

# **SSUSH4: ANALYZE THE IDEOLOGICAL, MILITARY, SOCIAL, AND DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**



***ELEMENT D: Investigate the role of geography at the Battles of Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown.***

# Overview

- ❑ George Washington recognized the limitations his forces faced against the British Army and Navy. Most of the engagements between the Continental Army and the British were managed by Washington in such a way as to preserve his forces, prolong the war, and wear down the enemy's will to fight.
  - However, there were three battles in particular- Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown- where Washington won decisive victories and each is considered a turning point in the Revolutionary War.
  - Geography played a significant role in each battle.
    - In all three, rivers were essential in the Americans' ability to trap the British and force them to surrender.
    - The high ground occupied by the American force at Saratoga also contributed to their success over the British in that pivotal battle.

# Battle of Trenton

□ Early in the war, Washington engaged the British in quick, strong strikes and then retreated as a means of overcoming the inadequate training of American forces and to boost morale.

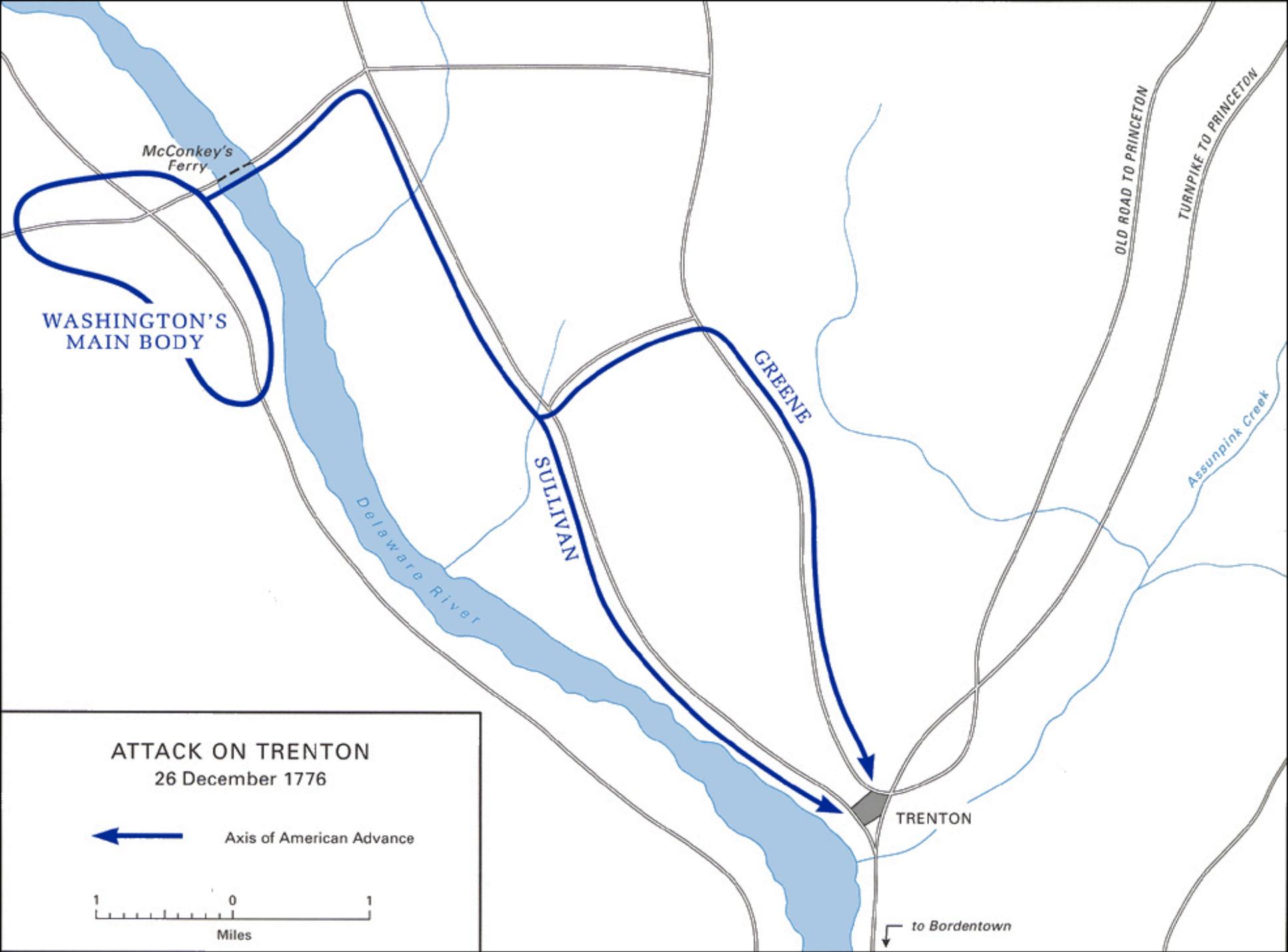
▪ This principle is illustrated by Washington's Crossing of the Delaware and subsequent Battle of Trenton on the night of December 25 and morning of December 26, 1776.

- The American forces under Washington's command routed the Hessians (German mercenaries hired by the British to fight in the Revolutionary War) in a surprise attack at Trenton, New Jersey.
- This decisive victory boosted the morale of American forces, which had been defeated in New York earlier that year.



# Battle of Trenton

- ❑ Washington and the Continental Army had been forced out of New York during the late summer and fall of 1776. They had been forced to retreat to the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River.
  - Washington used the poor weather conditions and geographic challenge of a river crossing to aid him in successfully carrying out the surprise attack at Trenton.
  - Washington carefully planned the secret attack and led approximately 2,400 men across the icy Delaware River on Christmas night 1776.
  - Increasingly poor weather conditions caused the river crossing to take far more time than Washington had planned.
  - The ability to surprise the Hessian mercenaries camped at Trenton relied on the cover of darkness and a swift river crossing.
- ❑ Ultimately, Washington concluded that abandoning the planned attack and retreating back across the river was more dangerous than pushing forward in the early morning hours of December 26th.
  - The attack was a resounding success and of the 1,500 Hessians trapped at Trenton by American forces, only 500 escaped without either being killed or captured. Only two soldiers in the Continental Army were killed and only four were wounded.
- ❑ The Hessians were caught off guard for a number of reasons.
  1. First, the proximity of the river to the Hessian camp at Trenton was thought to provide them with an extra barrier against attack.
  2. Second, the Christmas holiday was thought to be an unlikely time for military action.
  3. And third, the terrible storm that kicked up on Christmas night caused the Hessians to be even more relaxed in their surveillance, thinking that attack would not be possible in such conditions.
- ❑ The Crossing of the Delaware and subsequent victory at Trenton is considered significant in the war because of the confidence it gave to the American soldiers who had very little success in the preceding months.



McConkey's Ferry

WASHINGTON'S  
MAIN BODY

Delaware River

SULLIVAN

GREENE

TRENTON

OLD ROAD TO PRINCETON

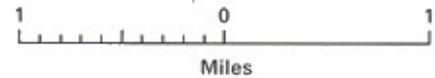
TURNPIKE TO PRINCETON

Assunpink Creek

to Bordentown

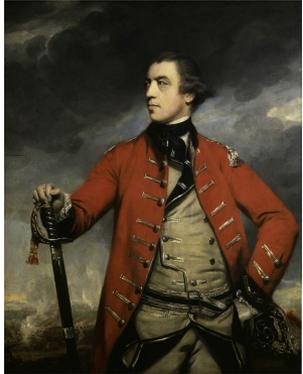
### ATTACK ON TRENTON 26 December 1776

← Axis of American Advance



# Battle of Saratoga

- ❑ The Battle of Saratoga is another critical battle from the Revolutionary War in which geography contributed to the American victory.



- The British plan to defeat the rebellious Americans was to take control of New York, which would drive a wedge between New England and the rest of the colonies.
  - If the colonies were divided, the British believed the Americans would have no choice but to end the war.
  - British commander General John Burgoyne was leading his forces south from Canada down Lake Champlain to the Hudson River.
  - British General William Howe was to lead another force toward the north from New York City.
- The coordinated movements of the British was intended to secure the entire New York region.
  - Howe, instead of trekking north as part of the plan to assist Burgoyne, pursued control of Philadelphia.
  - Burgoyne subsequently was trapped by the Americans at Saratoga, New York and forced to surrender his forces.

- ❑ The American commander who faced Burgoyne as the British moved south from Canada was General Horatio Gates.

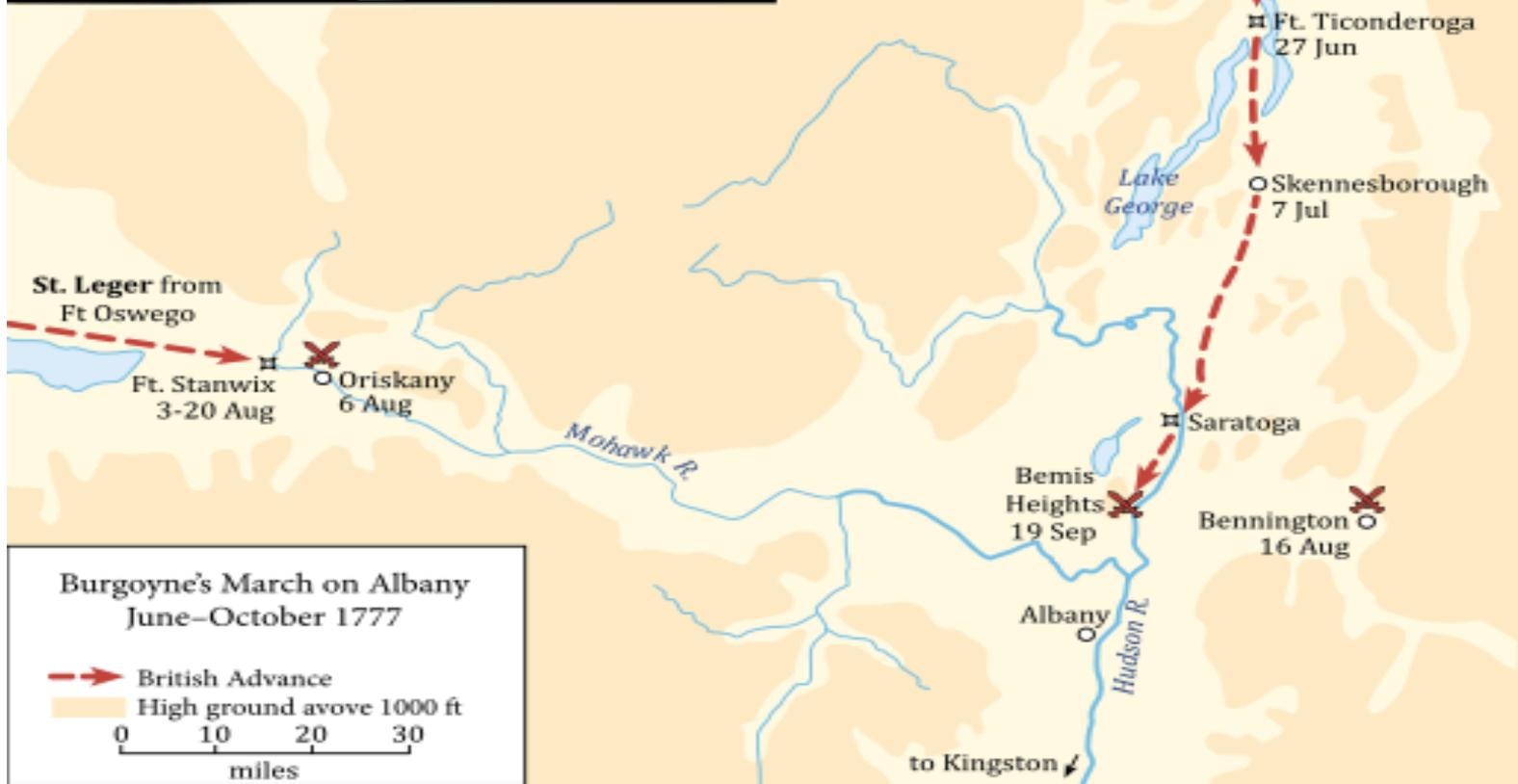
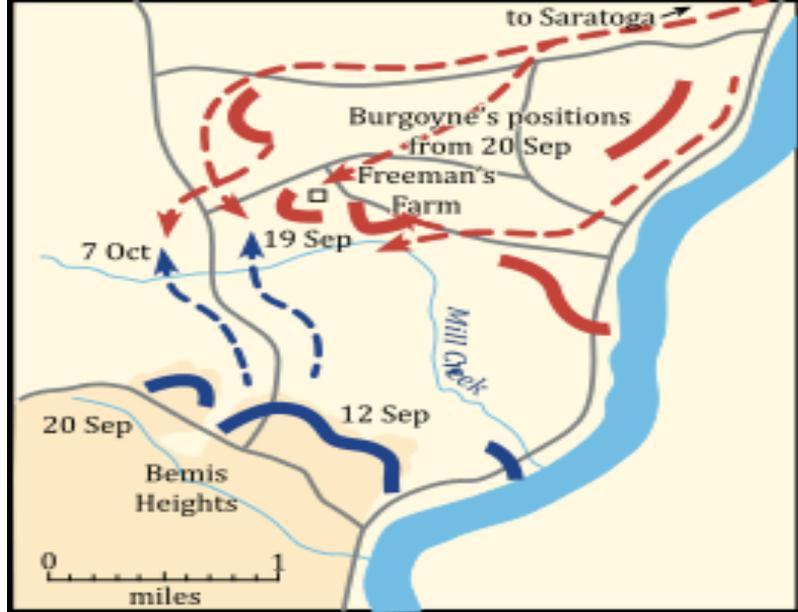


- The British force was slowed because of the large supply convoy that traveled with Burgoyne. While Burgoyne slowly made his way from Canada toward the south, the Americans were steadily building fortifications on the high ground around Saratoga.
- Bemis Heights is a ridge that overlooks the Hudson River Valley where Burgoyne's British forces were headed. Having cannon on top of the ridge and fortified walls at the base gave the Americans control of the area.

# Battle of Saratoga

- ❑ When Burgoyne's British forces approached the fighting ensued.
  - After a number of weeks of intense fighting, the British were surrounded and Burgoyne was forced to surrender on October 17, 1777.
  - Controlling the high ground at Bemis Heights with fortifications at the Hudson River geographically contributed to the American victory at Saratoga.
- ❑ This victory is considered a turning point in the American Revolution because it signaled to France that the Americans had a chance of winning.
  - The French had been reluctant of openly agreeing to an alliance with the Americans for fear that victory was not possible.
  - The victory at Saratoga was just what Benjamin Franklin needed in his European negotiations for alliance and support of the American cause.







# Battle of Yorktown

- ❑ The American Revolution concluded with the Battle of Yorktown in Virginia.
  - Again, this decisive battle was influenced by the geography of the area.
  - After the decisive victory at Saratoga and the resulting French alliance with America, the British adjusted their battle plan.
- ❑ Britain's new plan was to have General Charles Cornwallis move the war to the southern states to try to separate those colonies from revolutionary forces in the north.
  - Cornwallis immediately succeeded in a series of British victories, but the Americans were able to prevent a complete victory in the south.
  - Cornwallis pursued Americans into Virginia but was met with heavy resistance.

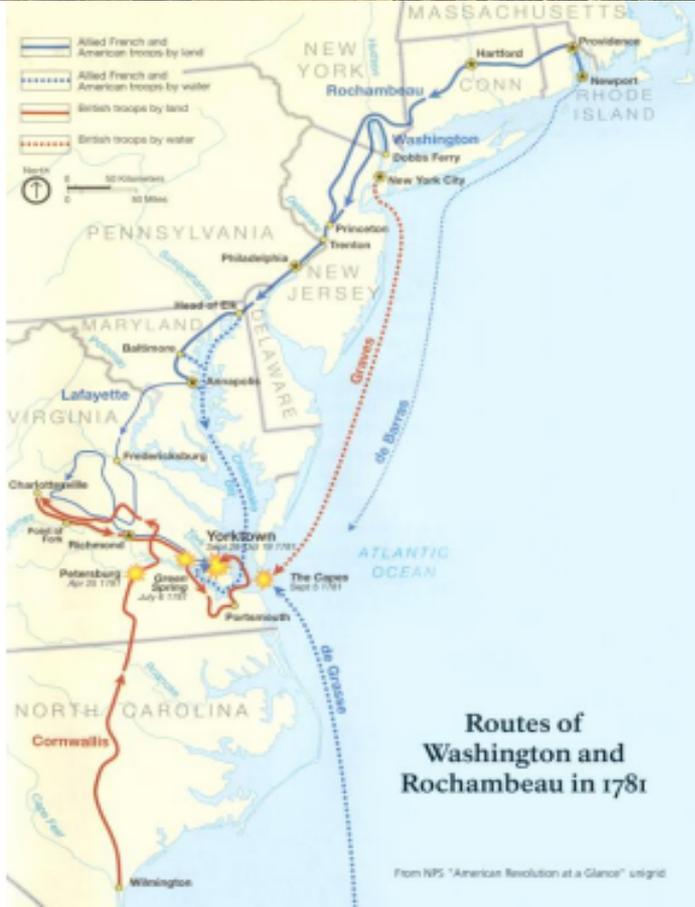
Wishing to maintain communications with Great Britain by sea, General Cornwallis retreated to the coastal town of Yorktown on the Chesapeake Bay. While awaiting the British fleet, his forces were surrounded by the combined French and American armies.

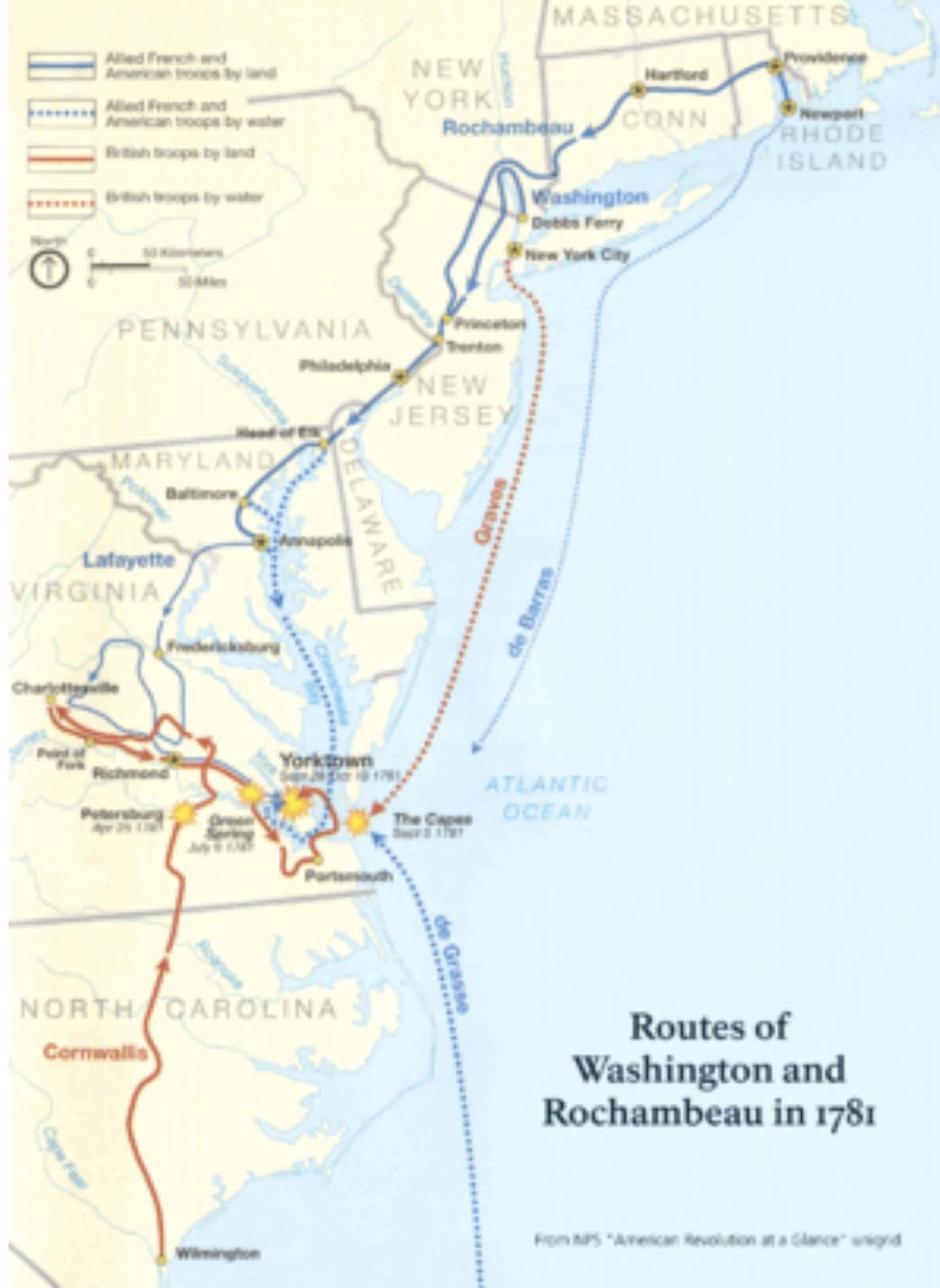


# Battle of Yorktown



- ❑ In July, 1781 George Washington began moving his army toward the south from Rhode Island.
  - The French Navy arrived at the Chesapeake Bay to block the British escape by sea. The American forces surrounded the British by land at Yorktown.
  - After three weeks of fighting, the British General Cornwallis surrendered to Washington at Yorktown on October 17, 1781.
    - This victory secured the final end to the American Revolution.
    - The combined effort by the American forces and French Navy were critical.
  - Geography contributed to the overall victory at Yorktown because again, the body of water served as another line of defense.
    - The French Navy was able to cut off the escape route the British would have needed to prolong the war.
- ❑ Geography played a role in the American Revolutionary War victories at Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown.
  - Knowing the land can assist in military strategy. Controlling bodies of water and the high ground proved critical in these particular battles.





## Routes of Washington and Rochambeau in 1781

From NPS "American Revolution at a Glance" grid