LAFAYETTE

Highlights

- Born 1757. Never knew his father who was killed in a battle with the British.

- An only child, he was brought up in a household of women who filled his head with tales of the exploits of his forbears who had distinguished themselves in the service of their kings.

- As a youth, he was awkward and tall, with red hair. (Marie Antoinette once made fun of the way he danced.)

- At school, he excelled both in his studies and in sports, showing early promise as a leader. He was an accomplished horseman and fencer.

- Unlike many French aristocrats of the time, he sympathized with the plight of the peasants on his estate, a concern which became a motivating factor throughout his life.

- His mother died when he was thirteen, leaving him an orphan - and a millionaire.

- He married when he was sixteen. His bride, Adrienne de Noailles, the daughter of a duke, was fourteen. She worshiped the ground he walked on.

- Rejecting the decadent "lifestyle" of his peers at the court of Versailles, he resolved to pursue a military career.

- He joined an elite regiment of the French army, and received military training as an officer.

- Enthusiastic about the American "insurrection," he decided to volunteer his services. Defying the orders of the king, he sailed on the "Victoire," a ship he had purchased and equipped at his own expense. (On his return as a "hero", he was temporarily placed under house arrest!)

- Upon his arrival at Philadelphia in 1777, he was commissioned a Major General in the Army of the United States, serving without pay.

- He developed a very close relationship with Washington whom he came to look upon as his surrogate "father." (He named his son "George Washington Lafayette"). Wounded at Brandywine, he went through the grim winter at Valley Forge.

- Returning to France in 1780, he was successful in gaining increased support for the American cause.
- Back in this country in 1781, he was charged with the defense of Virginia and played an important role in bringing about the surrender of Cornwallis in the Battle of Yorktown. (His "opposite number" was General Phillips who, as a Major, had commanded the battery which had killed his father twenty years earlier!)

- On his return to France, he was appointed commander of the National Guard, with the responsibility for maintaining order in Paris.

- Became active in a number of liberal causes, culminating in his "Declaration of the Rights of Man" which the king was persuaded to sign.

- When the royal family was threatened, it was Lafayette who protected them from an angry mob.

- Forced to flee during the Revolution, he was captured and imprisoned in Austria for five years. Abortive escape attempt. His wife's family guillotined.

- On his eventual return to France after captivity and exile, he "retired" to his estate and assumed the role of a gentleman farmer.

- Always active in the defense of liberty, he was outspoken in his criticism of Napoleon.

- Calls for Napoleon's abdication in 1815.

- Triumphal tour of America, 1824-25.

- Participated in the Revolution of 1830 which placed Louis Philippe on the throne of France.

- Died in 1834 at the age of 78.

- The name of Lafayette has become part of our heritage.

- When the A.E.F. arrived in France in 1917, one of the first things General Pershing did was to visit Lafayette's grave and utter the famous words, "Lafayette, we are here!"

- The young Americans who volunteered to fly in the defense of France named their contingent "The Lafayette Escadrille." (A handful of these men survive to this day.)

- There are a score of American cities, towns and counties identified with the name of Lafayette - Not to mention hotels, parks and other public places, as well as a college.

- The name of Lafayette lives on! As does his spirit!