



French Alliance Day

On May 6, 1778 at Valley Forge, officers and soldiers of the Continental Army marched by brigade to the “Grand Parade” at the center of camp and fired salutes honoring the recently announced alliance with France. Artillery and musket salutes were followed by “Huzzas!” for the King of France, the friendly European powers, and the United States of America.

The day continued with general rejoicing throughout the army, as all recognized what the entry of France into the war could mean for the cause of American independence. Indeed, the celebration was of such an extent that Colonel Alexander Scammel wrote, “The general joy seemed to create a forgetfulness of past toils and fatigues.”

France, a long-time rival of Britain, had seized the opportunity offered by the American Revolution to gain revenge on her old enemy. From the moment the shooting broke out at Lexington and Concord in 1775, France had assisted the American cause with military supplies, money, and other support. While at first providing assistance in secret, the French decided after three years of warfare that the time had come for open involvement.

In February of 1778, treaties of commerce and alliance were signed by members of the French government and the American delegation in Paris. Ratification of the treaties by Congress on May 4 led to the Continental Army celebration at Valley Forge on May 6. The young French nobleman, the Marquis de Lafayette, already a Major General in the Continental Army, wrote, “My country has at least taken action. I truly love the American cause with the greatest enthusiasm.”

Watch as an artillery crew fires a salute on the Grand Parade ground on the 229th anniversary of French Alliance, May 6 2007.