Chapter 7 – The American Revolution
In response to the various laws and regulations imposed upon the American colonies, the decision was made to hold the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1774. Each colony sent delegates, or representatives, to this Congress in order to discuss a possible solution to the ongoing crisis, which was escalating in areas such as New England.

The delegates at the Congress did not agree on the best course of action. Some wanted armed rebellion against Britain, while others wanted to pursue a more peaceful solution. In the end, the delegates compromised, or reached an agreement, in which the colonies would continue to boycott British goods, send a list of grievances, or complaints, to the British Parliament and King George III, and prepare the colonial militias for potential conflict. The delegates agreed to meet again in a year if no solution to the issues had been reached.

Colonial militias, especially in New England, began to train and prepare for any potential conflict. In Massachusetts, these militias were referred to as Minutemen, because they could be ready to fight with short notice.

Military governor General Thomas Gage decided to act pre-emptively in April of 1775, ordering British soldiers to seize the militia's arms, ammunition, and supplies, which were stored at the small town of Concord, Massachusetts outside Boston. Another goal of the British was to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who by this time had fled Boston and were reportedly hiding in Lexington. After learning of the plan (possibly from Gage’s American born wife), colonists Paul Revere, William Dawes and others rode throughout Massachusetts warning Americans of the British plan. Some Minutemen gathered in the town of Lexington to await the arrival of British Redcoats. The militia confronted the British at Lexington, where they hoped to delay the British in order to give time for Adams and Hancock to escape, as well as give the militiamen at Concord more time to evacuate the militia’s supplies and weapons.

Although no order was given, someone fired their musket and a skirmish erupted. This was the first shot of the American Revolution and became known as the “shot heard round the world.” As fighting went on at Lexington, other militiamen removed the supplies at Concord. At Lexington, the outnumbered militiamen retreated, and the British marched to Concord, where they found the weapons they were to seize were missing. Adams and Hancock also escaped to safety. As the British prepared to burn the town, the colonists attacked yet again, forcing the British to retreat back to Boston. The British suffered more than 250 casualties that day, compared to less than 100 for the Americans.
The Revolution Begins

-In May 1775, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to discuss further action. Although the delegates were not yet prepared to declare independence, many thought it was a possible option. Many delegates still wanted to pursue peaceful options, hoping to avoid war. Again, the delegates compromised. They agreed to create the Continental Army, and nominated Colonel George Washington of Virginia to be its commander. Washington was chosen because of his previous military experience, his ability to lead, and the fact that he was well-respected throughout the colonies.

-In addition to creating the Continental Army, the delegates also voted to send the Olive Branch Petition, named because an olive branch is traditionally a symbol of peace. This petition included a list of the colonists grievances but emphasized the colonists’ desire for a peaceful solution to the crisis with Britain.

-King George III rejected this petition, stating that the colonies must lay down their arms and accept British law.

-Meanwhile, the Massachusetts militia conducted military operations against the British. A group of men called the Green Mountain Boys under the command of Ethan Allen of Vermont led a raid on Fort Ticonderoga in New York. He was joined by militia officer Colonel Benedict Arnold. The Americans surprised the British in the fort and captured it, along with its supply of weapons and two cannon, which were then hauled to Boston, which was under siege (surrounded) by George Washington and the Continental Army. He built fortifications overlooking Boston and was able to fire his cannons at the defenseless British. The Americans also built fortifications on Breed’s Hill and Bunker Hill, north of Boston in the town of Charleston, in order to prevent a British escape by land. The British army then attacked the Americans there. The Americans fought bravely, and caused over 1,000 British casualties as the British charged the American positions repeatedly. However, the Americans began to run low on supplies and ammunition, and were forced to retreat. This battle, known as the Battle of Bunker Hill, was the first major land battle of the American Revolution. And although the Americans “lost”, they showed they could fight successfully against the better trained and equipped British army.
By 1776, the colonists had little hope that the crisis with Britain would be solved peacefully. The delegates at the Continental Congress began to seriously consider the idea of declaring independence from Britain.

The colonists themselves had to be convinced. British author Thomas Paine, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, published a pamphlet known as Common Sense, in which he argued the colonies should declare independence for various reasons: the King and Parliament had abused their rights, that people are ruled with the consent of the governed, that America was now culturally, socially, and economically different than Britain, and other reasons that were “common sense” when one examined the issue. Paine’s pamphlet was heavily influenced by the thinking of the Enlightenment. Paine published his pamphlet in a more common version of the English language so that the average person could read it. Over 500,000 copies of Common Sense were sold, making it very widely read. It convinced many Americans that independence was necessary.

The Continental Congress appointed a committee to write a document establishing independence from Britain. Among these were Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin, the three principle authors of what became known as the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration included three main sections: 1) A statement of basic, natural rights called unalienable rights to which all men are entitled. Among these, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” 2) A list of grievances against King George III and Parliament, in which the various abuses and violations of American rights were listed. And finally, 3) as the name implies, it declares independence from Britain, explaining that since the government of Britain no longer ruled with the people’s interests at heart, it was the duty of the American colonies to declare independence and institute a government that would.

The Declaration of Independence was ratified by the Continental Congress and then read to the general public on July 4th, 1776, which is known as Independence Day in the United States today.

Reaction to the Declaration in the colonies was divided. Those who supported independence became known as Patriots, while those still loyal to Britain were known as Loyalists or Tories. Loyalists were often targeted for abuse by Patriots, and many left America for Britain, Canada, or other parts of the British Empire.
## Advantages and Weaknesses

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<th>Britain</th>
<th>America</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Comparative Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comparative Weaknesses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain: Superior army and navy in terms of size, leadership, training, experience, weaponry, etc.</td>
<td>America: Smaller army with little to no experience and training (most were members of local militias at best), lack of experienced leadership, poorly supplied and equipped; no navy</td>
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<td>Britain: Could better afford to pay for the war, almost unlimited funds, supplies, weapons, and troops</td>
<td>America: Found it difficult to pay for the war, had to borrow much of its money from American citizens</td>
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<td>Britain: Could hire <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercenary">mercenaries</a> (foreign soldiers that fought for pay alone)</td>
<td>America: Had little outside help, at least initially</td>
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<td><strong>Comparative Weaknesses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Were fighting on foreign, hostile soil, thousands of miles from their homes; unfamiliar with American territory and geography</td>
<td>-Were fighting on their “home soil” with the support of most Americans; very familiar with American territory and geography</td>
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<td>- Long supply lines: supplies, weapons, and reinforcements had to travel thousands of miles over the Atlantic Ocean, which could take many weeks or even months</td>
<td>- Short supply lines: supplies and reinforcements were usually nearby, did not have to travel far to reach the Continental Army</td>
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<td>- The average British soldier was fighting in America because he was ordered to, thus was less motivated to win</td>
<td>- The average American soldier was a Patriot, fighting for his freedom, home, and country, thus were more motivated to win</td>
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While the British had a large, professional army and navy, America’s military was primarily composed of poorly trained and undisciplined militias at the beginning of the Revolution.

At times, Washington’s Continental Army had as many as 20,000 soldiers, and at others, as few as 1,000 soldiers. Many soldiers would leave the army when their enlistments ran out, and many others would desert the army throughout the war.

In order to boost their numbers, some American leaders suggested recruiting African-Americans as soldiers. Most rejected this idea, especially in the South, where many feared arming African-Americans, especially slaves, might lead to a slave rebellion. The British, on the other hand, welcomed the help of African-Americans, promising freedom to any slave that fought for the British during the Revolution through Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation. Dunmore was the royal governor of Virginia. In response, Washington agreed to allow blacks to serve in the Continental Army.

Native Americans would fight on both sides in the war, primarily acting as guides and scouts, since they were very familiar with the geography and terrain of North America.

Women would also serve an important role. Some would serve as nurses, spies, and messengers. Others would even take part in the actual fighting, such as Mary Hays, known as Molly Pitcher. Although her existence is now considered myth (historians suggest she was an amalgamation or combination of different people), she was known for bringing water to thirsty soldiers during battle, and when her own husband was wounded, she allegedly took over his job loading cannons on the battlefield. Women also took over the duties of their husbands on the home front, running family farms and businesses while their husbands were fighting with the army.
Early Days of the Revolution

At first, the Revolution went poorly in military terms. Washington was a good leader overall, but a poor military commander. The British had superior generals, soldiers, and weaponry. They had virtually unlimited supplies compared to the Americans.

Being outnumbered and fighting in their home country, Americans favored fighting a **defensive** war, or one in which they preferred the enemy to attack them at places of American choosing. They did this to limit their casualties, take advantage of the terrain, and preserve their limited supplies.

Other leaders wished to “distract” the British by invading Canada, forcing the British to spread their forces throughout North America. In late 1775, Americans invaded Canada, capturing the towns of St. John’s and Montreal. American soldiers led by Generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold then marched towards Quebec. However, the Americans were ill-prepared for the cold weather, and were mostly poorly trained militia troops. Many soldiers’ enlistments would run out soon, and so American leaders were forced to act quickly. Lacking any cannons to attack Quebec’s walls, the Americans attempted to attack the city without artillery support. This resulted a major defeat for the Americans, who were forced to retreat after suffering many casualties. The invasion of Canada was a complete failure.

After being forced to leave Boston by Washington, the British made New York City their main base of operations in America. British general William Howe forced the Continental Army out of New York City in the Battle of Long Island and the Battle of Manhattan, in which the Americans suffered many casualties. The British would remain in control of New York City for the remainder of the war.
After Washington’s defeat in New York, the Revolution looked bleak for the Americans. The British were in control of New York, the colonies’ largest port. Support for the Revolution in New York was weak, due in part to the fact that many New Yorkers were loyalists.

Washington chose to focus his efforts on harassing the British in the areas around New York, including New Jersey, where the British stationed Hessian (German) mercenaries, or soldiers for hire. As the winter of 1776 approached, British General William Howe, the overall commander of British forces in America, chose to rest his army in New York City.

Meanwhile, Washington gathered more troops, and rather than resting his army as was customary during winter months, he went on the offensive. On the night of Christmas, 1776, Washington famously crossed the Delaware River under the cover of darkness and attacked the Hessian troops stationed in Trenton, New Jersey. At the Battle of Trenton, Washington surprised the Hessians and won an important victory. Although the victory was not strategically important, it tremendously raised the morale of the American soldiers. Soon after, Washington attacked the British at the Battle of Princeton, in which he used deception to defeat the British. Washington set up camp in view of the British, and then left his camp fires burning as if his men were resting for the night. In secret under the cover of darkness, he led his soldiers around the British and attacked them from the rear, again by surprise. And again, despite the lack of strategic importance, Washington’s victory at Princeton boosted the morale of his army. Washington showed that he was able to not only fight the British with his poorly trained and equipped army, but win battles as well.
Although the victories at Trenton and Princeton did a great deal to raise the morale and confidence of the Continental Army, Washington knew that the Revolution could not succeed without the help of Britain’s enemies such as France and Spain. American diplomats such as John Adams and Benjamin Franklin had been sent to France to negotiate an alliance, but the French refused military help until the Americans won a major victory against the British. 

That victory came at the Battle of Saratoga in upstate New York in the spring of 1777.

The British plan was to march three separate forces towards the town of Albany from different directions, surround the Continental Army, and destroy it. The British were led by General John Burgoyne, called “Gentleman Johnny” by his troops. However, communication between the various groups of British soldiers was poor. General Howe attacked and captured Philadelphia, delaying the operation in New York. This decision meant that the British would not have their full force when they met the Americans at Saratoga in upstate New York, and instead of the British surrounding the Americans, it was the Americans who encircled the British. The result was the surrender of Burgoyne’s army and over 7,000 British soldiers to American generals Benedict Arnold and Horatio Gates.

This victory again raised the morale of the Continental Army; more importantly, it convinced France join America in a military alliance against Britain. France pledged to send soldiers and ships to fight against the British. Now America had the assistance of a major world power in their fight against Great Britain. However, the success of the Revolution was far from certain.
Now that the Americans had the support of France, the tide of the war began to change. Britain was no longer sure of victory in America. Other foreigners offered their services to the American cause as well. The Spanish governor of Louisiana, then a Spanish territory, Bernardo de Galvez (for whom the city of Galveston, Texas is named) allowed American ships to use the port of New Orleans, and attacked the British forts around the Gulf of Mexico. A young, wealthy French aristocrat named the Marquis de Lafayette, believed strongly in the American cause, and spent much of his own personal fortune assisting the Revolution and became one of Washington’s most trusted advisors. Other foreigners volunteered their services as well. Polish officers Tadeusz Ksociuszko (an engineer) and Kazimierz Pulaski (a cavalry officer) volunteered to help the American effort and train American soldiers. Their expertise in warfare greatly helped the Continental Army.

Washington chose to spend the winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. While the British rested comfortably in cities like Philadelphia and New York, Washington’s soldiers were forced to endure cold, sickness, and starvation and more than 1/5 of Washington’s soldiers died at Valley Forge. Although conditions were miserable, Washington was able to keep morale high. He did this partially by using this time to train his men and turn them into professional soldiers. Prussian officer Baron Friedrich von Steuben, a tough, experienced German soldier, was entrusted with the task of training the Continental Army. He introduced the concept of military drill to the Continentals, forcing them to repeat the same actions (marching, saluting, loading and firing their weapons) until they did so as a team, rather than individually. Von Steuben is often called the “father of military drill” in the American military today. Now, Washington’s army was no longer a ragtag bunch of untrained colonial militia; after Valley Forge, they were a well trained army capable of going toe-to-toe with the British. This newfound confidence would raise the overall morale of the army despite the harsh conditions they faced that winter at Valley Forge.
Although the American Navy was basically non-existent at the beginning of the Revolution, the Continental Congress set aside funds for the creation of a Continental Navy in 1776. The British, on the other hand, had the largest and most powerful navy in the world.

With such a small navy, America could not hope to compete with the British in large naval battles. Instead, they focused on attacking lightly defended targets like transports and merchant ships, trying to harm the British supply lines and harass British vessels around the world. When American vessels did fight against those of the British navy, it was usually in one-on-one engagements. Much of America’s naval success was due in part to privateers attacking British shipping as well. These privateers were allowed to sell any cargo they captured from British merchant and naval vessels.

- The most famous and successful American naval commander of the war was John Paul Jones. Jones had a reputation for showing up where the enemy least expected it, and was also known for his bravery and courage against incredible odds. The French government gave Jones a small fleet of ships with which to raid British shipping. Jones’ flagship was called the Bonhomme Richarde. Jones most famous victory was that of his vessel over the British vessel HMS Serapis. After a long battle and both sides suffering heavy casualties, the British captain famously demanded Jones’ surrender. He replied “I have not yet begun to fight!” and the battle raged on until the British ship finally surrendered. This victory made Jones a national hero and raised the morale of the American people.
While most of the major battles of the Revolution took place near the Atlantic coast, important actions and events took place further west, in areas west of the Appalachian Mountains such as the Great Lakes region, the Mississippi River, etc. Americans would harass and distract the British, often using guerilla tactics (ambushes, surprise attacks, etc.). Many of the small battles and skirmishes in the west took place between Americans and the Native allies of the British in the region, who saw British rule preferable to American.

One important figure in the west was George Rogers Clark, a Virginian. Initially, Rogers’ job was to protect American settlements and towns on the western frontier, particularly in what today is the state of Kentucky. Clark harassed the British and its Native allies in the west by attacking their small forts and settlements near the Mississippi River. He and his small force captured important targets such as the village of Kaskaskia on the Mississippi, which allowed the Patriots to control this important trade and supply route. Clark also worked to make peace with the various native tribes in the region, persuading many to remain neutral for the remainder of the war. Clark also famously captured a British fort at the Battle of Vincennes in 1779.

In the Treaty of Paris, the British agreed to cede the Northwest Territory, which today includes the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and other Great Lakes states. Clark is often credited as the “Conqueror of the old Northwest” because some believe through his actions, he convinced the British of the difficulties of holding and defending the wilderness between the Appalachians and Mississippi River, and this convinced the British to cede the area to the United States at the conclusion of the Revolution.
After being defeated at Saratoga in 1777, the British chose to focus their efforts on areas more loyal to Britain, and so they shifted the bulk of their forces to the South.

The British had more success in the southern states than in the north; there, they won more decisive battles against the Americans. The British captured numerous cities and towns from the Americans, including Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, the two largest American ports in the South. During these battles, many Americans were killed, wounded, or captured.

The British also used the concept of “total war”. The British wanted to harm the United States militarily and economically, and in the South, they destroyed farms, plantations, and freed slaves throughout the region.

The biggest defeat in the South, and perhaps in the war, came at the Battle of Camden in South Carolina. The Americans were led by General Horatio Gates, Washington’s nemesis, who made several mistakes during this battle. In addition to being outnumbered, Gates fed his men after a long march to Camden. The food, however, made his soldiers sick. Gates attacked the British anyway, suffering numerous casualties and was forced to retreat. Gates was court-martialed (put on military trial) after this defeat.

While the Americans were generally not successful in large scale battles against the British in the South, they did use guerilla warfare successfully. The South’s swampy and forested geography allowed small bands of guerilla fighters to attack and harass the British using hit-and-runs, ambushes, etc. The most well-known guerilla leader in the South was Francis Marion, also known as the “Swamp Fox”. Typically Marion would attack British supply lines and communications network in order to cause confusion in the British army.
Victory at Yorktown and the Treaty of Paris

Emboldened by his victories in the South, commanding General Charles Cornwallis moved his forces into Virginia. He landed his men on the Yorktown peninsula next to Chesapeake Bay, where he prepared to attack a small American force led by the Marquis de Lafayette. Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau, the French commanding general, quickly moved their troops south from New York in order to trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. Meanwhile, French navy ships from the Caribbean under the Comte de Grasse moved in from the south to blockade the British fleet at Yorktown, preventing their escape and preventing any reinforcements from arriving.

The combined American and French forces trapped Cornwallis and his army at Yorktown. Outnumbered and under siege, Cornwallis had no choice but to surrender. The British suffered their worst defeat of the entire war, and it became clear that victory in America was out of reach. American and Britain then entered talks to negotiate a surrender and peace treaty to end the war. Britain was ready to recognize American independence.

In 1783, Britain recognized American independence by signing the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the American Revolution. Britain agreed to recognize American independence; it agreed to give up claim to all of its territories east of the Mississippi River and all the way north to Canada to America; it agreed to remove all British soldiers from the frontier regions, and to stop assisting Native Americans in their attacks on American settlers and forts. The American Revolutionary War was officially over and the United States of America was now a free and independent country.