

Scenario GB-10 – Alternate Battle of the Chesapeake

5 Sept 1781

“Oh God, it is all over!”

~ Frederick, Lord North, British Prime Minister,
on hearing about the surrender at Yorktown

“La piece est jouée.” (The drama is ended.)

~ Marquis de Lafayette to Maurepas

Ia. HISTORICAL SITUATION

It is common knowledge that the War for American Independence was won at Yorktown, in October 1781, when the British army under Cornwallis surrendered to the much superior Franco-American army under Washington. The reason for the British surrender was that they had lost the control of the seas that was utterly necessary to either supply their army or to evacuate it, as necessary; and the reason the British lost sea control was that the French admiral, the Comte de Grasse, saw clearly that the decisive point of the war had arrived and he then strove heroically to bring his *entire* fleet (rather than the expected half) to the Chesapeake. There his 24 ships of the line were able to face off 19 British SOLs under the brave but tactically hidebound RADM Thomas Graves in the indecisive sea “battle of the Chesapeake” on 5 September 1781. However, although the battle itself was indecisive, the *results* were not; the British suffered more damage than the French and had to burn one of their ships, the aptly-named *Terrible*, shortly after the battle due to her leaking so badly that the carpenters of the fleet doubted that she would survive the trip back to New York. After that Graves had no better option than to sail back to New York to repair, hopefully receive reinforcements, and try again. Unfortunately for the British cause in North America, in the days that followed the British position at Yorktown quickly grew ever more difficult, and on 19 October 1781, after a six-week siege, Cornwallis surrendered, effectively ending any chance for the British to retain even a small part of the 13 “American” colonies (i.e., not counting the several Canadian provinces).

Ib. HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION

This scenario assumes that De Grasse did what the British fully expected him to do, and what in fact the *French Government* had ordered him to do: return half his ships to France for refitting, keeping only the ships in best condition in North American waters during the Hurricane season. Historically, De Grasse chose to bring ALL his ships to North America, even the ones in bad material condition; by so doing, he ensured a sufficient naval supremacy to guarantee American Independence. By doing he he enshrined his name as perhaps the greatest strategist of the war, and his behavior was so essential and so superb that a grateful American government has named several U.S. Navy ships after him.

However, by so doing de Grasse also guaranteed himself a tough time in the Caribbean the following Spring, due to having a lot of worn-out ships that had not had the chance to be repaired/refitted in France over the winter. One fascinating “what-if” is therefore to explore what might have happened had De Grasse followed his orders and sent half or more of his ships—the ones in worst materiel condition or worst-manned or worst-commanded—back to France. This scenario assumes that he took the best 12 of his ships to the Chesapeake (the precise number that British admiral Hood expected); after uniting with the French Rhode Island squadron of 7 SOLs under RADM Barras, he would have had a fleet of 19 good SOLs. By coincidence, this was exactly the number of battleships that RADM Thomas Graves (the British admiral commanding in North America) was able to assemble by 1 Sept 1781 (his own five and Hood’s 14 from the Caribbean). In addition, this scenario assumes that Graves did what he should have done and refitted *Prudent* (64) (which had extensive rigging damage which could not be repaired due to an entire lack of spare spars at both New York and Halifax) with the masts of *Robust* (74), which had been leaky for months and proved in the end to be incapable of sailing with the fleet.

In this plausible scenario, the two sides would have been almost perfectly matched in Victory Points, which have been an accurate predictor of force ratios in the past. The British are *very* slightly superior in quality and have a few carronades, while the French fleet have better ships overall. A very balanced battle!

II. PLAYERS

Minimum: 22 (11 British, 11 French)
Ideal: 35 (18 British, 17 French)

III. MAP CONFIGURATION

STANDARD LONG

IV. WEATHER CONDITIONS

Wind Direction: x Wind Direction Change: None
Wind Speed/Sea State: 3 / 3 Wind Speed Change: None

V. SPECIAL RULES

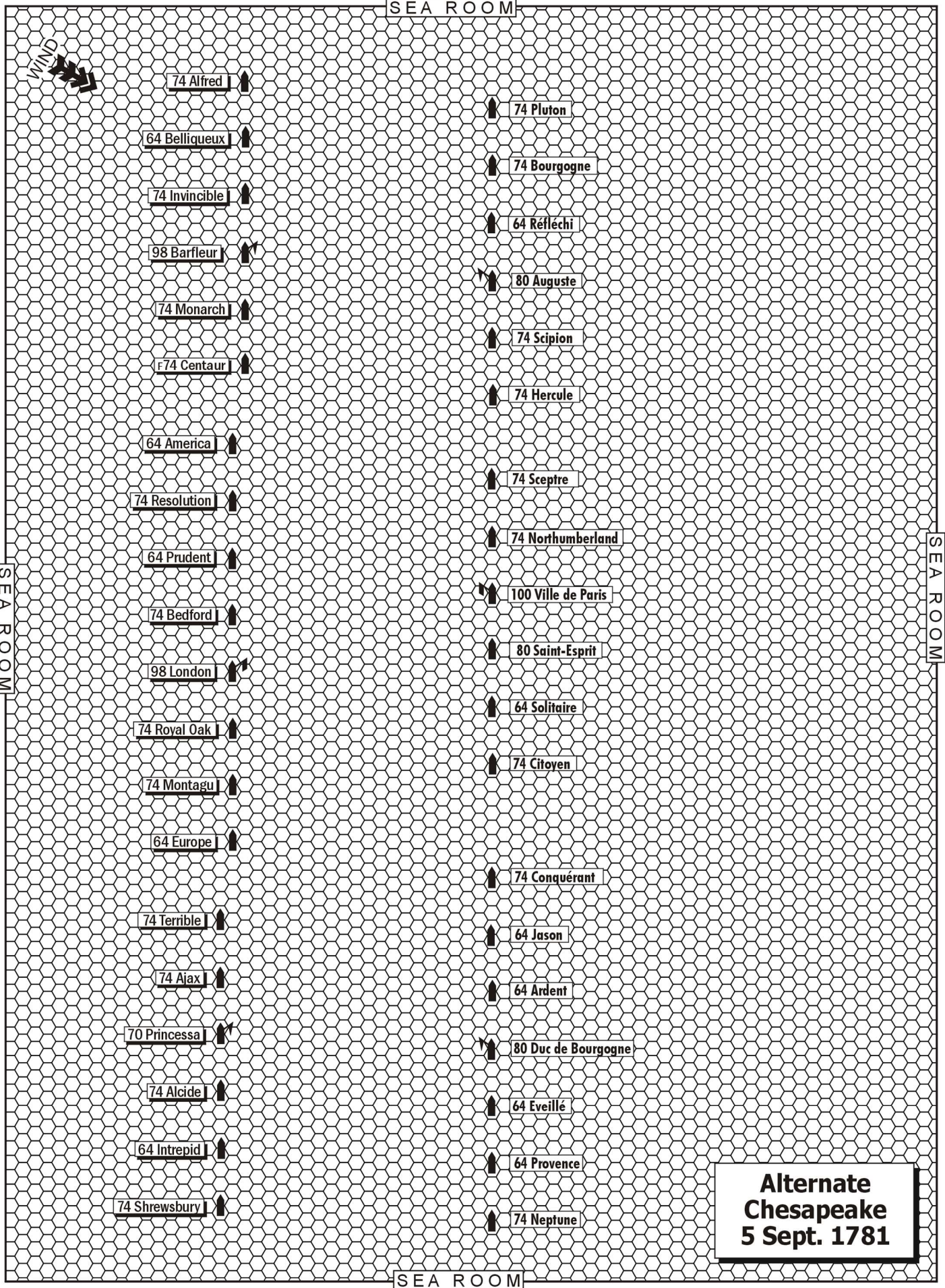
- A. Sail Status: The British start at PS; the French start at MS.
B. Scatter: After command conferences, both sides scatter normally.
C. Sea Room. There is sea room in all directions.

VI. SPECIAL VICTORY CONDITIONS

- A. None

VII. ORDER OF BATTLE

Bow/D:	Rt:	NAME:	CQ:	CM:	ST:	D:	CH:	Rigging: 1-2-3-4	Hull: 1 2 3 4	Crew: 1 2 3 4 : M	Guns: LG C (F: LD)	VP
BRITISH [20]: RADM Thomas Graves												Total British Points: 1901
Van [6]: RADM Samuel Hood [5]												
01	74	Alfred	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 1 (4: -5)	103
02	64	Belliqueux	C3	2L	L-f	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	4 5 5 5 : 4	13 0 (4: -4)	77
03	74	Invincible	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	99
04	98	Barfleur R	B3	1T	L-s	24	0	7-8-8-8	10 10 10 10	7 7 8 8 : 7	21 0 (4: -4)	134
05	74	Monarch	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	99
06	F74	Centaur	C4	2L	L-s	22	0	7-7-7-7	5 9 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	92
Center [8]: RADM Thomas Graves [4]												
07	64	America	B3	2L	L-f	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 5 : 4	13 0 (4: -4)	87
08	74	Resolution	B3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	111
09	64	Prudent	C3	2L	L-s	21	-1	4-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	4 4 4 5 : 4	13 0 (4: -4)	72
10	74	Bedford	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	6 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	100
11	98	London R	C4	1T	L-s	24	0	7-8-8-8	10 10 10 10	7 7 8 8 : 7	21 0 (4: -4)	115
12	74	Royal Oak	D4	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	7 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	84
13	74	Montagu	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	99
14	64	Europe	C4	2L	L-s	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	4 5 5 5 : 4	13 0 (4: -4)	73
Rear [6]: RADM Francis Samuel Drake [4]												
15	74	Terrible	C4	2L	L-s	22	0	7-7-7-7	3 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	89
16	74	Ajax	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	5 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	15 1 (4: -4)	94
17	S70	Princessa R	C3	2L	L-s	23	0	7-7-7-7	8 9 9 9	6 6 6 6 : 5	15 0 (4: -4)	90
18	74	Alcide	C3	2L	L-f	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 1 (4: -5)	103
19	64	Intrepid	C5	2L	L-f	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	4 5 5 5 : 4	13 0 (4: -4)	71
20	74	Shrewsbury	B3	2L	L-s	22	0	7-7-7-7	8 8 9 9	5 6 6 6 : 5	17 0 (4: -5)	109
FRENCH [19]: VADM François-Joseph-Paul, Comte de Grasse												Total French Points: 1913
Van [6]: RADM Louis-Antoine de Bougainville [5]												
01	74	Pluton	B3	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	121
02	74	Bourgogne	C3	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	108
03	64	Réfléchi	C4	2L	L-s	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 6 : 4	12 0 (4: -5)	70
04	80	Auguste R	C3	2T	L-f	24	0	8-8-8-8	10 10 10 11	7 7 7 8 : 6	23 0 (4: -4)	129
05	74	Scipion	C4	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	104
06	74	Hercule	C4	2L	L-s	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	102
Center [6]: VADM Comte de Grasse [4]												
07	74	Sceptre	C3	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	108
08	74	Northumberland	C4	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	104
09	100	Ville de Paris R	C4	1T	L-f	26	0	8-8-8-9	10 10 11 11	8 8 8 8 : 7	26 0 (4: -4)	138
10	80	Saint-Esprit	C4	2T	L-f	24	0	8-8-8-8	6 10 10 11	7 7 7 8 : 6	23 0 (4: -4)	123
11	64	Solitaire	C4	2L	L-s	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 6 : 4	12 0 (4: -5)	70
12	74	Citoyen	C3	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 6 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	108
Rear [7]: RADM Jacques-Melchior, Comte de Barras St.Laurent [4]												
13	74	Conquérant	C3	2L	L-s	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 7 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	106
14	64	Jason	B3	2L	L-s	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 6 : 4	12 0 (4: -5)	81
15	B64	Ardent	C4	2L	L-s	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 6 : 4	13 0 (4: -4)	70
16	80s	Duc de Bourgog. R	C3	2L	L-f	24	0	7-7-8-8	9 9 10 10	7 7 7 8 : 6	20 0 (4: -5)	116
17	64	Eveillé	C3	2L	L-f	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 6 : 4	12 0 (4: -5)	74
18	64	Provence	D4	2L	L-vs	21	-1	6-6-6-7	7 7 7 8	5 5 5 6 : 4	12 0 (4: -5)	59
19	74	Neptune	B3	2L	L-f	23	0	7-7-7-8	9 9 9 9	6 6 7 7 : 5	19 0 (4: -5)	122



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