

Guide to the Documents Relating to the French Participation in the American Revolution

GEN MSS 308



by Kathryn Rawdon

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 308

TITLE: Documents relating to the French participation in the American Revolution

DATES: 1768-1793

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.4 linear feet (1 box) + 1 portfolio

LANGUAGE: Materials chiefly in French, some documents in Spanish and English.

SUMMARY: Collection consists of documents relating to France's secret and open role on behalf of the American Revolution. Includes letters and documents related to Philippe Charles Jean Baptiste Tronson du Coudray; material on the mobilization of the French fleet, including letters and reports from Pierre-Louis, Chevalier de Monteil, Antoine de Sartine, comte d'Alby, Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, Marquis de Castries, and Bernardo de Gálvez; papers related to France's role in the Caribbean and its alliance with the Spanish forces, including several reports by Diego José Navarro; French rule of Santo Domingo after the Treaty of Paris; and other materials including documents related to naval confrontations between the French and British fleets, the supplying of Rochambeau's army, the termination of hostilities, including an assessment of France's gains and losses, the repatriation of French troops, and Franco-American commerce after the revolution.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased in 1990 from the William Reese Company on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund. Many of the documents are stamped "Archives du Mal. [Maréchal] de Castries" on the back.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Restricted Fragile Papers contains fragile originals, which may only be seen with the permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies have been substituted in the main files for the originals.

Conditions Governing Use

Documents Relating to the French Participation in the American Revolution are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Documents Relating to the French Participation in the American Revolution. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Biographical / Historical

This collection contains papers which relate to a number of individuals important to France's involvement in the American Revolution. Brief biographical sketches of three of the most prominently represented individuals, Philippe Charles Jean Baptiste Tronson du Coudray, Pierre-Louis, Chevalier de Monteil, and Diego José Navarro, are provided below.

PHILIPPE CHARLES JEAN BAPTISTE TRONSON DU COUDRAY (1738-1777)

Born in Reims, France, in 1738, Philippe Charles Jean Baptiste Tronson du Coudray was originally trained as a mining engineer. He became a lieutenant of artillery in 1760, and his success in the Corsican Campaign of 1768-69 brought him to the attention of the general and military theoretician Jean Baptiste Vaquette de Gribeauval. When France began converting its artillery to the new Gribeauval system, Du Coudray was assigned to screen the nation's stockpiles for supplies which could be sent to the Americans to aid in their revolutionary efforts. Although he did not hold a high-ranking position, prior to being sent to the Americas he was given the lofty title of "General of Artillery and Ordnance", and was given command of the Corps of Artillery and Engineers. This incurred the resentment of American generals, who refused to serve under the command of such an inexperienced officer. To resolve this conflict, the American Congress proposed to strip Du Coudray of much of his authority, but offered him the fabricated title of "Inspector General of Ordnance and Military Manufacturies". He declined the title, stating that he would serve the American efforts in any capacity they saw fit to give him, and was given a regular captain's commission. In 1777, his rather checkered career was ended when the horse he was riding onto a boat bolted into the Schuylkill River, drowning Du Coudray. During his military service, Du Coudray worked with such figures as Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Silas Deane, and Benjamin Franklin, and he succeeded in bringing to American shores some of the first ships from France to participate in the Revolution. After his death, Congress reinstated his original high-ranking title, and gave him a burial with full honors of war.

PIERRE-LOUIS, CHEVALIER DE MONTEIL

Pierre Louis, Chevalier de Monteil, began his naval service in 1741. He entered the Sous-Gardes de la Marine in 1746, and was later named Major d'Escadre du Roi. He assisted in France's efforts against the British in Newfoundland in 1762, and during the 1770's served in the Russo-Turkish War. In 1776 he began service in the waters off of Santo Domingo in the West Indies. During the American Revolution, Monteil had command of *Le Conquérant* along with several other ships in the West Indies, and assisted in the taking of Pensacola and St. Christophe (Saint Kitts). In 1781, while in command of *Le Neptune*, Monteil became ill and returned to France. Afterwards, he used his extensive military experience to write several tracts or memoranda of use to the French Navy. DIEGO JOSÉ NAVARRO

Diego José Navarro, a native of Spain, was an administrator and military officer in the Spanish colonies, and commander of the Spanish fleet in Havana. He served as Captain General of Cuba from 1777-1782, and in that capacity he was the regional military commander of the Spanish territories of Cuba, Louisiana and the Caribbean Islands. As such, he furnished much of the military aid which Spain made available to America.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of letters and documents related to France's participation in the American Revolution, French military efforts during this period, and the French presence in the Americas after the war. The collection is organized into four series. Materials are in French unless otherwise noted in the box and folder list.

[*Series I, Papers Relating to Du Coudray*](#) (1768-1778), contains letters and documents written by and about Philippe Charles Jean Baptiste Tronson du Coudray. These document the developing situation in the Americas, and generally concern the preparation of artillery, orders given to his men, and plans for Du Coudray's arrival in the Americas. Most of the letters are addressed to one or the other of Du Coudray's two close friends and adjutants, Mssrs. de Goy and [Bellecour?] Le Brun. Le Brun, like Du Coudray, was greatly interested in military engineering and had been a professor at the *École des Mines* at Verdun. After Du Coudray's death, he took it upon himself to petition Congress for payment to the family. One letter to an unidentified recipient, dated Oct. 6, [1774] (Box 1, folder 5), mentions an association with the duc de Chartres, later Louis Philippe Joseph, duc d'Orléans, the future Philippe Égalité.

Two letters from Du Coudray's brother, Tronson du Jardin, refer to his efforts to obtain the money due his late brother by the United States Congress. Le Brun was unable to achieve this because he was not a legal representative of Du Coudray. Another document, dated Oct. 29, 1778, summarizes the state of affairs following Du Coudray's death. Also included is one document from Congress detailing the status of compensation for French soldiers.

[*Series II, Mobilization of the French Fleet*](#) (1779-1782), illustrates the effort to prepare and strengthen French naval forces destined for America and the Caribbean. The letters and documents in this series discuss the gathering of naval forces in that area, French policy as regards those forces in the Americas, and contain orders from French officials to those in command of the naval forces. Several of the documents are written by or about the Chevalier de Monteil.

[*Series III, France in the Caribbean*](#) (1780-1793), consists of materials relating to the Franco-Spanish campaign in the West Indies, and to the French rule of the island of Santo Domingo after the Treaty of Paris. Documents include intelligence reports regarding naval activities in the West Indies, and other documents regarding the alliance between the French and Spanish fleets. Materials related to the establishment of French rule in Santo Domingo include documents regarding economic, political and social concerns, including discussion of the treatment of enslaved peoples.

[*Series IV, Other Papers*](#) (1781-1793), consists of material related to other aspects of French military, political and economic efforts during this period. Included are accounts of two naval confrontations between French and British forces outside the Caribbean area, as well as orders issued to the quartermaster of Rochambeau's army for his passage through France to raise supplies for the army. Also included are materials regarding the termination of hostilities, and evaluating France's gains and losses, as well as those of Spain and America. Twenty ship manifests document the repatriation of troops from three French

regiments (Armagnac, Dillon and Auxerrois) from various points in the French West Indies to Lorient, France in 1783. Also included are materials illustrating the development of Franco-American commerce, including the establishment of a system of "paquebots" or packet-boats between France and the newly independent states.

Collection Contents

Series I: Papers Relating to Du Coudray, 1768-1778

0.1 linear feet (.25 box)

LETTERS FROM DU COUDRAY

b. 1, f. 1-2	Letters to Le Brun Includes: one list entitled "Etat des Plans que j'ai remis à M. de Ruyg[?]" Includes: Partial manuscript copies	1768-77
b. 1, f. 3-4	Letters to De Goy Includes: Partial manuscript copies	1776-77, n.d.
b. 1, f. 5-6	Letters to unidentified recipients Includes: Partial manuscript copies	1774-77

OTHER DOCUMENTS

b. 1, f. 7	"Etat Explicatif des effets d'Artillerie, des officiers, bas officiers et soldats d'Artillerie qui composent l'équipage aux ordres de M. du Coudray" Includes: a list of men and equipment embarking from various parts, with specific names, ranks, and salaries	[1776 Nov?]
b. 1, f. 8	2 ALS from Tronson du Jardin to unidentified recipients, Reims	1778
b. 1, f. 9	Document summarizing the state of affairs following Du Coudray's death	1778 Oct 29
b. 1, f. 10	Memorandum of the Continental Congress, signed by Charles Thomson, Secretary to the Continental Congress Regarding compensation of French officers In English	1777 Nov 14

Series II: Mobilization of the French Fleet, 1779-1782*0.1 linear feet (.25 box)*

b. 1, f. 11	"Nouvelles de Brest" Intelligence report	1779 Apr 30
b. 1, f. 12	ALS from Monteil to "Mon general", from on board Le Conquérant	1779 Jul 24
b. 1, f. 13	ALS from Antoine de Sartine, comte d'Alby to Monteil, Versailles	1779 Dec 31
b. 1, f. 14	ALS from Sartine to Luc Urbain de Bouëxic, comte de Guichen for Monteil, Versailles	1780 May 12
b. 1, f. 15	ALS from Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, Marquis de Castries, successor to Sartine, to Monteil, who is at Martinique Telling him of his replacement of Sartine as Secretary of State for the Marine	1780 Oct 16
b. 1, f. 16	ALS from the Chevalier de St. Hipolite to Monteil[?], from on board the Victoire, at Martinique	1781 Mar 22
b. 1, f. 17	ALS from Bernardo de Gálvez to Monteil, Havana	1781 Aug 31
b. 1, f. 18	AL from Unidentified to Monteil	1782 Jan 24
b. 1, f. 19	"Nottes de Services" [of the Chevalier de Monteil] Includes details of his military career and activities in the Caribbean	n.d.

Series III: France in the Caribbean, 1780-1793

0.1 linear feet (.25 box)

PAPERS CONCERNING FRANCO-SPANISH OPERATIONS

b. 1, f. 20	3 intelligence reports, in Spanish, from Spanish generals to Monteil Two of the letters are from Joseph de Solano, General of the Spanish fleet	1780-81
b. 1, f. 21-23	14 reports, in French and Spanish, of Spanish commanders to Monteil Includes: 7 reports from Diego José Navarro	1780-81
b. 1, f. 24	"Observations sur L'Expédition de la Jamaïque." 2 variants, slightly different	1781, 1782
b. 1, f. 25	"Convention Entre Sa Majesté très Chretienne et Sa Majesté Catholique concernant les operations et le Service des troupes combinées..." Regarding the alliance between French and Spanish Forces in the West Indies	[1781?]
b. 1, f. 26	"Mémoire sur les forces du Roi aux Isles d'Amérique, et sur les projets d'opérations." 2 variants	1782 Jun 14
b. 1, f. 27	"Résumé des Deliberations arretées au Cap Le 26 juin 1782 et des lettres des généraux"	1782 Jun 26
b. 1, f. 28	"Des Derniers jours du mois de Juillet" Intelligence report	[1782] Jul
b. 1, f. 29	"Mémoire relatif aux nouvelles apprises le 18 Aout 1782"	1782 Aug 22
b. 1, f. 30	"Raport du 16 7bre 1782" Intelligence report	1782 Sep 16

FRENCH RULE IN SANTO DOMINGO AFTER THE TREATY OF PARIS

b. 1, f. 31	"Projet de Loi sur les Troupes de Police" Regarding law enforcement in Santo Domingo	[ca. 1785]
b. 1, f. 32	"Mémoire relatif à l'ordonnance du 4 Dec. 1784. Sur les gérens[?] et la police des noirs" Analysis of the printed law which is present in interleaved form, entitled, "Ordonnance du Roi, Concernant les Procureurs & Économes- gérans des habitations situées aux Isles sous le Vent, Du 3 Décembre 1784"	[ca. 1785]
b. 1, f. 33	"Instruction qui doit servir de regle à l'agent par interim du Gouvernement Français pour la partie espagnolle de L'Isle Saint Domingue" Signed "M. Roume"	[ca. 1791]
b. 1, f. 34	"Notes sur les Traités Et Capitulations, et sur Les Proclamations faites entre les Gouvernements Espagnols et Anglois..."	[1793]

Series IV: Other Papers, 1781-1793*0.1 linear feet (.25 box)*

NAVAL BATTLES BETWEEN FRENCH AND BRITISH FORCES		
b. 1, f. 35	"Combat de St. Iago, ou de la Baye de la Praia, le 16 Avril 1781" Account of the battle of Sao Tiago in the Cape Verde Islands	1781 Apr 16
b. 1, f. 36	Account by a ship commander in the French fleet Regarding an encounter with the British fleet	[1781-82?]
SUPPLYING ROCHAMBEAU'S ARMY		
b. 1, f. 37	"Armée de Rochambeau: Passeport" Orders issued by Gabriel-Claude Palteau de Veimerange, Conseiller au Parlement de Metz, to S. François Martin, of Rochambeau's army. Includes attestations of various mayors to the effect that they have met the required levies	[1782]
TERMINATION OF HOSTILITIES		
b. 1, f. 38	"Dispositions Relatives à la signature aux préliminaires" Signed "approuvé", possibly in the hand of Louis XVI	n.d.
b. 1, f. 39	"Motifs de La Guerre" and "Résultat de la Guerre" Analyzes the overall gains and losses of France, Spain, and America	[1783]
REPATRIATION OF FRENCH TROOPS		
b. 1, f. 40-43	20 ship manifests, regarding the repatriation of French troops Includes names, ranks and positions of numerous officers, and accounts for the cost of transportation and maintenance of passengers	1783
FRANCO-AMERICAN COMMERCE AFTER THE REVOLUTION		
b. 1, f. 44-47	12 documents regarding the development of maritime commerce, especially concerning the system of packet-boats	1785-86, n.d.
OTHER MATERIALS		
b. 1, f. 48-50	Empty Folders Received with the collection. Some folders have additional descriptive information written on them	n.d.

Restricted Fragile Papers

(1 portfolio)

Restricted Fragile Papers contains fragile originals, which may only be seen with the permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies have been substituted in the main files for the originals.

b. PORT, folder Box 1, folder 10
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Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Geographic Names

France -- Foreign relations -- United States
United States -- Foreign relations -- France
United States -- History -- Revolution,
1775-1783 -- Participation, French

Names

Castries, Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix,
marquis de, 1727-1801
Gálvez, Bernardo de, 1746-1786
Monteil, Pierre-Louis, chevalier de.
Navarro García de Valladares, Diego José,
1708-1784
Rochambeau, Jean-Baptiste-Donatien de
Vimeur, comte de, 1725-1807
Sartine, Antoine de, comte d'Alby, 1729-1801
Tronson du Coudray, Charles, 1738-1777

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