

The American Revolution (1775 - 1783)

Lexington and Concord, the beginning of the war

The British government commanded General Thomas Gage to enforce the Intolerable Acts and shut down the Massachusetts legislature. Gage also decided to confiscate a stockpile of colonial arms located in Concord. On April 19, 1775, Gage's troops marched to Concord and on the way, at the town of Lexington, Americans, who were warned in advance by Paul Revere and others of the British movements, made a token attempt to stop the troops. No one knows exactly which side fired the first shot, known as **The Shot Heard 'Round the World**, but it sparked a battle on Lexington Green between the British and the Minutemen. Faced against an overwhelmingly superior number British regular troops in an open field, the Minutemen were quickly routed. Nonetheless, alarms were sounded throughout the countryside and the colonial militias poured in and were able to launch sporadic guerrilla attacks on the British while they marched on to Concord. The colonials managed to amass a sizeable number of troops at Concord and they engaged the British in force there and they were able to repulse them. The British were forced to depart without destroying the armory. They were compelled to retreat to Boston while all the way under a constant and withering fire from all sides. Only a reinforcing column with artillery support, on the outskirts of Boston, prevented the British withdrawal from becoming a total rout.

The Second Continental Congress sent a petition for peace - the Olive Branch Petition. But Parliament reacted by passing the Prohibitory Act, which banned trade with the colonies.

The Battle of Bunker Hill

In Massachusetts, Boston and little else was controlled by British troops. The colonists besieged the city; General Gage countered on June 17 by attacking the colonists on Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill. And although the British suffered tremendous casualties while the colonial forces suffered relatively few casualties, the British were eventually able to dislodge the American rebel forces from their entrenched positions atop the hills.

The colonies of Canada did not resist the British as the American ones did. Two colonists- Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen- took the British fort of Ticonderoga in May. By September, the colonists had taken control of the city of Montreal. But by the spring of next year, the British had recaptured Montreal and caused heavy casualties among the Americans, chief among them was the wounding and capture of General Arnold.

The Declaration of Independence



☞ Raising the first flag at Independence Hall. Copy of a painting by Clyde O. Deland.

In 1776, the englishman [Thomas Paine](#) wrote the pamphlet *Common Sense*, which encouraged American independence based on an anti-Monarchy argument. Thomas Paine argued from both a biblical perspective and republican virtues that monarchies were never good for people of any free state. As military hostilities built up, the Second Continental Congress appointed [George Washington](#) as General of the Continental Army. Washington gave up his salary for the position all through the war (being among the richest men in the colonies, this was a choice he could afford). In June, 1776, thoughts in the Second Continental Congress turned to independence and the Committee of Five was appointed to draft a declaration of independence. [Thomas Jefferson](#), one of the five, became the principal author of the document. Finally, on July 4, Congress declared the independence of the colonies. The Declaration of Independence listed the "crimes" of the King and set forth other justifications for independence.

Saratoga

In July, 1776, General William Howe and thirty-thousand British troops arrived at Staten Island in New York. The large army attacked and defeated General George Washington's American forces. Washington was forced to retreat to New Jersey.

Howe could have ended the war by pursuing Washington's forces. But Howe was very cautious and took almost no risks. He feared losing too many men so far from home.

Americans were extremely dissappointed by the near-loss. Luckily, American victories at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton against Hessians (Germans) and the British greatly increased morale.

In 1777, British General John Burgoyne and General Howe decided to attack the colonial Army from two sides and thus defeat it. As Howe marched north, he won the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown, eventually capturing Philadelphia. But Burgoyne's Army was not as fortunate.

Burgoyne's troops slowly marched from Canada to Albany. By September of the year, the troops reached Saratoga. A relatively enormous American Army attacked the troops, and in October, General Burgoyne surrendered his entire Army to the Americans. General Howe, despite his victories in Pennsylvania, resigned his post.

Yorktown

After the loss at Saratoga, the traditional rivals of the British, the French, offered their aid in the Revolution. The United States allied itself with the French in 1778. Spain and Holland also joined the American side.

War broke out on the seas as well. Americans granted commissions to "privateers" to attack and destroy all British ships, whether they were military or not.

Meanwhile, on land, British forces under Lord Cornwallis attempted to take control of the South. In 1781, Cornwallis' troops at Yorktown were outnumbered two to one by an American and French force. By the end of October of that year, Cornwallis had surrendered his Army to the United States.

Treaty of Paris

The British lost almost all hope of crushing the rebellion after Yorktown. They decided to negotiate peace with The United States, France, and also Spain. The Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3rd, 1783; it provided for several things: The United States was recognized as an independent nation sharing a northern boundary with British North America (Canada), rights of both Great Britain and the United States to use the Mississippi River, and the protection of Loyalists still in the United States. This treaty granted the United States land stretching from the Mississippi River on west, to the Great Lakes up north, and to Spanish controlled Florida to the south.