

The Role of Princess Anne County in the Siege of Yorktown

There was a bustle of activity in Lynnhaven Bay and the southern Chesapeake Bay related to war preparations in September of 1781. This included strategic meetings, movement of troops and equipment, and repairs to battle damaged ships. The French vessels were able to resupply from the citizens of Princess Anne County. The location of the anchorage and the plentiful supplies in the county, particularly with the recent harvest, was an economic boon for the local citizenry, whose livelihoods and trade were fraught with uncertainty during the war when confronted by British blockades and raids.

Despite the new rise in economic activity, the recent British presence under Gen. Benedict Arnold in and around the county produced a great deal of turmoil. Loyalists were still a viable presence in Princess Anne County but local militia prevented them from causing much trouble. Some Loyalists who evacuated with the British to Yorktown were now fleeing Yorktown and trying to quietly assimilate back into their previous homesteads. The extended French presence in the Chesapeake Bay, as well as the demands for fresh meat and vegetables for the armies operating around Yorktown, gave the Loyalists ample opportunity to profit from the supply needs of the military. Regardless of who was marketing goods to the Continental Army and the French, Princess Anne County became a hub of economic activity.

As the siege of Yorktown dragged on, Princess Anne County continued to support the Patriot effort with needed supplies, and its militia continued to provide protection throughout the county. On October 19, the Army of Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington's forces. Over the next several months, the flurry of activity in the bay continued with the French resupplying their ships, the movement of British prisoners out of the area on cartel ships, and the resumption of normal merchant and trade activities in the region. Princess Anne County played a small but very vital role in the success of this campaign – the last major campaign of the American Revolution.