

Timeline of the American Revolution

1763 - 1783

Key Events in Bolded Italic

Prelude

Early Americans had made the risky Atlantic crossing seeking a better life, adventure, religious freedom and political autonomy. They built a society in the New World and for generations ran it with little outside meddling. After the French and Indian War, Britain initiated policies aimed at bringing the colonists under closer control. Tensions grew. Many Americans stood firm in their belief that the King had suspended their natural rights. Increasingly, resistance leaders banded together. The stage for the Revolution was set.

February 10, 1763

The Treaty of Paris ends Seven Year's War (French and Indian War). Left in debt from war, Great Britain looks to colonies for revenue.

October 7, 1763

Proclamation of 1763 bars settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains.

April 5, 1764

Sugar Act imposes stricter trade regulation and duties on sugar and molasses.

March 22, 1765

Stamp Act places tax on printed matter and legal documents.

June 29, 1767

Townshend Revenue Acts create new import duties for the colonists.

October 1768

British soldiers arrive in Boston to enforce compliance with new regulations.

March 5, 1770

"Boston Massacre." King's troops kill five civilians before British back off and troops leave Boston. All Townshend duties removed except for tax on tea.

December 16, 1773

Chests of tea destroyed in protest at Boston "Tea Party."

March-June 1774

Coercive Acts close port of Boston, bring Massachusetts's government under crown control, and allow for quartering of British troops on private property.

September-October 1774

First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia and approves collective strategy to deal with Coercive Acts. Declare common grievances and adopt comprehensive boycotts of British goods.

October 1774

"Minute Man" companies formed.

1775

"Rage Militaire"

On the eve of the Revolution the patriots succeeded in organizing a home defense; militias stood mobilized and ready. Fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, on April 19. At the Battle of Bunker Hill in June, the patriots lost, but learned that they could stand against British regulars. Soon after, George Washington assumed command of the newly created Continental Army.

April 19

Battles of Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, occur. A rallying militia drives British back in retreat to Boston.

May 10

Second Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
Fort Ticonderoga, New York, captured by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold.

June 14

Congress establishes Continental Army.

June 15

Congress appoints George Washington as commander-in-chief.

June 17

At the Battle of Bunker Hill (Breed's Hill), Massachusetts, the British seize their objective, but suffer severe casualties.

July 3

George Washington assumes command of the Continental Army in Massachusetts.

July 5

Continental Congress adopts Olive Branch Petition in effort to reconcile differences with Britain.

August 28

Hoping to gain a fourteenth colony to aid in fight against Britain, patriots begin a campaign to capture Quebec, Canada.

October 13

Congress authorizes Continental Navy.

November

Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, offers freedom to slaves who join Crown forces.
King George III rejects Olive Branch Petition.

November 10

Congress establishes Continental Marines.

November 14

General Richard Montgomery's forces occupy Montreal.

December 9

Patriots defeat British at Great Bridge, Virginia.

December 30

George Washington orders recruiting officers to allow free blacks to join the Continental Army.

1776

Independence?

While pens declared political independence on paper, the cause was nearly lost on the battlefield. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* won many over to the cause. Congress took the dramatic step of declaring independence from Britain in July. After being pushed to the brink, the Continental Army's daring Delaware River crossing and victory over the Hessians at Trenton gave new life to the cause.

January 1

British thwart Montgomery and Arnold's assault on Quebec; invasion of Canada fails.

January 5

New Hampshire becomes the first colony to declare full independence.

January 19

Thomas Paine publishes Common Sense.

February 27

Patriots defeat a loyalist force at Battle of Moores Creek Bridge near Wilmington, North Carolina.

March 2

Americans fortify Dorchester Heights, Massachusetts, using cannon brought from Fort Ticonderoga by artillery chief, Henry Knox.

March

Congress appoints Silas Deane as diplomatic agent to France, in hopes of securing military aid.

March 3 - 4

Continental Navy and Marine raid on the British colony of Nassau, Bahamas, yields quantities of valuable military stores.

March 17

American siege forces British to evacuate Boston.

March 31

Abigail Adams issues historic plea for women's rights, urging her husband, John to "remember the ladies" as Congress drafts new laws.

April

Continental Army leaves its first winter encampment at Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Continental Army enters and begins to erect defenses in New York City.

May

The French government consents to send secret military aid to the colonies.

May 10

Congress authorizes each of the thirteen colonies to form new state governments.

June 7

Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee offers a formal resolution calling for American independence.

June 12

Congress appoints a committee to prepare a draft of a working government entitled the Articles of Confederation.

June 28

Jefferson presents his draft of the Declaration of Independence to Congress.
American defenders repulse British attack at Fort Sullivan (Fort Moultrie), Charleston, South Carolina.

June - July

British armada arrives in New York carrying over 30,000 British and Hessian troops intending to crush the rebellion.

July 2

Continental Congress votes in favor of Lee's resolution for independence.

July 4

Congress formally adopts the Declaration of Independence.

August 2

Delegates sign Declaration of Independence. Demonstrating the new nation's potential for religious tolerance, the list of signers includes one Catholic, Charles Carroll of Maryland.

August 27 - 29

British commanded by William Howe defeat Washington's outnumbered army at the Battle of Long Island, New York. Americans evacuate to Manhattan.

September

Congress appoints Arthur Lee and Benjamin Franklin to assist Deane in diplomatic mission to France.

September 12

Washington evacuates New York City.

September 16

Americans hold off British at the Battle of Harlem Heights, New York.

September 22

British hang patriot Nathan Hale for spying.

October 11 - 12

British overpower Benedict Arnold's small fleet at the Battle of Valcour Island on Lake Champlain, New York, but this valiant action halts British lake-route invasion of New York.

October 13

British occupy Crown Point, New York.

October 28

Howe's army achieves a costly victory over Washington at the Battle of White Plains, New York.

November 16

British capture Fort Mifflin, New York, on the east side of the Hudson River.

November 20

Americans forced to abandon Fort Mifflin, New Jersey, on the west side of the Hudson River. New York City is now in British hands.

December 19

Thomas Paine publishes *The Crisis*, which helps rekindle the fires of liberty during the darkest hour of the Revolution.

December 25

With army enlistment about to expire at year's end, Washington must act. Continental Army begins daring Christmas night crossing of the Delaware River.

December 26

Washington's victory over the Hessians at Trenton, New Jersey, gives new life to the cause. In the coming year, Congress and Washington build an army for the war based on long-term enlistment.

1777

At What Price?

In 1777 the Americans cut short a British plan to divide and conquer the colonies. The British surrendered a large force to the Continental Army after the battles of Saratoga in New York, but were able to capture the patriot capital at Philadelphia. In December, an optimistic, but weary Continental Army marched into winter quarters at Valley Forge.

January 3

Washington follows up triumph at Trenton with a victory at the Battle of Princeton, New Jersey.

January 6

Continental Army enters second winter encampment of the war at Morristown, New Jersey.

May

After facing defeat by patriot militia along the southern frontier, Cherokee Indians are forced from their land in South Carolina.

May 28

Continental Army leaves Morristown, New Jersey, encampment.

June

British under General John Burgoyne begin lake-route invasion from Canada.

July 6

British force Americans to abandon Fort Ticonderoga.

July 20

After struggle with patriot forces along the Carolina and Georgia frontiers, Cherokee give up land in western North Carolina.

July 27

Marquis de Lafayette arrives in Philadelphia to volunteer for the American cause.

August 2 - 23

Patriots successfully defend Fort Stanwix, New York, against intimidating British assault, halting one prong of planned English offensive.

August 6

In one of the bloodiest actions of the war, Mohawk war chief, Joseph Brant and British-allied Indians ambush and engage New York militia outside Fort Stanwix at Oriskany, New York.

August 16

Hessian component of General Burgoyne's offensive defeated at Bennington (Vermont).

August 25

British land at Head of Elk (Chesapeake Bay), Maryland, and begin campaign to capture Philadelphia.

September 2

Zealous Pennsylvania government arrests prominent Philadelphia Quakers for not supporting patriot causes and sends them into exile in Virginia.

September 11

Washington gives ground after losing hard-fought Battle of Brandywine, Pennsylvania.

September 19

At the first Battle of Saratoga (Freeman's Farm), New York, Burgoyne's army is shaken by encounter with Arnold and Morgan's riflemen.

September 21

British carry out victorious nighttime bayonet assault on Anthony Wayne's Pennsylvania troops at the Battle of Paoli, Pennsylvania.

September 22 - 26

English outmaneuver Continental Army and capture Philadelphia.

October 4

Washington's bold counter attack at the Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania, falls short.

October 7

At Second Battle of Saratoga (Bemis Heights) New York, Arnold defeats British again and forces them to retreat.

October 17

Burgoyne surrenders his trapped army to General Horatio Gates.

October 22

Hessian attack on Fort Mercer, New Jersey, is firmly repulsed.

November 10 - 15

Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, reduced and evacuated after valiant American defense.

November 15

Articles of Confederation adopted by Continental Congress in York, Pennsylvania.

December 19

Continental Army enters the third winter encampment of the war at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

1778

The Tide Turns

European recognition, assistance, and military professionalism came to America in 1778. By February American diplomatic efforts and military achievements yielded an alliance with France. At the Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey, in June, the Americans claimed victory over their opponent. In November

the army set up their winter quarters with business-like efficiency at Middlebrook, New Jersey.

February

Rhode Island Assembly enacts temporary law granting freedom to slaves who enlist in the predominately African American First Rhode Island regiment.

February 6

French Alliance treaties signed in Europe.

February 23

Former Prussian officer Baron von Steuben arrives at Valley Forge to begin training program.

May 6

Continental Army formally celebrates French Alliance at Valley Forge.

June 18

British withdraw from Philadelphia.

June 19

Continental Army leaves Valley Forge in pursuit.

June 28

Steuben-trained Continentals prove their mettle and force the King's troops from the field at Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey.

July

George Rogers Clark carries out audacious operation against British-held posts in present-day Indiana and Illinois, capturing Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Fort Sackville at Vincennes.

July 10

France declares war on Great Britain.

August 29

French Alliance gets off to a rocky start as uncoordinated Franco-American attack on Newport, Rhode Island, fails.

November 11

Loyalist leaders Walter Butler and Joseph Brant lead tory and Indian attack on Cherry Valley, New York.

November

Continental Army begins fourth winter camp at Middlebrook, New Jersey.

December 17

British retake Vincennes.

December 29

British expedition captures Savannah, Georgia.

1779

World at War

By 1779 the war had spread across the globe. In spring Spain entered the war as an ally of France and soon declared war on Great Britain. As the year closed, the Continental Army entered into

winter camp at Morristown, New Jersey, where they would endure fiercer weather conditions and subsist on fewer supplies than they had at Valley Forge.

January 11

Lafayette returns to France to plead for additional support.

January 29

British occupy Augusta, Georgia.

February 25

George Rogers Clark recaptures Vincennes.

April 12

Spain, which had been contributing aid to the Americans, enters war as an ally of France.

May

Continental Army leaves Camp Middlebrook, New Jersey.

June 1

British occupy Stony Point and Verplancks Point, New York, and secure strategic Kings Ferry on the Hudson River.

June 21

Spain formally declares war on Great Britain.

July 16

Anthony Wayne captures formidable fortress Stony Point, New York, during daring night assault.

July-August

American attempt to attack Penobscot (Maine) fails miserably.

August 29

In only battle of General John Sullivan's punitive campaign against the Iroquois, Continental Army defeats tory and Indian force at Newtown, New York.

August 19

Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee carries out successful offensive against Paulus Hook, New Jersey, a British stronghold on the Hudson River.

September-October

Allied forces fail to dislodge British garrison during the disappointing Siege of Savannah, Georgia.

September 23

John Paul Jones defeats frigate Serapis near English coast.

September 25

Congress appoints John Jay minister to Spain.

December 1

Continental Army comes into the war's fifth winter encampment at Morristown, New Jersey, where the army endures an extraordinarily harsh winter.

1780

A Bad Year

A worsening economy, military disaster in the South, and treason, all undermined the war effort in 1780. Two South Carolina defeats: the capture of Charleston and its large American garrison, and subsequent loss at Camden, made the patriot situation in the South extremely tenuous. Benedict Arnold's treasonous attempt to hand over the plans to Fort West Point, New York, added insult to injury.

March 14

Spanish take British-held post at Mobile (Alabama).

March 29 - May 12

British General Henry Clinton besieges Charleston, South Carolina, and compels the surrender of its garrison of 5,500 troops.

May 29

Brutal treatment of surrendering force at the Battle at Waxhaws, South Carolina, by "Bloody" Banastre Tarleton arouses patriot fury.

June 22

Continental Army leaves Morristown encampment.

June 23

Continental Army under Nathanael Greene repulse attack led by General Knyphausen at the Battle of Springfield, New Jersey.

July 10

5,500 fresh French troops arrive in Newport, Rhode Island.

Summer-Fall

Guerilla leaders Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, William Davies, and Elijah Clarke carry the war against British and loyalist troops in the South.

August 16

British defeat last major southern continental force at the Battle of Camden, South Carolina.

September

Washington foils Arnold's plot to surrender West Point, New York, but Arnold escapes.

October 7

Intimidating British tactics backfire as swarms of riled frontiersmen annihilate Patrick Ferguson's tory force at the Battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina.

December 2

Nathanael Greene assumes command of beleaguered southern army and puts British off guard by dividing his forces in the face of superior numbers.

December

England declares war on Holland.

Continental Army enters sixth winter with encampments in New York's Hudson Highlands and Pompton and Morristown, New Jersey.

1781

Upside Down

Nathanael Greene's masterful strategies as well as Franco-American cooperation secured victory in the South. After Greene frustrated General Cornwallis' designs in the Carolinas, the British general moved to Virginia where the Allies trapped his army. Yorktown was not the end of the war, as Washington and his generals had to contend with the British garrisons that remained.

January

Pennsylvania and New Jersey troops mutiny over pay and enlistment grievances. To prevent further spread of revolt among army, Washington and his officers deal harshly with the mutineers, executing several men.

January 17

Daniel Morgan wins one-sided victory against British at the Battle of Cowpens, South Carolina.

February 14

Continental Army under Greene's command exhausts Cornwallis in marching contest, covering forty miles in sixteen hours.

February 20

Congress appoints Robert Morris, "The Financier of the Revolution" as Superintendent of Finances. During trying financial period, Morris astutely manipulates accounts to keep the war effort funded.

March 1

States formally ratify the Articles of Confederation.

March 15

Greene further weakens British stamina in a fierce clash of arms at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina.

April 25

Finding his position untenable, Greene withdraws during the Battle of Hobkirk's Hill, South Carolina.

May 9

Spanish capture British outpost at Pensacola (Florida).

July 6

Finding himself outnumbered nearly 10 to 1, Anthony Wayne saves his troops from capture by charging straight into Cornwallis' men at Green Spring Plantation, Virginia.

August 21

Combined armies of Washington and Rochambeau slip away from New York before the British can discover them missing, marching south to confront Cornwallis in Yorktown, Virginia.

September 5

The Battle of the Virginia Capes and subsequent naval operations prevent the British fleet from entering Chesapeake Bay to rescue Cornwallis.

September 8

Greene fights sharp action at Eutaw Springs, South Carolina, and orders another tactical withdrawal.

September-October

Allied siege of Yorktown, Virginia, by land seals Cornwallis' fate.

October 19

Cornwallis surrenders along with his full contingent of 8,000 troops, marking the beginning of the end for the British.

November

The Netherlands extends the first of four crucial loans to the United States.

Continental Army returns to Hudson Highlands and New Jersey for its seventh winter encampment.

1782

Stay The Course

By spring England initiated peace negotiations, yet fighting continued. On the seas, British, French, and Spanish navies continued to battle for supremacy. In America, warfare threatened security on the frontier and in the South. By November, however, Britain and the United States signed a draft peace agreement.

January

As the British begin to withdraw forces, loyalists flee the United States in great numbers. Over the course of the war, 100,000 Tories depart.

April 12

Peace talks between Britain and the United States begin in Paris.

April 19

The Netherlands recognizes American sovereignty.

July 11

British end their occupation of Savannah, Georgia.

August 1

Haym Salomon, Broker to the Office of Finance, delivers the first of many large sums that help alleviate the nation's financial crisis at war's end.

August 15 - 19

Tories and Indians attack Bryan's Station (Kentucky). Daniel Boone and Kentuckians lose skirmish at Blue Licks.

August 27

John Laurens, promising young leader and former aide-de-camp to Washington, dies in fight at Combahee Ferry, South Carolina.

November 10

In the last battle of the American Revolution, George Rogers Clark attacks Shawnee town of Chillicothe (Ohio).

November

Continental Army moves into its eighth and final winter quarters, the New Windsor cantonment in the Hudson Highlands.

November 30

American and British ministers agree upon preliminary peace treaty.

December 14

British evacuate Charleston, South Carolina.

1783

Peace

In 1783 America acquired independence, but domestic troubles threatened. As the war wound down, George Washington drew on his leadership ability to keep order amongst a mostly idle, unpaid, and discontented army. On September 3 ministers signed the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the war. Washington bade a tearful farewell to his officers and then resigned his commission.

January 20

Britain signs preliminary peace articles with France and Spain.

April 11

Congress proclaims cessation of hostilities.

April 19

Washington declares end to fighting eight years to the day after war began.

September 3

Final peace treaty between Britain and the United States signed in Paris

British-allied tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy lose most of their lands as they are left out of the settlement. Some bands settle in southern Ontario with Joseph Brant.

November 2

Washington issues farewell orders to the "Armies of the United States."

November 25

British finally evacuate New York.

December 4

Washington bids farewell to his officers at Fraunces' Tavern in New York City.

December 23

Washington resigns his commission before the Continental Congress in Annapolis, Maryland.

Legacy

On a personal level the Revolutionary War produced a mixed legacy of positive and negative consequences. On the patriot side, the cost of founding an independent republic was high. Approximately 25,000 sacrificed their lives, and many forfeited their livelihood. The success of the Revolution brought scorn to those loyal to the Crown, and most of them lost fortunes and homes. The war broadened the horizons and prospects of many revolutionaries. Numerous former soldiers felt wanderlust and formed the vanguard of westward expansion. In turn this relentless advance forced thousands of American Indians off their rich domain. For some African Americans, service brought freedom, yet many remained enslaved. While women gained new outlooks, their actual status remained unchanged. As the sound of combat grew fainter, the battle for individual rights began.