

Timeline of the Revolution 1775–1779 ^[1]

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1775

New England Restraining Act

Parliament passed an act banning trade between the New England colonies and any other country besides Great Britain.

New England resists

British troops continued to attempt to seize colonial [ammunition](#) ^[2], but were turned back in Massachusetts, without any violence. Royal authorities decided that force should be used to enforce recent acts of Parliament; war seemed unavoidable.

Lexington and Concord

British troops planned to destroy American ammunition at Concord. When the Boston Committee of Safety learned of this plan, it sent Paul Revere and William Dawes to alert the countryside and gather the Minute Men. On April 19, Minute Men and British troops met at Lexington, where a shot from a stray British gun led to more British firing. The Americans only fired a few shots; several Americans were killed. The British marched on to Concord and destroyed some ammunition, but soon found the countryside swarming with [militia](#) ^[3]. At the end of the day, many were dead on both sides.

The Second Continental Congress

The Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia on May 10. John Hancock was elected president of Congress.

George Washington is named commander-in-chief

On June 10, John Adams proposed that Congress consider the forces in Boston a Continental army, and suggested the need for a general. He recommended George Washington for the position. Congress began to raise men from other colonies to join the army in New England, and named a committee to draft military rules. On June 15, Washington was nominated to lead the army; he accepted the next day. To pay for the army, Congress issued bills of credit, and the twelve colonies represented in the Congress promised to share in repaying the bills.

Bunker Hill

On June 12, British General Gage put martial law in effect, and stated that any person helping the Americans would be considered a traitor and rebel. When Americans began to fortify a hill against British forces, British ships in the harbor discovered the activity and opened fire. British troops -- 2,400 in number -- arrived shortly after. Although the Americans -- 1,000 in number -- resisted several attacks, eventually they lost the fortification.

Olive Branch Petition

Congress issued a petition declaring its loyalty to the king, George III, and stating its hope that he would help arrange a [reconciliation](#) ^[4] and prevent further [hostilities](#) ^[5] against the colonies. Four months later, King George III rejected the petition and declared the colonies in rebellion.

Congress treats with the Indians

Acting as an independent government, Congress appointed commissioners to create peace treaties with the Indians.

Congress creates a navy

Congress began to plan for aggressive action against British ships stocked with ammunition. It authorized the building of four armed ships, and began to formulate rules for a navy. On December 22, Congress named Esek Hopkins commodore of the fledgling American navy. Soon after, Congress authorized privateering, and issued rules for dealing with enemy vessels and [plunder](#) ^[6].

Congress searches for foreign aid

When a congressional committee began to investigate the possibility of foreign aid in the war against Great Britain, France expressed interest.

1776

Common Sense

Thomas Paine moved many to the cause of independence with his pamphlet titled "Common Sense." In a direct, simple style, he cried out against King George III and the monarchical form of government.

The British evacuate Boston

American General Henry Knox arrived in Boston with cannons he had moved with great difficulty from Fort Ticonderoga, New York. Americans began to entrench themselves around Boston, planning to attack the British. British General William Howe planned an attack, but eventually retreated from Boston.

Congress calls for the colonies to adopt new constitutions

In May, the Second Continental Congress recommended that the colonies establish new governments based on the authority of the people of the respective colonies rather than on the British Crown.

Congress declares independence

When North Carolina and Virginia empowered their delegates to vote for American independence, Virginian Richard

Henry Lee offered a resolution stating that the colonies "are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." A committee was appointed to draft a declaration of independence, and Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write it. On July 2, Congress voted in favor of independence, and on July 4, the Declaration of Independence was approved. Copies were sent throughout the colonies to be read publicly.

Battle of Long Island

After leaving Boston, British General Howe planned to use New York as a base. The British captured Staten Island and began a military build-up on Long Island in preparation for an advance on Brooklyn. Washington succeeded in saving his army by secretly retreating onto Manhattan Island. Washington eventually retreated from Manhattan, fearing the prospect of being trapped on the island, and the British occupied New York City.

Congress names commissioners to treat with foreign nations

Congress sent a delegation of three men to Europe -- Silas Deane, Benjamin Franklin, and Arthur Lee -- to prepare treaties of commerce ^[7] and friendship, and to attempt to secure loans from foreign nations.

The Battle of White Plains

British and American forces met at White Plains, New York, where the British captured an important fortification. Washington once again retreated, still attempting to save his army from the full force of the British army.

Retreat through New Jersey

Washington and his army retreated across New Jersey, crossing the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Congress, fearing a British attack on Philadelphia, fled to Baltimore.

Battle of Trenton

On December 26, Washington launched a surprise attack against a British fortification at Trenton, New Jersey, that was staffed by Hessian soldiers. After one hour of confused fighting, the Hessians surrendered. Only five American soldiers were killed.

1777

Battle of Princeton

British General Howe reacted to the Battle of Trenton by sending a large force of men to New Jersey. At Princeton, Washington once again launched a surprise attack, and succeeded in defeating the British. His efforts cleared most of New Jersey of enemy forces, and greatly boosted American morale.

America has a flag

On June 14, Congress declared that the flag of the United States would consist of thirteen alternating red and white stripes, and a blue field with thirteen white stars.

The British attack Philadelphia

British and Americans met at Brandywine Creek, Pennsylvania. The Americans retreated, and the British soon occupied Philadelphia, forcing Congress once again to flee the city. After retreating further during the Battle of Germantown, Washington settled his army for the winter in Valley Forge -- a winter of extreme cold and great hunger.

Saratoga

On October 7, British and American troops engaged in New York. Fatigued from battle and short of supplies, British General John Burgoyne's troops were repulsed ^[8] by American forces under General Horatio Gates. On October 8, Burgoyne retreated to Saratoga; by October 13th, he asked for terms of surrender. The "Convention of Saratoga" called for Burgoyne's army to be sent back to England, and for each soldier to pledge not to serve again in the war against the colonies.

The "Conway Cabal" ^[9]

Many in Congress were unhappy with Washington's leadership; some murmured the name of General Horatio Gates as a possible replacement. Thomas Conway, the army's inspector general, wrote a critical letter to Gates about Washington, leading many to believe there was an organized effort to replace Washington. Conway resigned from the army, and eventually apologized to Washington.

Articles of Confederation

When Richard Henry Lee made a motion for independence (1776), he also proposed a formal plan of union among the states. After a discussion lasting more than a year, the Articles of Confederation were adopted by Congress, although the states did not ratify ^[10] the Articles until 1781.

1778

France and America become allies

France and America formed an alliance, negotiated by Benjamin Franklin, stating that each would consider the other a "most favored nation" for trade and friendship; France would be obligated to fight for American independence; and America would be obligated to stand by France if war should occur between France and Great Britain. Within four months, France and Great Britain were at war.

The British attempt to make peace

Threatened by the alliance between France and America, Parliament proposed the repeal of the Tea Act (1773) and Coercive ^[11] Acts (1774), pledged not to tax the colonies, and sent peace commissioners to America. However, most Americans were interested only in British recognition of American independence. When a British commissioner tried to bribe congressmen Joseph Reed, Robert Morris, and Francis Dana, Americans became even less interested in reconciliation. Competing for support from the American people, both Congress and the desperate commissioners appealed directly to them with broadsides, but the British commissioners soon returned to Great Britain, their

mission a failure.

John Paul Jones wins victories

Although Esek Hopkins was never very successful with the American navy, Captain John Paul Jones won several victories against the British with his ship, the "Ranger."

The Battle of Monmouth

When the British headed for New York, Washington left Valley Forge to follow. At the Battle of Monmouth, American General Charles Lee gave several confused orders, and then ordered a sudden retreat. Washington's arrival on the scene saved the battle, although the British escaped to New York during the night. Lee was later court-martialed.

1779

The British attack in North and South

Fighting continued in both the northern and southern states. In the frontier settlements of Pennsylvania, Loyalists and Indians led by Mohawk Joseph Brant attacked American settlers. The Loyalists soon were defeated, and Americans went on to destroy many Native American villages whose residents were fighting on the side of the British.

Spain joins the war

Spain asked Britain for Gibraltar as a reward for joining the war on the British side. When Britain refused, Spain joined with France in its war against Britain, although refusing to recognize American independence.

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