American Revolutionary War

The American Revolutionary War (1775 - 1783) was an insurrection by 13 British North American colonies that won political independence and went on to form the United States of America.

The war followed more than a decade of growing division between the British crown and a large and influential segment of its North American colonies.

It was caused by British attempts to assert greater control over colonial affairs after having long adhered to a policy of neglect.

Until early-1778 the conflict was a civil war within the British Empire, but afterward it became an international war as France (in 1778) and Spain (in 1779) joined the colonies against Britain.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands, which provided both official recognition of the United States and financial support for it, was engaged in its own war against Britain.

From the beginning, sea power was vital in determining the course of the war.

This gave the British flexibility that helped compensate for the comparatively small numbers of troops sent to America; sea power later helped the French bring about the final British surrender at Yorktown.

Americans fought the war on land with two sets of fighters: the Continental (national) Army and the state militias.

Quotas were filled from each of the states that provided a total of 231,771 men into the Continental Army, and the militias totaled 164,087.

At any given time, however, the American forces were seldom over 20,000; in 1781 there were only about 29,000 insurgents under arms throughout the country.

By contrast, the British army was a reliable steady force of professionals. Since it numbered only about 42,000, heavy recruiting programs were introduced.

Many of the enlisted men were farm boys, as were most of the Americans.

In addition, the British paid for about 30,000 troops (Hessians) from various German princes.

Preliminary articles of peace were signed on November 30, 1782, and the Peace of Paris (September 3, 1783) ended the US War of Independence.

Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States (with western boundaries to the Mississippi River) and ceded Florida to Spain.

Other provisions called for payment of US private debts to British citizens, American use of the Newfoundland fisheries and fair treatment for American colonials loyal to Britain.

An estimated 6,800 Americans were killed in action, 6,100 wounded, and upwards of 20,000 were taken prisoner.

Historians believe that at least an additional 17,000 deaths were the result of disease, including about 8,000-12,000 who died while prisoners of war.

Unreliable data places the total casualties for British regulars fighting in the Revolutionary War around 24,000 men.

Approximately 1,200 Hessian soldiers were killed, 6,354 died of disease and another 5,500 deserted and settled in America afterward.