



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. IV.

OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, APRIL 4, 1870.

No. 14.

THE REVOLT

OF THE

British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Whilst the British General commanding in chief in North America assisted by the Admiral and his superior in the West Indies were allowing themselves to be outmanœuvred, Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown was busily engaged in his own way in facilitating the accomplishing the designs of the French and American Generals; he had allowed the Marquis de Lafayette to maintain a position on the Chickahominy within striking distance of his lines in such a situation that surprise and total defeat were matters of certainty to an enterprising partisan, and he possessed in Lieut. Colonels Tarleton and Simcoe the very beau ideals of dashing Guerrilla leaders, men fitted physically, morally, and intellectually for the deeds of daring requiring patient endurance, great powers of command and a thorough scientific knowledge of their profession, enhanced by practical experience, with a force trained to follow; but the only use he could make of those advantages were to shut them up within the badly designed and worse executed fortifications of Yorktown and Gloucester.

On the 28th August the Guadalupe of 28 guns was despatched to New York, but on the 29th she encountered the French fleet of 28 sail of the line off the capes of Virginia and barely escaped by superior sailing, while the Loyalist, a slow 20 gun ship, was captured by the French van after a severe struggle. On the 30th the whole French fleet from the West Indies under the Comte de Grasse entered the Chesapeake and proceeded at once to block up York River with three large ships and some frigates while the principal part of the fleet was moored in Lynhaven bay.

Intelligence of the arrival of the French West India fleet was conveyed to General Washington at Philadelphia and to the Marquis de la Fayette at the Chickahomany, who at once advanced to the Green Springs on

the 3rd September to cover the disembarkation of a brigade of 2000 men which the fleet brought from the West Indies—this service being effected by the James River on the 6th Sept. the combined French and Americans were moved to Williamsburgh.

The British fleet under Admiral Greaves having examined the entrance to the Delaware, and not finding the French fleet there, proceeded to the Chesapeake, off which they arrived on the morning of the 5th September; the advanced frigates announced by signal that the enemy's fleet were at anchor within the capes, and the wind being fine the British fleet bore down to bring it to action.

The entrance to the Chesapeake is formed by Cape Charles on the North and Cape Henry on the South, between these are shoals known as the middle ground; the French fleet were anchored without any order in Lynhaven bay; just within Cape Henry the British fleet were running free with wind at N. E. standing for Cape Charles, and when abreast of the middle ground the rear division by signal bore away for the enemy. It will be thus seen that they had not only the weather gauge but the advantage of attacking a foe totally unprepared, and who had to slip their cables and to beat out against a head wind in the face of an approaching adversary whose movements if conducted with ordinary prudence ought to have resulted in the capture of one-third of the whole force, the crippling of another third by the vessels fouling alone, and the driving away of the remainder. So great was the confusion that the rear of the French fleet got out to sea first; a squadron of seven sail actually stood across the van of the British line, thus voluntarily affording the opportunity for cutting them off, but instead of this the British Admiral wore round on the larboard tack and formed line parallel to the advanced division, thus allowing the French to get clear out to sea. At four in the afternoon an action commenced which lasted for two hours, in which the British fleet was severely handled, losing 90 killed and 246 wounded, and were so thoroughly disabled that they could not renew the action, but Admiral Graves preserved the weather

gauge. Both fleets continued in sight of each other for five days during which the wind changed so that the much coveted advantage of the weather gauge remained with the French. At length the Count de Grasse bore away for the Chesapeake where he found that M. de Barras with the Rhode Island squadron and fourteen transports laden with heavy artillery and all kinds of military stores necessary for a siege had arrived while those extraordinary naval manœuvres were taking place.

The British Admiral sought the ordinary refuge of all incompetent commanders—a council of war, and, in pursuance of its advice, determined to return to New York before the equinox to refit. Having lost a battle by his stupidity and being obliged to destroy the Terrible, 74 gun ship, from the damages received in action, she was set on fire and burnt on 11th Sept.

While the British Admiral was bringing disgrace and disaster on his country, the British General at New York was exhibiting his incapacity by such peurile efforts as an expedition to New London in Connecticut, amusing himself with the idea that a diversion in that quarter would compel the Franco-American force to turn aside from its certain success at Yorktown. A heavy division of troops under the command of General Arnold, was landed three miles from New London on 6th September, and after a gallant resistance, the forts covering the town were carried, several ships and the town burnt, and many more escaped up the Norwich river. The whole operation having no connection with or influence on the issue of the contest, would in no way cover its own cost; it was the last occasion on which Sir Henry Clinton had an opportunity of putting his peculiar strategy to the test of practice, happily for his country if that period had arrived when his first essay was made.

In the meantime the isolated British army at Yorktown received intelligence that Generals Washington and Rochambeau with a large body of French and American troops were preparing to form a junction with La Fayette, by descending the Elk river under