



George Washington's Great Gamble: And the Sea Battle That Won the American Revolution

James Nelson

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One shining yet overlooked moment that changed the course of the Revolutionary War

In the opening months of 1781, General George Washington feared his army would fail to survive another campaign season. The spring and summer only served to reinforce his despair, but in late summer the changing circumstances of war presented a once-in-a-war opportunity for a French armada to hold off the mighty British navy while his own troops with French reinforcements drove Lord Cornwallis's forces to the Chesapeake. The Battle of the Capes would prove the only time the French ever fought the Royal Navy to a draw, and for the British army it was a catastrophe. Cornwallis confidently retreated to Yorktown, expecting to be evacuated by a British fleet that never arrived. In the end he had no choice but to surrender. Although the war sputtered on another two years, its outcome was never in doubt after Yorktown.

General Washington's Great Gamble is the story of the greatest naval engagement of the American Revolution. It is also a study in leadership, good and bad, political machinations and the wild, unpredictable circumstances that led to the extraordinary confluence of military and naval resources at that time and place.

Topics include:

Looking South; Sea Power for the General; Arnold; Copper Bottoms; Head of Elk; The Battle of Cape Henry; An Attempt to Conquer Virginia; Greene and Cornwallis: Looking North; The American Command; The Battle of Guilford Courthouse; Pyrrhic Victory; Reinforcing the Chesapeake; "[T]he enemy have turned so much of their attention to the Southern States..."; The Battle of Blandford; The British War at Sea; Juncture; "I am inclined to think well of York..."; The Promise of a Fleet; The Battle of Green Springs; The March on New York; An Operation to the Southward; The Arrival of De Grasse; The Battle of the Capes; Cornwallis Surrenders

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