

## Replica French ship arrives in Virginia to hero's welcome – again, 235 years later

The Hermione, which carried the Marquis de Lafayette to the US colonies, sailed into Yorktown, Virginia, to kick off a series of events along the east coast

Alan Yuhas in New York

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Sails unfurled and greeted by a cheering crowd, the ship that brought the Marquis de Lafayette and bad news for Britain returned to America on Friday – or at least its three-masted twin did, arriving to a hero's welcome in Virginia.

A replica of the Hermione, the 18th-century frigate that carried Lafayette to the rebellious colonies with the French king's promise to send an army and a fleet, sailed into Yorktown, Virginia, 235 years after the original docked on American shores.

A crowd of several hundred people cheered its arrival at the port, and fireworks shot into the morning sky from docked ships nearby. The Hermione in turn fired its unarmed cannons as it traveled up the river.

Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe was among the crowd who met the ship, and alongside the French ambassador to the US he hailed more than two centuries of Franco-American friendship.

In 1780 the ship brought the marquis, Gilbert du Motier, back to America from a diplomatic mission to the court of Louis XVI. Lafayette had led American forces as a general in the early years of the revolution, and traveled back to Paris to lobby the king to support the rebels.

The king's views on war for democracy notwithstanding, Lafayette played to a naturally French predilection: waging war against the English.

The marquis landed in Boston with material support and good tidings: a fleet of warships would arrive to help break the British blockade, as would an expeditionary land force. He took off south to New Jersey to inform general George Washington that his armies would be bolstered by an additional 5,000 men. Perhaps buoyed by his good news, Lafayette praised the ship during the journey, saying: "She sails like a bird."

The combined forces of the French navy and American armies eventually cornered British general Charles Cornwallis in Virginia and staved off the enemy fleet in New York, sealing the independence of the United States from the British empire.

The Yorktown celebration is only the first of a tour set to last several weeks, as the Hermione travels up the east coast and makes a dozen stops at the hubs of the American revolution, including Philadelphia and Boston. On Independence Day, the Hermione will dock in New York and participate in the annual People's Parade of Ships with hundreds of other sail boats. The ship is an extremely detailed replica of the original, and will be open to visitors throughout the journey.

Although the original was constructed in six months and hailed as an advanced class of speedy frigate, the joint American and French project took nearly two decades to complete the replica using techniques of the era. They had to find thousands of suitable oaks and conifer trees for the hull, and commissioned 26 cast-iron cannons from a foundry.

The ship also has modern generators, engines, and synthetic sails, mostly to ensure the safety of its 70 or so crew members.

The original L'Hermione saw combat during the revolution, said Alan Hoffman, president of the American Friends of Lafayette, but the frigate survived the war and returned to France in 1782. It ultimately foundered on the rocks near Le Croisic, France, during a fight against the British in 1793.

Hoffman said "we like to think that Lafayette is still everywhere" in America, noting the impact that the marquis made during his 1824 "farewell tour" through the young United States, of which there were only 24 at the time. "He was the last surviving major general of the revolution, and his reputation was significantly enhanced," Hoffman said.

"So now there are 80 cities, towns, counties or townships named for Lafayette," he said. "He's actually ahead of most of our founders like Hamilton and Adams, which is quite unusual considering he's a citizen of a foreign nation. He's behind Washington and Jefferson but about tied with James Madison. Then there're colleges, streets and so on."

The project was organized by the Friends of Hermione-Lafayette in America, and the National Park Service is helping to coordinate events in the US. Paid for by various sponsors, it cost in total about \$32m. Cognac on board the ship (provided by one of its main sponsors) will be auctioned off for charity.

"Being admirers of general Lafayette, our hope of course is to keep his memory alive," Hoffman said. "And also to bring to the fore the Franco-American relationship and friendship, and how important these two countries have been to each other."

When the ship returns to France in August, its owners hope it will help boost tourism in Rochefort.

At the Virginia ceremony, Miles Young, president of the Friends of Hermione-Lafayette in America, said that the Hermione's resurrection makes history alive again, and in part explained its voyage by harking back to the family motto of Lafayette himself: "Why not?"



📷 A replica of the French frigate Hermione arrives in the Yorktown City Harbour, Virginia, on Friday. Photograph: Mladen Antonov/AFP/Getty Images



📷 People dressed like George Washington, left, and French general Lafayette, center, reenact events from 235 years ago. Photograph: Mladen Antonov/AFP/Getty Images





📷 Sailors sing songs on board of the replica of the French navy frigate Hermione at her arrival at Yorktown, Virginia. Photograph: Mladen Antonov/AFP/Getty Images





📷 The guided-missile destroyer USS Mitscher, right, welcomes the French tall ship replica the Hermione in the vicinity of the Battle of Virginia Capes. Photograph: US Navy/Reuters

