

Compensation for Steuben and Lafayette

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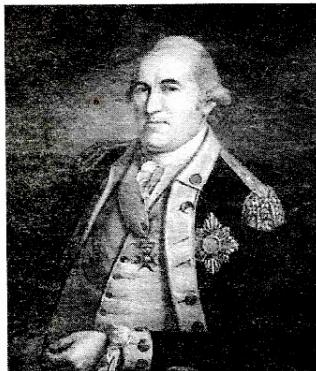
The disparity of the compensation approved by Congress for Baron von Steuben (1730-94) and Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) for services rendered in the American Revolution is readily apparent in terms of the amounts they received. On 4 June 1790, Congress approved the following act providing an annual annuity for Steuben:

"That, in order to make full and adequate compensation to Frederick William de Steuben, for the sacrifices and eminent services made and rendered to the United States during the late war, there be paid to the said Frederick William de Steuben an annuity of two thousand five hundred dollars, during life, to commence on the first day of January last; to be paid in quarterly payments, at the treasury of the United States, which said annuity shall be considered in full discharge of all claims and demands whatever, or of the said Frederick William de Steuben against the United States."

The Congressional act was co-signed by John Adams, U.S. Vice-President and Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, Speaker of the House of Representatives, a well-known German-American.

The support of the latter no doubt facilitated the passage of this legislation.

The act was approved by President Washington who was pleased that an annual annuity was granted to Steuben, rather than a specific one-time payment. He commented: "I rejoice that Congress has given to so an excellent patriot an independence by an annuity, for had they bestowed a specific sum, were it ten times that amount, the generous heart of Steuben would keep him a beggar."



Frederick William de Steuben. Portrait by Charles Willson Peale, 1780.



A 1791 portrait of Lafayette as lieutenant general by Jean-Baptiste Weyler.

However, four years later, Congress awarded Lafayette a specific one-time payment that was ten times larger than the annual annuity of \$2,500 for Steuben. On 27 March 1794, Congress passed the following act, granting Lafayette the sum of \$24,424:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, that there be allowed to Major General La Fayette the sum of twenty-four thousand, four hundred and twenty-four dollars, being the amount of the pay and emoluments of a major general during the time he was in the service of the United States, and that the same be paid out of any monies which may be in the treasury and not otherwise appropriated."

Steuben received annuities for five years (1790-94) for a total of \$10,000, an amount significantly less than the lump sum received by Lafayette. He also has not fared as well as Lafayette in American historical writing. Rudolf Cronau has commented: "The majority of our historians while they compiled voluminous works on the glorious past of our country, devoted little space to this remarkable person." This assessment holds true today. A total of 58 books on Steuben can be found on Amazon.com, whereas 301 can be found on Lafayette.

In life, Steuben did not receive compensation commensurate with his service for the American Revolution. In death, the same could be said regarding recognition of his service in American historical writing. However, he has been honored by means of the Steuben Monument in Washington, D.C., by several parades that bear his name, and by a society, the Steuben Society of America, which have all recognized his contributions. Without these efforts, his service record might be less well known than it is today.

Sources:

Cronau, Rudolf. *The Army of the American Revolution and its Organizer: Rudolf Cronau's Biography of Baron von Steuben*. Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1998.

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U.S. Third Congress. Sess. I. Ch. 13. 1794. March 27, 1794, pp. 351: "An Act allowing to Major General La Fayette his Pay and Emoluments while in the Services of the United States."