What You Will Learn...

Soldiers fight with single-shot muskets in this re-enactment of the Revolutionary War. The men in the colonial militias did not have regular uniforms like the British soldiers did. They wore their own clothes and often used their own supplies. In this chapter you will learn about the American War for Independence.

Chapter Time Line

1774 The First Continental Congress meets
1775 The Revolutionary War begins with the fighting at Lexington and Concord.
1776 On July 4 the thirteen colonies issue the Declaration of Independence and break away from Great Britain.
1778 France allies with the Americans and joins the war against Great Britain.
1780
1781 The British surrender to George Washington at Yorktown.
1783 The Treaty of Paris is signed, ending the war.
1783 Simon Bolivar is born in present-day Venezuela.
Section 1
The Revolution Begins

If YOU were there...

You are a member of the British Parliament in the 1770s. Some members say that the Americans are defying the king. Others point out that the colonists are British citizens who have certain rights.

Now the king must decide to punish the rebellious colonists or listen to their complaints.

**What advice would you give the king?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Taxes and harsh new laws led some colonists to protest against the British. In some places, the protests turned violent. The British government refused to listen, ignoring the colonists’ demands for more rights. That set the stage for war.

**First Continental Congress**

To many colonists the closing of Boston Harbor was the final insult in a long list of abuses. In response to the mounting crisis, all the colonies except Georgia sent representatives to a meeting in October 1774. This meeting, known as the **First Continental Congress**, was a gathering of colonial leaders who were deeply troubled about the relationship between Great Britain and its colonies in America. At Carpenters’ Hall in Philadelphia, the leaders remained locked in weeks of intense debate. Patrick Henry and others believed that violence was unavoidable. On the other hand, delegates from Pennsylvania and New York had strict orders to seek peace.

Wisely the delegates compromised. They encouraged colonists to continue boycotting British goods but told colonial militias to prepare for war. Meanwhile, they drafted the Declaration of Rights, a list of 10 resolutions to be presented to King George III. Included was the colonists’ right to “life, liberty, and property.”

The First Continental Congress did not seek a separation from Britain. Its goal was to state the colonists’ concerns and ask the king to correct the problems. But before they left Philadelphia, the delegates agreed to meet in 1775 if the king refused their petition.

Patrick Henry returned from the Congress and reported to his fellow Virginians. To encourage them to support the Patriot cause, Henry voiced these famous words:

Henry voiced these famous words:

“They tell us, Sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when will we be stronger? Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace—but there is no peace. I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”

—Patrick Henry, quoted in Eyewitnesses and Others

In time many colonists came to agree with Henry. They became known as **Patriots**—colonists who chose to fight for independence from Great Britain.
**Battle of Lexington**

The Battle of Lexington was the first battle of the Revolutionary War. The map shows the route that Paul Revere used to warn the minutemen of Lexington. He was captured before he could get to Concord. The photo shows one of the actual candle lanterns used to signal Revere.

**“Shot Heard ’round the World”**

The Continental Congress planned to meet again in 1775. Before it could, the situation in the colonies had changed—for the worse.

**The Ride of Paul Revere**

British military leaders in the colonies grew uneasy when local militias seemed to be preparing for action. The governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Gage, learned that a stockpile of weapons was stored in Concord, about 20 miles from Boston. In April 1775 he decided to seize the supplies.

Gage thought he had kept his plan a secret. However, Boston was full of spies for the Patriot cause. They noticed the British were preparing for action and quickly informed the Patriots. Unsure of how the British would strike, Sons of Liberty member Paul Revere enlisted the aid of Robert Newman. Newman was to climb into the steeple of the Old North Church and watch for British soldiers. If they advanced across land, Newman would display one lantern from the steeple. If they rowed across the Charles River, Newman would display two lanterns.

When Revere and fellow Patriot William Dawes saw two lights shine, they set off on horseback. Using two different routes out of Boston, they sounded the alert. As the riders advanced, drums and church bells called out
the local militia, or **minutemen**—who got their name because they were ready to fight at a minute’s notice.

**Battles at Lexington and Concord**

At dawn on April 19, the British troops arrived at the town of Lexington, near Concord, where 70 armed minutemen waited for them. Patriot captain John Parker yelled to his troops, “Don’t fire unless fired upon. But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here.” Suddenly a shot rang out. To this day, no one knows who fired this “shot heard ’round the world.”

The battle at Lexington ended in minutes with only a few volleys fired. When the smoke cleared, 8 of the badly outnumbered minutemen lay dead, and 10 were wounded. The British, with only one soldier wounded, marched on to Concord.

Although Revere had been arrested, the citizens of Concord were warned by another rider, Samuel Prescott. Most of the weapons in Concord had already been hidden, but the few that were left were now concealed. Some of the British troops, frustrated because the stockpile had disappeared, set fire to a few buildings.

In **reaction** the minutemen charged forward.

For the skilled colonial marksmen of Concord, the British soldiers made an easy target. They were wearing the British military uniform with its bright red jacket. For some time the colonists had called the British soldiers **Redcoats** because of these jackets. The British were forced to retreat to Boston, suffering many casualties along the way.

**Second Continental Congress**

King George III had refused to address the concerns listed in the Declaration of Rights. In May 1775, delegates from 12 colonies met again in Philadelphia for the **Second Continental Congress**. This second group of delegates from the colonies was still far from unified, but represented the first attempt at a Republican government in the colonies.

Some of the delegates called for a war, others for peace. Once again they compromised. Although the Congress did not openly revolt, delegates showed their growing dissatisfaction. They sent word to colonial authorities asking for new state constitutions. States set up conventions to write them. They also authorized the Massachusetts militia to become the Continental Army **Continental Army**. This force would soon include soldiers from all colonies and would carry out the fight against Britain. Congress named a Virginian, **George Washington**, to command the army.

As Washington prepared for war, the Congress pursued peace. On July 5 the delegates signed the **Olive Branch Petition** as a final attempt to restore harmony. King George refused to read it. Instead, he looked for new ways to punish the colonies.

**Early Battles**

While the Congress discussed peace, the Massachusetts militia began to fight. Boston was a key city in the early days of the war. Both Patriots and the British fought to hold it.

**Bunker Hill**

Desperate for supplies, leaders in Boston sent Benedict Arnold and a force of 400 men to New York State. Their objective was to attack the British at Fort Ticonderoga. In May 1775, Arnold captured the fort and its large supply of weapons.

Meanwhile, the poorly supplied Patriots kept the British pinned down inside Boston. Although British leaders were trying to form a battle plan, they awoke on June 17 to a stunning sight. The colonial forces had quietly dug in at Breed’s Hill, a point overlooking north Boston. The Redcoats would have to cross Boston Harbor and fight their way uphill.

As the British force of 2,400 advanced, 1,600 militia members waited. Low on gunpowder, the commander ordered his troops not to fire “until you see the whites of their eyes.” As they climbed the exposed hillside with
their heavy packs, the British soldiers were cut down. Twice they retreated. Stepping over the dead and wounded, they returned for a third try. The colonists were now out of ammunition, and eventually they had to retreat.

This famous conflict is now known as the **Battle of Bunker Hill**, although it was actually launched from Breed’s Hill. While the Patriots lost, they proved they could take on the Redcoats. For the British, the battle was a tragic victory. To win, they had sacrificed about double the number of Patriot soldiers.

**Battles for Boston 1775–76**

![Interactive Map]

The colonists were forced to retreat from Breed’s Hill, but the British suffered heavy losses during the battle.

General Washington arrived two weeks later and took command of 14,000 troops. In 1776 they drove the British from Boston.

**Dorchester Heights**

Shortly after the Battle of Bunker Hill, General Washington arrived in Boston to command the Continental Army. Washington knew that he would need heavier guns to drive the British out of Boston. And he knew where to get them—Fort Ticonderoga. Colonel Henry Knox was assigned to transport the captured cannons from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. He successfully brought the heavy guns over 300 miles of rough terrain in the middle of winter. When Knox delivered the cannons, Washington was ready to regain control of Boston.

On March 4, 1776, Washington moved his army to Dorchester Heights, an area that overlooked Boston from the south. He stationed the cannons and his troops on Nook’s Hill overlooking British general William Howe’s position. When Howe awoke the next morning and saw the Patriots’ well-positioned artillery, he knew
he would have to retreat. “The Rebels have done more in one night than my whole army could do in months,” Howe declared. On March 7 Howe retreated from Boston to Canada. The birthplace of the rebellion was now in Patriot hands.

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** Some colonial leaders became convinced that they could not avoid war with Great Britain. In the next section you will read about another step toward war—the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

### Biography

**George Washington**

What would you do if you were asked to lead a new country?

![George Washington](image)

**KEY EVENTS**

- **1775** Serves in Second Continental Congress; selected commander of the Continental Army
- **1789** Inaugurated as president
- **1793** Begins second term as president
- **1796** Publishes his Farewell Address and retires to his plantation at Mount Vernon
- **1799** Dies at Mount Vernon; his will frees his slaves

**When did he live?** 1732–1799

**Where did he live?** George Washington was a true American, born in the Virginia colony. As president, he lived in New York City and Philadelphia, the nation’s first two capitals. When he retired, he returned to his plantation at Mount Vernon.

**What did he do?** Although Washington was a wealthy farmer, he spent most of his life in the military and in politics. Leading the colonial forces to victory in the Revolutionary War, he then helped shape the new government of the United States. On April 30, 1789, he was sworn in as the first president of the United States.

**Why is he so important?** George Washington inspired Americans and helped to unite them. One of his great accomplishments as president was to keep the peace with Britain and France. Upon leaving the presidency, he urged Americans to avoid becoming politically divided.

Mount Vernon was Washington’s plantation.
Section 2
Declaring Independence

If YOU were there...
You live on a farm in New York in 1776. The conflicts with the British have torn your family apart.
Your father is loyal to King George and wants to remain British. But your mother is a fierce Patriot,
and your brother wants to join the Continental Army. Your father and others who feel the same way
are moving to British-held Canada. Now you must decide what you will do.

Would you go to Canada or support the Patriots?

BUILDING BACKGROUND The outbreak of violence at Lexington, Concord, and
Boston took some colonists by surprise. Many, like the father above, opposed
independence from Britain. Those who supported freedom began to promote their cause in
many ways.

Paine’s Common Sense
“There is something very absurd in supporting a continent to be perpetually [forever] governed by an island.”
This plainspoken argument against British rule over America appeared in Common Sense, a 47-page pamphlet
that was distributed in Philadelphia in January 1776. Common Sense was published anonymously—that
is, without the author’s name. The author, Thomas Paine, argued that citizens, not kings and queens, should
make laws. At a time when monarchs ruled much of the world, this was a bold idea.

News of the work spread throughout the colonies, eventually selling some 500,000 copies. Paine reached a
wide audience by writing as a common person speaking to common people. Common Sense changed the way
many colonists viewed their king. It made a strong case for economic freedom and for the right to military self-
defense. It cried out against tyranny—that is, the abuse of government power. Thomas Paine’s words rang out
in his time, and they have echoed throughout American history.

Independence Is Declared
Many colonial leaders agreed with Paine. In June 1776 the Second Continental Congress formed a committee to
write a document declaring the colonies’ independence. A committee also created a seal for the new country
with the Latin motto “E pluribus unum” or “out of many, one.” This motto recognized the new union of states.

A New Philosophy of Government
The Declaration of Independence formally announced the colonies’ break from Great Britain. In doing so,
it expressed three main ideas. First, Thomas Jefferson, the document’s main author, argued that all people
possess unalienable rights, including the rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Next, Jefferson asserted that King George III had violated the colonists’ rights by taxing them without their
consent. Jefferson accused the king of passing unfair laws and interfering with colonial governments. He also
believed that stationing a large British army within the colonies was a burden.

Third, Jefferson stated that the colonies had the right to break from Britain. Influenced by the Enlightenment
ideal of the social contract, he maintained that governments and rulers must protect the rights of citizens. In
exchange, the people agree to be governed. Jefferson argued King George III had broken the social contract.
On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. This act broke all ties to the British crown. The United States of America was born.

**Choosing Sides**

The signing of the Declaration made the rebellion a full-scale revolt against Britain. Those who supported it would be considered traitors. **Colonists who chose to side with the British were known as Loyalists**—often called Tories.

Historians estimate that 40 to 45 percent of Americans were Patriots, while 20 to 30 percent were Loyalists. The rest were neutral.

Because of persecution by Patriots, more than 50,000 Loyalists fled the colonies during the Revolution. Most went to Canada. In doing so, they abandoned their homes and property. Divided allegiances tore apart families and friendships—even Benjamin Franklin became separated from his Loyalist son William.

Native Americans were at first encouraged by both sides to remain neutral. By the summer of 1776, however, both Patriots and the British were aggressively recruiting Indian fighters. Most sided with the British. In northern New York, four of the six Iroquois nations fought for the British. However, the Oneida and Tuscarora helped the Patriots, even delivering food to the soldiers at Valley Forge.

**Primary Source**

**POINTS OF VIEW**

**Choosing Sides**

*When Ben Franklin’s son William was a child, he helped his father experiment with lightning. But by the time William had grown and the Revolution started, the two men viewed the conflict differently. They exchanged letters on the subject.*

“I am indeed of opinion, that the parliament has no right to make any law whatever, binding on the colonies... I know your sentiments differ from mine on these subjects. You are a thorough government man, which I do not wonder at, nor do I aim at converting you. I only wish you to act uprightly and steadily.”

—Benjamin Franklin, quoted in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin Vol. III*

“I think that all laws until they are repealed ought to be obeyed and that it is the duty of those who are entrusted with the executive part of government to see that they are so.”

—William Franklin, quoted in *Benjamin and William Franklin* by Sheila L. Skemp
The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. This painting shows 47 of the 56 signers of the document. The man sitting on the right is John Hancock, who was the president of the Second Continental Congress. He is accepting the Declaration from the committee that wrote it.

Unfinished Business

Today we recognize that the Declaration of Independence excluded many colonists. While it declared that “all men are created equal,” the document failed to mention women, enslaved Africans, or Native Americans.

Women
Although many women were Patriots, the Declaration did not address their rights. At least one delegate’s wife, Abigail Adams, tried to influence her husband, John, to include women’s rights in the Declaration. In a letter, she expressed her concerns:

“Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands...If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are and will not hold ourselves bound by Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”

—Abigail Adams, quoted in Notable American Women

**African and Native Americans**

The Declaration did not recognize the rights of enslaved Africans, either. The authors had compared life under British rule to living as an enslaved people. The obvious question arose: Why did any form of slavery exist in a land that valued personal freedom? Even Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration, was a slaveholder.

In July 1776 slavery was legal in all the colonies. By the 1780s the New England colonies were taking steps to end slavery. Even so, the conflict over slavery continued long after the Revolutionary War.

The Declaration of Independence also did not address the rights of Native Americans to life, liberty, or property. Despite the Proclamation of 1763, American colonists had been quietly settling on lands that belonged to Native Americans. This tendency to disregard the rights of Native Americans would develop into a pattern after the colonists won their independence from Great Britain.

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In 1776 the colonists declared their independence. To achieve their goal, however, they would have to win a war against the British army. In the next section you will learn about some of the battles of the Revolutionary War. For a time, it seemed as if the British would defeat the colonists.

**The Declaration of Independence**

*In Congress, July 4, 1776*

*The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,*

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his
Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws of Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislature.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:
Mum Bett, a Massachusetts slave, believed that the words “all men are created equal” should apply to her and other enslaved Africans. She successfully sued for her freedom in 1781.

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighboring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislature, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas
to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free People.

Nor have We been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

John Hancock  Benjamin Harrison  Lewis Morris
Button Gwinnett  Thomas Nelson, Jr.  Richard Stockton
Lyman Hall  Francis Lightfoot Lee  John Witherspoon
George Walton  Carter Braxton  Francis Hopkinson
William Hooper  Robert Morris  John Hart
Joseph Hewes  Benjamin Rush  Abraham Clark
John Penn  Benjamin Franklin  Josiah Bartlett
Edward Rutledge  John Morton  William Whipple
Thomas Heyward, Jr.  George Clymer  Samuel Adams
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Section 3
The Struggle for Liberty

If YOU were there...

You are a serving maid at an inn in New York City. British soldiers often stop at the inn for a meal. You sometimes overhear their conversations, though they don’t notice you. Now a Patriot leader has asked you to bring him any information you hear. You want to help the Patriot cause but wonder what will happen if you are caught spying.

Would you agree to spy for the Patriots?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Many colonists struggled for the Patriot cause. Men, women, and children all made important contributions. They fought, kept farms and shops running, and provided food and supplies. In spite of their efforts, winning the war was a great challenge.

Supporting the War Effort

George Washington’s chief task as the Continental Army’s commander in chief was to raise troops. During the war, more than 230,000 soldiers served in the Continental Army, and another 145,000 enlisted in local militias. The typical soldier was young, often under the legal age of 16, and had little money or property. The army offered low pay, harsh conditions, and a big chance of becoming a casualty. Yet the Patriots knew they were fighting for their homes and their freedom.

Finding and keeping dedicated soldiers would be a constant challenge throughout the war. In time, the Continental Congress required states to supply soldiers. Men who could afford it often paid others, such as slaves or apprentices, to fight in their places.

One question facing General Washington was whether to recruit African Americans. Many white southerners opposed the idea, and at first Washington banned African Americans from serving. When the British promised freedom to any slave who fought on their side, however, thousands of African Americans joined the Redcoats.

In response, the Continental Army began allowing free African Americans to serve.

While men served as soldiers, many women ran farms and businesses. Others helped the army by raising money for supplies or making clothing. Women served as messengers, nurses, and spies. A Massachusetts man noted:

“At every house Women and children [are] making Car tridges, running Bullets…and at the same time animating [encouraging] their Husbands and Sons to fight.”

—Anonymous, quoted in Born for Liberty, by Sara M. Evans

Perhaps the best known woman to fight in the war was Mary Ludwig Hays. She was called Molly Pitcher because she brought water to the troops. When her husband was wounded in a 1778 battle, she took his place loading cannons. Another woman, Deborah Sampson, dressed as a man and fought in several battles.
Defeats and Victories
As the Revolution gathered steam, it became more deadly. At first the Continental Army suffered a number of defeats. In time, though, the Patriots’ patience began to pay off.

Canada
In part because the army was short on supplies, many Patriot leaders favored fighting a defensive war. Others wanted to invade British-controlled Canada and make it the “14th colony.”

Patriot troops led by General Richard Montgomery captured Montreal in November 1775. The next major target was the city of Quebec. Benedict Arnold, now a general, led his troops north on a remarkable trek through the rough backcountry of Maine. He reached Quebec around the same time that Montreal fell to Montgomery. Since his first attempt to take the city failed, Arnold waited for Montgomery’s troops to join his.

Taking an immense chance, the combined armies attacked during a fierce blizzard on New Year’s Eve. They were quickly defeated. The Americans had suffered a crushing loss, and the Patriots’ hopes of taking Canada faded.
New York

New York City became the next battleground. General Washington had moved his troops to New York, expecting the British arrival. Sure enough, in June 1776, a fleet of British ships approached New York Bay. Led by General William Howe, the British forced the Continental Army off Long Island. Howe’s 32,000 soldiers were much better equipped than Washington’s 23,000 men, most of whom were militia. The Patriot general had to use all of his skills just to save his army.

In a series of battles, Howe pounded the Continental Army, forcing it to retreat farther and farther. The Redcoats captured Patriots as well as supplies. Eventually, the British pushed Washington across the Hudson River into New Jersey. Howe’s revenge for his defeat at Boston was complete.

During the New York campaigns, a young Connecticut officer named Nathan Hale went behind British lines to get secret information. Seized by the British with documents hidden in the soles of his shoes, Hale was ordered to be hanged. Before his execution, he is said to have declared, “I regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

New Jersey

In November 1776 the tattered Continental Army was on the run. Washington’s remaining 6,000 men were tired and discouraged. The one-year contract for many of them would end on December 31. Who would re-enlist in this losing army, and who would replace the soldiers who left? Washington’s army was in danger of vanishing.

Thinking the rebellion would end soon, Howe left New Jersey in the hands of soldiers from the German state of Hesse. The Hessians were mercenaries—foreign soldiers who fought not out of loyalty, but for pay. On December 7 Washington retreated across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Even with 2,000 fresh troops, the Patriots were near the end. “These are the times that try men’s souls,” wrote Thomas Paine in The American Crisis, a series of pamphlets he began publishing in late 1776.

Without a convincing victory, Washington knew he would lose his army. He decided to take a big chance and go on the offensive. The Americans would attack the Hessians at Trenton, New Jersey.

On Christmas night, 1776, with a winter storm lashing about them, Washington and 2,400 soldiers silently rowed across the iceclogged Delaware River. As morning broke, the men, short on supplies and many with no shoes, marched through the snow to reach the enemy camp.

The Hessians, having celebrated the holiday the night before, were fast asleep when the Patriots sprang upon them. The Battle of Trenton was an important Patriot victory. American soldiers took more than 900 prisoners.

British general Charles Cornwallis rushed to stop Washington as he marched northeast to Princeton. On the night of January 2, 1777, the Patriots left their campfires burning, then slipped into the darkness and circled behind the British troops. In the morning, Washington attacked. A local resident witnessed it:

“The battle was plainly seen from our door... and the guns went off so quick and many together that they could not be numbered ...Almost as soon as the firing was over, our house was filled and surrounded with General Washington’s men.”

—Anonymous, quoted in Voices of 1776 by Richard Wheeler

As Washington watched the Redcoats flee Princeton, he cheered, “It is a fine fox chase, my boys!” Now, new soldiers joined the chase. Others re-enlisted. The army—and the Revolution—was saved.

Saratoga

The two quick defeats stung the British. In the spring of 1777, they wanted a victory.

British general John Burgoyne decided to push through New York State and cut off New England from the other colonies. The strategy required perfect timing.
George Washington and his troops crossed the partially frozen Delaware River on the night of December 25, 1776. This daring act led to a key Patriot victory at the Battle of Trenton. German American artist Emanuel Leutze created this famous painting in 1851. A version of Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware* hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

According to the plan, Burgoyne’s army would invade from Canada, recapture Fort Ticonderoga, and sweep south to Albany. General Howe, in New York City, would sail up the Hudson River to meet him, strangling New England.

Indeed, Burgoyne took Ticonderoga in early July and headed toward Albany. Here, the timing went wrong for the British. Unknown to Burgoyne, Howe had left New York, sailed up the Chesapeake Bay, and captured Philadelphia. Delegates to the Continental Congress were forced to flee.

Meanwhile, Burgoyne’s army bogged down in thick forests. The Patriots had chopped down large trees and dammed rivers to create obstacles. All along the route, the militia swarmed out of nowhere to attack the Redcoats. As Burgoyne neared Saratoga, New York, he found himself surrounded. On October 17, 1777, he was forced to surrender his entire army to General Horatio Gates.

The **Battle of Saratoga in New York was the turning point of the Revolutionary War.** It was the greatest victory yet for the American forces. Morale soared. Patriot James Thacher wrote, “This event will make one of the most brilliant pages of American history.”

**Help from Europe**

The French and Indian War had drastically changed the balance of power in North America. The French and Spanish had lost a large expanse of valuable land to the British. Both countries were delighted to see their powerful rival experiencing trouble in its American colonies.

The victory at Saratoga gave the Patriots something they had been desperately seeking: foreign help. Not surprisingly, it came from Britain’s enemies, France and
October 17, 1777 British forces under General John Burgoyne marched south, heading for Albany. They were crushed by Patriot forces under General Horatio Gates at Saratoga.
The Patriots Gain Ground

Two Remarkable Europeans
“The welfare of America is closely bound up with the welfare of mankind,” declared a wealthy young Frenchman, the Marquis de Lafayette. Inspired by the ideas of the Revolution, Lafayette bought his own ship and arrived in America in 1777. He brought with him a group of well-trained soldiers and volunteered to serve in the Continental Army himself without pay.

Lafayette spoke little English and had never seen battle. However, he quickly became a skillful commander, earning the title of major general. Lafayette led 2,000 Patriots to successfully pursue 6,000 Redcoats throughout Virginia during 1780-81. He gave $200,000 of his own money to support the Revolution and wrote many letters home to powerful friends and family asking their aid for the Patriot cause.

In February 1778 another European came to serve heroically under Washington. Baron Friedrich von Steuben, an experienced military officer from Prussia, led with a combination of respect and fear. He started training the American troops, focusing on basic military drills. Soon he turned the Continental Army into a finely tuned fighting force. One historian has called von Steuben’s feat “perhaps the most remarkable achievement in rapid military training in the history of the world.”

Help from France
Benjamin Franklin, a skilled and experienced diplomat, had gone to France in 1776 to ask for support from King Louis XVI. Finally, the Battle of Saratoga in 1777 persuaded the French king that the colonists could win the war. Not until then did the king agree to an alliance with the Patriots.

In May 1778 the Continental Congress ratified the treaty of support with France. The French had been helping the Patriots all along with supplies and ammunitions. After the treaty became official, the French increased the level of supplies and agreed to provide soldiers and ships. The French naval support would be a key ingredient in defeating the British.

Help from Spain
Spain, also a bitter enemy of Britain, joined the war in 1779. Bernardo de Gálvez, the governor of Spanish Louisiana, became a key ally to the Patriots. Gálvez gathered a small army of Spanish soldiers, French Americans, colonists, and Native Americans. Together they made their way east from Louisiana. Gálvez seized British posts all the way to Pensacola, Florida.
JOURNAL ENTRY

Valley Forge
A surgeon at Valley Forge, Albigence Waldo kept a journal of what he saw during the winter of 1777–78.

“The Army which has been surprisingly healthy hitherto, now begins to grow sickly from the continued fatigues they have suffered this Campaign. Yet they still show a spirit of Alacrity [cheerful readiness] and Contentment not to be expected from so young Troops. I am Sick—discontented—and out of humour. Poor food—hard lodging—Cold Weather—fatigue—Nasty Cloaths [clothes]—nasty Cookery…smoke and Cold—hunger and filthyness—A pox on my bad luck.”

—Albigence Waldo, from Diary of Surgeon Albigence Waldo of the Connecticut Line

Winter at Valley Forge
The entry of France and Spain into the war came at a crucial moment. The Continental Army was running very low on food and clothing. In December 1777, Washington settled his 12,000 men at Valley Forge, north of Philadelphia.

To this day, the name of Valley Forge brings to mind suffering—and courage. Yet no battles took place here. The only enemy was the brutal winter of 1777–78.

Washington’s men lacked even the most basic protections against shin-deep snows. In spite of the general’s repeated requests for supplies, conflicts over funding between state authorities and Congress kept supplies from coming. Washington wrote in a letter:

“To see men without clothes…without blankets to lie upon, without shoes…without a house or hut to cover them until those could be built, and submitting without a murmur, is a proof of patience and obedience which, in my opinion, can scarcely be paralleled [matched].”

—George Washington, quoted in George Washington: A Collection

As winter roared in, soldiers quickly built crude shelters that offered little protection against the weather. Some soldiers had no shirts. Others had marched the shoes off their feet. At their guard posts, they stood on their hats to keep their feet from touching the freezing ground. One soldier wrote that getting food was the “business that usually employed us.”

During that terrible winter, some 2,000 soldiers died of disease and malnutrition. Amazingly, the survivors not only stayed—they drilled and marched to the orders of Baron von Steuben, becoming better soldiers.
While the soldiers suffered through the winter at Valley Forge, the British lived a life of luxury in Philadelphia. Most of the Patriots had fled the city, leaving only Loyalists and British soldiers. Together they enjoyed the city’s houses, taverns, and theaters, and held parties and balls.

**War at Sea and in the West**

While some Americans struggled against the British on land in the former colonies, others fought at sea and on the western frontier. Each area posed tough challenges.

**War at Sea**

The entry of the French navy into the war greatly aided the colonists. Many people had thought that the mighty British navy would crush the much smaller American fleet. However, the British failed to use their powerful navy effectively during the war.

In the fall of 1775, the Continental Congress made plans to build four American warships. Soon afterward the Congress formally established the marines and the Continental Navy. By adapting merchant vessels, the navy had eight fighting ships ready for combat by February 1776.

That month the tiny American navy launched a major offensive to damage the operating ability of the British fleet located off the Carolina coast. Rather than attack the fleet directly, the Patriots went after the British supply base on Nassau, in the Bahamas.

The American troops seized the main supply fort on the island. They then raised the newly created flag of the American Revolution over Nassau. After that campaign, the American navy focused on seizing British supply ships and weakening Britain’s naval forces in the West Indies.

**John Paul Jones**

The Patriots owed much of their success on the seas to naval hero John Paul Jones. Jones had once been considered an outlaw. He was born John Paul in Scotland and began working on ships at a young age. After accidentally killing the leader of a mutiny, he fled to America and added Jones to his name.

When the war broke out, Jones volunteered his services to the newly created navy. He quickly established himself as a brave and clever sailor. Considered a pirate by the British, Jones captured many British supply ships. The French greatly admired Jones. When France entered the war in 1778, French leaders presented him with a small fleet of seven vessels to command. He named his flagship *Bonhomme Richard* (“Gentleman Richard”) in honor of Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanac*.

One of Jones’s most famous victories was the capture of the British warship *Serapis* on September 23, 1779. Early in the battle, the British knocked out the heaviest artillery on the *Bonhomme Richard*. Captain Richard Pearson of the *Serapis* then called out to Jones, “Has your ship struck [surrendered]?” Jones replied, “I have not yet begun to fight!” The battle continued for more than two hours. Finally the Americans wore down the British, who surrendered at 10:30 p.m.

The Continental Navy used fewer than 100 ships over the course of the war. Yet the British lost more than 200 ships to the small but effective American naval force.

**War in the West**

The lands west of the Appalachian Mountains were controlled by Native American nations. Both the British and the Patriots tried to enlist these groups in their cause.

George Rogers Clark volunteered to lead the western campaign. Clark had been a surveyor along the Ohio and Kentucky rivers. By the time the war broke out, he knew the lands of the Midwest well. Clark created an army from the scattered settlements in the area. One of the best-known groups was the Over Mountain Men, a band of settlers from present-day Tennessee.

Determined to weaken the British support systems, Clark targeted trading villages. Following the Ohio River to the Tennessee, Clark’s force set out on a 120-mile overland trek to Kaskaskia, in present-day Illinois. The village’s leaders learned of the attack and surrendered. Other Patriots took Cahokia without a fight.

In February 1779 Clark launched a surprise attack on Fort Sackville near the town of Vincennes.
The attack was unexpected because the nearby Wabash River was icy and flooded. Despite overflowing riverbanks, Clark’s force of 150 men endured an 18-day march through freezing water. They also managed to bring enough Patriot flags for an army of hundreds. The flags were displayed near the fort, and the skilled pioneers sustained enough musket fire to indicate a much larger army. Falling for the ruse, the commander of Fort Sackville surrendered.

In general the British were more successful at winning over the Native Americans. But Clark’s many campaigns undermined British support in the West.

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** The Patriots faced hardships as the war continued. In the next section, you will see how they finally achieved their goal of independence.
Section 4
Independence!

If YOU were there...

You have grown up on a farm in South Carolina. You know every inch of the woods and marshes around your home. You are too young to join the Continental Army, but you have heard stories about a brave group of soldiers who carry out quick raids on the British, then disappear into the woods. These fighters get no pay and live in constant danger.

Would you consider joining the fighters? Why?

BUILDING BACKGROUND As the war moved to the South, American forces encountered new problems. They suffered several major defeats. But American resistance in the southern colonies was strong. Backwoods fighters confused and frustrated the British army.

War in the South

The war across the ocean was not going the way the British government in London had planned. The northern colonies, with their ragged, scrappy fighters, proved to be tough to tame. So the British switched strategies and set their sights on the South.

The British hoped to find support from the large Loyalist populations living in Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. As they moved across the South, the British also planned to free enslaved Africans and enlist them as British soldiers. Under the leadership of a new commander, General Henry Clinton, the strategy paid off—for a while.

Brutal Fighting

The southern war was particularly brutal. Much more than in the North, this phase of the war pitted Americans—Patriots versus Loyalists—against one another in direct combat. The British also destroyed crops, farm animals, and other property as they marched through the South. One British officer, Banastre Tarleton, sowed fear throughout the South by refusing to take prisoners and killing soldiers who tried to surrender.

Georgia, the last colony to join the Revolution, was the first to fall to the British. A force of 3,500 Redcoats easily took Savannah in 1778 and soon put in place a new colonial government.

Britain’s next major target was Charleston, South Carolina. In early 1780 General Clinton landed a force of 14,000 troops around the port city. With a minimal cost of about 250 casualties, the British scored one of their biggest victories of the war. The Patriots surrendered Charleston in May, handing over four ships and some 5,400 prisoners.

A Failed Attack

In August 1780, Patriot forces led by Horatio Gates tried to drive the British out of Camden, South Carolina. The attack was poorly executed, however. Gates had only half as many soldiers as he had planned for, and most were tired and hungry. In the heat of battle, many panicked and ran. The Patriot attack quickly fell apart. Of some 4,000 American troops, only about 700 escaped.

General Nathanael Greene arrived to reorganize the army. As he rode through the southern countryside, he was discouraged by the devastation. He later wrote, “I have never witnessed such scenes.”
**Guerrilla Warfare**

The southern Patriots switched to swift hit-and-run attacks known as guerrilla warfare. No Patriot was better at this style of fighting than Francis Marion. He organized Marion’s Brigade, a group of guerrilla soldiers.

Marion’s Brigade used surprise attacks to disrupt British communication and supply lines. Despite their great efforts, the British could not catch Marion and his men. One frustrated general claimed, “As for this…old fox, the devil himself could not catch him.” From that point on, Marion was known as the Swamp Fox.

**Battle of Yorktown**

In early 1781 the war was going badly for the Patriots. They were low on money to pay soldiers and buy supplies. The help of their foreign allies had not brought the war to a quick end as they had hoped. The British held most of the South, plus Philadelphia and New York City. The Patriots’ morale took another blow when Benedict Arnold, one of America’s most gifted officers, turned traitor.

Regrouped under Nathanael Greene, the Continental Army began harassing British general Charles Cornwallis in the Carolinas. Hoping to stay in communication with the British naval fleet, Cornwallis moved his force of 7,200 men to Yorktown, Virginia. It was a fatal mistake.

General Washington, in New York, saw a chance to trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. He ordered Lafayette to block Cornwallis’s escape by land.

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**Swamp Fox**

Francis Marion, leads his soldiers down a river in South Carolina. Marion built a hideout on one of the river’s islands. From there, he would lead lightning-fast raids against British communication and supply lines.
In October 1781, American and French troops surrounded British forces and defeated them in the Battle of Yorktown. Then he combined his 2,500 troops with 4,000 French troops commanded by the Comte de Rochambeau (raw-shahn-BOH). Washington led the French-American force on a swift march to Virginia to cut off the other escape routes. The Patriots surrounded Cornwallis with some 16,000 soldiers. Meanwhile, a French naval fleet seized control of the Chesapeake Bay, preventing British ships from rescuing Cornwallis’s stranded army.

The siege began. For weeks, the fighting steadily wore down the British defenses. In early October, Washington prepared for a major attack on the weakened British troops.

Facing near-certain defeat, on October 19, 1781, Cornwallis sent a drummer and a soldier with a white flag of surrender to Washington’s camp. The Patriots took some 8,000 British prisoners—the largest British army in America.

The **Battle of Yorktown** was the last major battle of the American Revolution. Prime Minister Lord North received word of the Yorktown surrender in November. In shock he declared, “It is all over!”
Sentiments of an American Woman
The Continental Army received aid from female Patriots led by Esther DeBerdt Reed and Sarah Franklin Bache, the daughter of Benjamin Franklin. In 1780 these women organized a campaign that raised $300,000 for soldiers’ clothing. The following pamphlet, written by the campaign’s leaders, announced the campaign. In it, the authors used images of women helping with war efforts of the past to gain support for their cause.

“On the commencement of actual war, the Women of America manifested a firm resolution to contribute…to the deliverance of their country. Animated by the purest patriotism they are sensible of sorrow at this day, in not offering more than barren wishes for the success of so glorious a Revolution. They aspire to render themselves more really useful; and this sentiment is universal from the north to the south of the Thirteen United States. Our ambition is kindled by the fame of those heroines of antiquity, who…have proved to the universe, that…if opinion and manners did not forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as the Men, we should at least equal, and sometimes surpass them in our love for the public good. I glory in all that which my sex has done great and commendable, I call to mind with enthusiasm and with admiration, all those acts of courage, of constancy and patriotism, which history has transmitted to us…”

“So many famous sieges where the Women have been seen…building new walls, digging trenches with their feeble hands, furnishing arms to their defenders, they themselves darting the missile weapons on the enemy, resigning the ornaments of their apparel, and their fortune, to fill the public treasury, and to hasten the deliverance of their country; burying themselves under its ruins; throwing themselves into the flames rather than submit to the disgrace of humiliation before a proud enemy.”

“Born for liberty, disdainning to bear the
irons of a tyrannic Government, we associate ourselves...[with those rulers] who have extended the empire of liberty, and contented to reign by sweetness and justice, have broken the chains of slavery, forged by tyrants.”

North America after the Treaty of Paris of 1783
The Treaty of Paris
After Yorktown, only a few small battles took place. Lacking the money to pay for a new army, Great Britain entered into peace talks with America. Benjamin Franklin had a key role in the negotiations.

Delegates took more than two years to come to a peace agreement. In the Treaty of Paris of 1783, Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States. The treaty also set America’s borders. A separate treaty between Britain and Spain returned Florida to the Spanish. British leaders also accepted American rights to settle and trade west of the original thirteen colonies.

At the war’s end, Patriot soldiers returned to their homes and families. The courage of soldiers and civilians had made America’s victory possible. As they returned home, George Washington thanked his troops for their devotion. “I…wish that your latter days be as prosperous as your former ones have been glorious.”

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Americans won their independence from Great Britain in 1783. In the next chapter you will learn how the new nation formed its first government.

Visual Summary

Use the visual summary below to help you review the main ideas of the chapter.