

Letter from the Marquis de Lafayette to his wife Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, Philadelphia, September 12 [1777]

I send you a few lines, dear heart, by some French officers, my friends, who came here with me but have not obtained positions and are returning to France. I shall begin by telling you that I am well, because I must end by telling you that we fought in earnest yesterday, and we were not the victors. Our Americans, after holding firm for a considerable time, were finally routed. While I was trying to rally them, the English honored me with a musket shot, which wounded me slightly in the leg. But the wound is nothing, dear heart; the ball hit neither bone nor nerve, and all I have to do for it to heal is to lie on my back for a while – which puts me in very bad humor. I hope, dear heart, that you will not worry; on the contrary, you should be even less worried than before, because I shall now be out of action for some time. I intended to take good care of myself; you may be sure of that, dear heart. This battle will, I fear, have unpleasant consequences for America; we must try to repair the damage, if we can. You must have received many letters from me, unless the English are as hostile to my letters as to my legs. I have received only one from you so far, and I long for news. Farewell. They won't let me write longer than this. For several days I have not had time to sleep. Last night was spent in our retreat and in my journey here, where I am very well cared for. Let all my friends know that I am in good health; give a thousand tender respects to Mme d'Ayen, and a thousand compliments to my vicomtesse and my sisters. These officers will leave soon; they will see you – how fortunate they are! Good night, dear heart, I love you more than ever.

Letter from the Marquis de Lafayette to his wife Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, Bethlehem, October 1, 1777

I wrote to you, dear heart, on the twelfth of September; the twelfth is the day after the eleventh. About that particular eleventh, I have a tale to tell you. To put the best face on it, I could tell you that mature reflection had induced me to remain in my bed for several weeks, sheltered from all danger. But I must admit that I was invited to stay there because of a very slight wound in the leg. I do not know how I received it; in truth, I did not expose myself to enemy fire. It was my first battle, so you see how rare battles are. It is the last of this campaign, or at least the last big battle, it appears. . . . But we were speaking of my wound; the ball passed through the flesh and touched neither bone nor nerve. The surgeons are astonished by the rate at which it heals; they are in ecstasy every time they dress it, and maintain that it is the most beautiful thing in the world. I myself find it very foul, very tedious, and rather painful; there is no accounting for tastes. . . . Do not be concerned, dear heart, about the care of my wound. All the physicians in America are paying close attention to me. I have a friend who has spoken to them in such a way that I can be assured of the best care. That friend is General Washington. This estimable man, who I at first admired for his talents and qualities and whom I have come to venerate as I know him better, has become my intimate friend. His affectionate interest in me soon won my heart. I am a member of his household and we live together like two brothers in mutual intimacy and confidence. . . . I am at this moment in the solitude of Bethlehem, of which Abbé Raynal has spoken so much. The people here lead a gentle and peaceful life; we shall talk about that when I return.