it had already began raining; we waited half an hour; but the General seeing that it was more likely to increase than to diminish, determined to get on horseback. Two horses were brought him, which were a present from the State of Virginia; he mounted one himself, and gave me the other. Mr. Lynch and Mr. de Montesquieu, had each of them, also, a very handsome blood horse, such as we could not find at Newport for any money. We repaired to the artillery camp, where General Knox received us: the artillery was numerous, and the gunners, in very fine order, were formed in parade, in the foreign manner, that is, each gunner at his battery, and ready to fire. The General was so good as to apologize to me for the cannon not firing to salute me; he said, that having put all the troops on the other side of the river in motion, and apprized them that he might himself march along the right bank, he was afraid of giving the alarm, and of deceiving the detachments that were out. We gained, at length, the right of the army, where we saw the Pennsylvania line; it was composed of two brigades, each forming three battalions, without reckoning the light infantry, which were detached with the Marquis de la Fayette. General Waine, who commanded it, was on horseback, as well as the Brigadiers and Colonels. They were all well mounted: the officers also had a very military air; they were well ranged, and saluted very gracefully. Each brigade had a band of music; the march they were then playing was the Huron. I knew that this line, though in want of many things, was the best clothed in the army; so that his Excellency asking me whether I would proceed, and see the whole army, or go by the shortest road to the camp of the Marquis, I accepted the latter proposal. The troops ought to thank me for it, for the rain was falling with redoubled force; they were dismissed, therefore, and we arrived heartily wet at the Marquis de la Fayette's quarters, where I warmed myself with great pleasure, partaking, from time to time, of a large bowl of grog, which is stationary on his table, and is presented to every officer who enters....

The rain spared us no more at the camp of the Marquis, than at that of the main army; so that our review being finished, I saw with pleasure General Washington set off in a gallop to regain his quarters. We reached them as soon as the badness of the roads would permit us. At our return we found a good dinner ready, and about twenty guests, among whom were Generals Howe and Sinclair. The repast was in the English fashion, consisting of eight or ten

large dishes of butcher's meat, and poultry, with vegetables of several sorts, followed by a second course of pastry, comprized under the two denominations of pies and puddings. After this the cloth was taken off, and apples and a great quantity of nuts were served, which General Washington usually continues eating for two hours, toasting and conversing all the time. These nuts are small and dry, and have so hard a shell, (hickory nuts) that they can only be broken by the hammer; they are served half open, and the company are never done picking and eating them. The conversation was calm and agreeable; his Excellency was pleased to enter with me into the particulars of some of the principal operations of the war, but always with a modesty and conciseness, which proved that it was from pure complaisance he mentioned it...

Marquis de Chastellux. *Travels in North-America, In the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782.* (London: 1787), I:112–125.