

Liberty Was His Cause



Lafayette with Gen. Washington at Valley Forge.

Born 200 years ago this week, Lafayette became a champion of freedom on two continents.

by Jerry Klein

FRIDAY WILL BE the 200th birthday anniversary of Marie Joseph Paul Yves Gilbert du Motier—better known to Americans as Lafayette.

This son of a French nobleman-soldier won fame in the American Revolution for volunteering, in 1777 at the age of 19, "to serve the United States with all possible zeal, without any pension or particular allowance . . ." Here is some of the lore of Lafayette:

When Lafayette first joined the American Army, he was an experienced officer compared with many of the untrained recruits, who feared the coming of the Frenchman. Yet upon his arrival he said, "I have come not to teach, but to learn."

It was from the Duke of Gloucester—brother of King George—that Lafayette first learned of America's struggle for independence. It was at a dinner party given in 1776 when he was stationed at Metz.

Sailing for America in 1777, Lafayette wrote to his wife: "The happiness of America is intimately connected with the happiness of all mankind; she is destined to become the safe and venerable asylum of virtue, honesty, tolerance, equality, and peaceful liberty."

Gen. Nathaniel Greene wrote to Washington: "The Marquis is determined to be in the way of danger." He led troops into the fiercest fights at the Battle of Brandywine Creek and suffered a gunshot wound in the leg.

After encouraging France to come to America's aid in winning her independence, Lafayette returned home a national hero. But he advocated moderation and non-violence during the French Revolution of 1789, and was imprisoned by his fellow countrymen for several years.

The last surviving general of the American Revolution, Lafayette again visited the United States as a national guest in 1824.

During this national tour, a gold watch given him by George Washington was stolen in Nashville, Tenn. It turned up in a Louisville, Ky., pawnshop in 1874 and was redeemed for \$300 by Congress, which sent it to Lafayette's grandson.

Lafayette died in 1834 and was buried in the Picpus Cemetery of Paris. Over his grave was placed a mound of earth from the state of Virginia.

On July 4, 1917, an officer of the American Expeditionary Force stood before the grave and declared: "America has joined forces with the Allied Powers, and what we have of blood and treasure are yours. Therefore, it is with loving pride we drape the colors in tribute of respect to this citizen of your great republic, and here and now in the presence of the illustrious dead, we pledge our hearts and our honor in carrying this war to a successful issue. Lafayette, we are here!"

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