

American Revolutionary War

The American Revolutionary War (1775 - 1783) was an insurrection by which 13 of Great Britain's 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 estrangement between the British crown and a large and influential segment of its North American colonies that was caused by British attempts to assert greater control over colonial affairs after having long adhered to a policy of salutary 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, lending to British strategy a flexibility that helped compensate for the comparatively small numbers of troops sent to America and ultimately enabling the French to help bring about the final British surrender at Yorktown. (Britannica)

Americans fought the war on land with essentially two types of organization: the Continental (national) Army and the state militias. The total number of the former provided by quotas from the states throughout the conflict was 231,771 men, and the militias totaled 164,087. At any given time, however, the American forces seldom numbered 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. Others were unemployed persons from the urban slums. Still others joined the army to escape fines or imprisonment. The great majority became efficient soldiers as a result of training and discipline.

Because troops were few and conscription unknown, the British government, following a traditional policy, purchased about 30,000 troops 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. (Britannica)

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. This total number includes battlefield deaths and injuries, deaths from disease, men taken prisoner, and those who remained missing. Approximately 1,200 Hessian soldiers were killed, 6,354 died of disease and another 5,500 deserted and settled in America afterward. (Battlefield)

American Revolutionary War Timeline

1754

May 28 - The French and Indian War begins

July 10 - Albany Plan of Union—Benjamin Franklin proposes a single government for the colonies

1763

February 10 - The Treaty of Paris ends the French and Indian War. The English drive the French from North America, and the English national debt soars

October 7 - Proclamation of 1763—King George III banned colonists from settling beyond the Appalachian mountains

1764

April 5 - Sugar Act—Smugglers could be tried in Admiralty Courts, without the benefit of a jury

1765

March 22 - Stamp Act—Tax on paper goods and legal documents

March 24 - Quartering Act—Colonies must provide housing and food for British troops

March 29 - Virginia House of Burgesses passes the Virginia Resolves, 7 resolutions that challenge the legality of the Stamp Act

October 7-25 - Stamp Act Congress meets in Philadelphia to discuss the crisis

1766

March 18 - Parliament repeals the Stamp Act and passes the Declaratory Act, which reiterates Parliament's authority over the colonies

1768

February 11 - Massachusetts Assembly issues Massachusetts Circular Letter, denouncing Townsend Acts

August 1 - Boston Non-Importation Agreement—Boston merchants agree to not import British goods, or sell to Britain

1770

January 19 - Golden Hill Riot, NY

March 5 - Boston Massacre

1772

June 9 - Gaspée Affair—A British ship patrolling for smugglers runs aground in Rhode Island and a local mob burns it; the mob is then accused of treason

1773

May 10 - Tea Act—An attempt by Parliament to undercut smugglers by reducing the price of tea to the colonies

December 16 - Boston Tea Party

1774

March 31 - Boston Port Act— Parliament closes the city's port in response to the Tea Party.

May 20 - Administration of Justice Act and Massachusetts Government Act, two of the so-called Intolerable Acts, further anger colonists

June 2 - Quartering Act is amended

September 5–October 26 - First Continental Congress—Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia

1775

March 23 - Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" speech, Richmond, VA

April 18 – Rides by were Paul Revere, Samuel Prescott, Israel Bissell, William Dawes and Sybil Ludington and others

General Thomas Gage, the military governor of Massachusetts, knew he was sitting on a powder keg. Since Parliament had imposed the Coercive Acts in response to the Boston Tea Party, American hostility toward British policies had increased and civil disobedience had spread. Believing that he must take aggressive steps to prevent an escalation of the conflict, he resolved to seize the arms and ammunition stockpiled by the local militias in Concord and Worcester. 188

Gage took huge precautions to keep his plan secret. But nothing could be kept secret in Boston in 1775. Anti-British Patriots like Paul Revere kept a close watch on every move made by the British troops occupying Boston. Informers filled in the details. By the time Gage was ready to act, only the exact route was still unknown. But even that was ascertained before the troops began piling into the small boats that would carry them across the Back Bay to Charlestown for their march to Concord.

Revere, Prescott and Dawe's midnight ride, therefore, brought news to Patriot militia that were already on hyper-alert. As 700 British troops waded from their boats to the shore, and then set off with wet feet toward Concord, bells and musket shots rang through the night warning colonists and rattling the soldiers who knew how combative the Americans could be.

April 19 - Battles of Lexington and Concord, MA

When the British troops reached Lexington around dawn—half way to Concord—they were surprised to find a band of American militia standing on the green to the side of the road. The men had gathered hours earlier—by this time half had returned home. But those remaining stood in silence to protest the assertion of British power represented by the troops passing through their village.

When their commander Major Pitcairn ordered the “damned rebels” to lay down their arms, his men shouted their approval. When someone fired a shot—to this day no one knows who—the soldiers jumped at the chance to deliver a volley.

A few Americans returned the fire. But clearly the militia got the worst of the exchange. Eight were killed and ten were wounded; only one British soldier received a minor wound. But the British officers were more embarrassed by their loss of control than celebratory. They quickly re-formed ranks and set off for Concord.

At Meriam’s corner, about one mile east of Concord, the militia caught the British and mounted the first of the guerrilla attacks that would turn the Redcoats’ sixteen mile trip back to Boston into a nightmare. Shooting from behind rocks and trees, the Americans took a brutal toll on the retreating troops.

Even with enforcements, there would be no safety or rest for the British until they reached Charlestown around dusk. By the time they reached their quarters in Boston, they had lost 273 men—73 killed, 174 wounded, and 26 missing.

- May 10 - Ethan Allen & Green Mountain Boys seize Fort Ticonderoga, Second Continental Congress meets
- June 15 - George Washington appointed commander-in-chief
- June 17 - Battle of Bunker Hill

After the battle at Concord on April 19, 1775, the British beat a hasty retreat back to Boston. With American colonists hot on their heels and taking potshots at them from behind rocks and trees, they could not wait to get back to the relative safety of Boston. But the militia that had taken such a deadly toll did not retire once the British reached their base. Instead they set up camp just outside the city and dared the British to attack.

On June 16, militia officer William Prescott and a force of about 1,000 men constructed, under the cover of darkness, a six-foot earthen wall along the crest of Breed’s Hill (the hill closest to the Charles River and the city of Boston). Militia also reinforced a rail fence to the north of the hill to protect the Americans’ left flank.

On the morning of June 17, the British woke to the new American defenses. Realizing just how vulnerable they now were, they immediately opened fire (largely ineffective) from ships in the harbor. At noon, a British force of 2,200 under General William Howe landed at Mouton’s Point, east of the American defenses.

As the battle-hardened British column approached, the American militia remained surprisingly calm. According to legend, Prescott instructed his men not to fire “until you see the whites of their eyes.” At fifty yards, the Redcoats dilated pupils came into view and the colonial militia let loose a withering musket fire.

After multiple attacks, the Redcoat’s succeeded in overrunning the American lines and forcing the American militia to withdraw. The British took the hill, but they were too demoralized and disorganized to pursue effectively, allowing most American militia to escape.



Regional Map Noting Locations of Some of the Battle Sites noted in this Summary (National Geographic)

July 3 - George Washington assumes command of the Army outside Boston
July 5 - Congress approves the Olive Branch Petition, a final attempt to avoid war with Britain
October 13 - The U.S. Navy is established
November 19-21 - First Siege of Ninety Six, SC
November – May 1776 – Assault on Canada

For most of the war, Americans entertained the illusion that Canada was ripe for the picking, that freedom-craving Canadians would rally to the American call and join them in ousting their common British foe. For most of the war, Americans also realized that Canada provided Britain with a valuable base, an easily-supplied staging ground from which they could launch attacks into New England and New York.

Informed that the British intended to send an army south from Canada under Governor Guy Carleton to capture New York, the Continental Congress dispatched General Philip Schuyler and a force of about 1000 militia in August 1775 toward Montreal by way of Lake Champlain. At the same time, General Washington ordered Benedict Arnold to recruit an army in Massachusetts. The Americans first took Montreal, then headed to Quebec.

December 9 - Battle of Great Bridge, VA
December 22 - Battle of Great Canebreak, SC
December 23-30 - Snow Campaign, SC
December 30-Jan 1 - Battle of Quebec

American forces slogged through freezing temperatures and driving winds to reach the city walls. The British waited for them inside. Almost as soon as the fighting began, Richard Montgomery (who had replaced the ailing Schuyler) was killed and Benedict Arnold took a bullet in the leg. Within just hours, the American forces were defeated. Fewer than 100 Americans were killed or injured, but 400 were captured.

1776

January 10 - Thomas Paine publishes Common Sense
February 27 - Battle of Moore's Creek, NC
March 3 - Continental Navy captures New Providence Island, Bahamas
March 17 - British evacuate Boston
April 12 - Halifax Resolves, NC—First colony to authorize its delegates to vote for independence
June 7 - Lee Resolution: Richard Henry Lee proposes independence to the Second Continental Congress
June 28 - Battle of Sullivan's Island, SC

British General Henry Clinton had plotted to take this city - and with eight warships and 30 transports filled with well-trained British regulars, he anticipated few problems. To enter the city's harbor, these ships would have to pass through a narrow channel guarded by Sullivan Island. But the island's fort was not yet completed; an entire wall had not been constructed.

The British fleet arrived on June 4, but for three weeks bad weather prevented the ships from approaching the harbor entrance. This gave militia from North Carolina and Virginia time to reach the threatened city. Six-thousand Americans were therefore poised to

defend Charleston by June 28 when the winds died, allowing the British to attack. But at this point, the half completed fort on Sullivan Island proved remarkably resilient. As British ships launched a massive barrage, the fort's still-green palmetto logs simply caught the hurling balls like a well-padded catcher's glove. Meanwhile, American canons took a terrible toll on the British ships, especially those that ran aground on the shallow harbor entrance. Finally, Clinton, and the British, withdrew.

- July 1 - Cherokee attack the southern frontier
- July 4 - Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence
- August 27 - Battle of Brooklyn, NY

By August 1775, British General William Howe had landed 32,000 troops on Staten Island, including 9,000 Hessian mercenaries. Anticipating the British move on New York, American General George Washington felt differently marched his army south from Boston. He carefully deployed his troops on the tip of Manhattan and across the East River on Long Island's Brooklyn Heights, and then he all but dared the British commanders to try and drive him from the gates of the Hudson River.

Washington's left flank was undermanned and British troops tried to take advantage of it. But bad weather prevented British General William Howe from doing so. The storm bought Washington a little time - just enough to finally realize that New York was lost. And so the next night, he quietly transported all 9,500 men deployed on Brooklyn Heights back across the East River to Manhattan.

The battle of New York was a disaster for the Americans but not a complete disaster. More than 300 were killed, 800 were wounded, and another 1,000 were captured.

- September 15 - British occupy Manhattan
- September 16 - Battle of Harlem Heights, NY
- September 22 - British execute Nathan Hale, a soldier in the Continental Army
- October 11 - Battle of Valcour Island, Lake Champlain
- October 28 - Battle of White Plains, NY
- November 16 - Battle of Fort Washington, NY
- November 20 - British capture Fort Lee, NJ
- December 23 - Thomas Paine publishes The American Crisis
- December 26 - Battle of Trenton, NJ

Washington had been humiliated in New York. He had botched the defense of the city and been forced to flee with his army north along the Hudson with the British close on his heels. He tried to slow their advance (and redeem his reputation) by strengthening the garrisons at Fort Washington and Fort Lee, but the British took both forts.

Washington could have sat safe for the winter. But several considerations urged him toward action. Almost half of his 3,000-man army was enlisted only through the end of the year; they would soon be going home. The other half suffered from sagging morale. And according to his intelligence, the Hessian troops stationed across the river in Trenton had taken few measures to fortify their position.

Therefore, on December 25, Washington led 2,400 men across the icy river and took the sleepy and Christmas cheer-filled garrison by surprise. After less than an hour of fighting, the Hessians surrendered. Only two Americans were killed; more than 900 Hessian mercenaries were taken prisoner.

Washington returned to his camp on the other side of the Delaware River; but believing that he could take another British winter camp, he re-crossed the Delaware on December 31 and occupied Trenton. Meanwhile, Cornwallis, who had broken camp after hearing of Washington's Christmas surprise, marched an army of 6,000 men toward the Delaware. When he pulled into Trenton, Washington fell back to the banks of the river as night fell.

As the British slept, while they slept, Washington slipped around the British army and marched on Princeton. Washington had driven the British garrison from the town and was on his way Morristown, New Jersey where he established an easily defended winter camp.

American victories at Trenton and Princeton could not have come at a better time. After the disaster at New York, the Patriots needed their morale boosted and Washington needed his credibility restored. Within less than a week, the American effort gained an entirely different complexion, and the prospects for 1777 looked far more encouraging.

1777

January 3 - Battle of Princeton, NJ

January 6 - May 28 - Continental Army winters at Morristown, NJ

April 27 - Battle at Ridgefield, CT

June 14 - Flag Resolution- Congress declared "That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field"

July 5 - British capture Fort Ticonderoga

In 1777, ambitious General John Burgoyne convinced the British ministry that he could deal a devastating blow to the Americans by leading an army from Canada south through Lake Champlain and into the Hudson River valley while General Howe led an army up the Hudson River from New York. In June 1777, Burgoyne departed Canada with a force of almost 8,000 men. Burgoyne's army took Fort Ticonderoga and Skenesboro.

August 6 - Battle of Oriskany, NY

August 16 - Battle of Bennington, VT (Walloomsac, NY)

September 11 - Battle of Brandywine, PA

September 19 - Battle of Saratoga, NY (Freeman's Farm)

Burgoyne's army entered the dense woods below Skenesboro and their progress came to a grinding halt. It took almost a month to travel the 25 miles to Stillwell on the Hudson and easier going. But by then, he was running short of supplies. He sent a detachment to Bennington, New York to commandeer provisions, but they ran into John Starks and a force of New Hampshire militia recently inspired to fight, at least partially, by Burgoyne's

outlandish proclamation. At Bennington, the entire British party was either killed or captured.

Burgoyne's men were exhausted and his army was short on supplies. But he decided to press on toward Albany. On September 19, however, he ran into American General Horatio Gates and a rapidly growing force of Continental regulars and militia at Bemis Heights. Burgoyne tried to break through the enemies' line the first time on September 19. But, suffering more than 600 casualties, he was forced to withdraw.

- September 20-21 - Battle of Paoli, PA
- September 26 - British take Philadelphia
- October 4 - Battle of Germantown, PA
- October 7 - Battle of Saratoga, NY (Bemis Heights)
- October 17 - British surrender at Saratoga, NY

Burgoyne fell back to Saratoga, but the American forces had almost doubled as militia poured in from all directions. Finally recognizing the impossible odds, Burgoyne surrendered his entire army of almost 6,000 men on October 17.

Saratoga was devastating for the British cause; they lost 6,000 men, 27 canons, 5,000 small arms. But the diplomatic consequences were even greater. France, who had been waiting for proof that the Americans might win before extending support, rushed into action.

- October 22 - Battle of Fort Mercer, NJ
- November 16 - British capture Fort Mifflin, PA
- December 5-7 - Battle of White Marsh, PA
- December 19 - Washington and his army winter in Valley Forge

1778

- February 6 - The United States and France become allies
- February 7 - British General William Howe replaced by Henry Clinton
- May 20 - Battle of Barren Hill, PA
- June 18 - British abandon Philadelphia, Continental Army marches out of Valley Forge
- June 28 - Battle of Monmouth, NJ

On a hot and humid June 28, 1778, General George Washington and his subordinate, General Charles Lee, attacked rearguard elements of General Sir Henry Clinton's British Army.

Although the American army outnumbered its foe two-to-one and had undergone extensive training in the art of war during its winter encampment at Valley Forge, Lee, who launched the initial attack, lacked confidence in the ability of the Continental soldiers under his command. In failing to press his advantage, Lee ceded the initiative to his British counterpart, General Charles Lord Cornwallis, who commanded the rear elements of Clinton's army.

What began as a promising opportunity devolved into a potential disaster. As George Washington approached the fighting, he encountered panic stricken troops fleeing the enemy. Enraged, he galloped ahead of his wing, In an angry confrontation on the field of battle, Washington removed Lee from command.

Rallying what troops he had, Washington continued the assault on the British. The commanding general's delaying action gave time for the rest of the Continental Army to come up and join the battle.

Washington placed General Nathanael Greene's division on the right and the division of General William Alexander, "Lord" Stirling, on the left. Lee's men were turned over to the Marquis de Lafayette, who kept those troops in reserve. General "Mad" Anthony Wayne assumed command over other elements of Lee's force and manned Lafayette's front. Artillery was placed on both flanks, with the guns on the right positioned to rain enfilading fire on the British.

An American counterattack on the British right forced the Redcoats to fall back and reorganize. The fighting see-sawed back and forth under the brutal June sun for several hours. By 6 pm, however, the British felt they had enough. While Wayne wanted to press the attack, Washington demurred, believing that his men were "beat out and with heat and fatigue." The British did not give Washington a chance to renew the fight in the morning, slipping away under the cover of darkness and resuming their withdrawal to New York City.

July 4 - George Rogers Clark captures Kaskaskia, in modern Illinois

July 29–August 31 - French and American forces besiege Newport, RI

December 29 - British capture Savannah, GA

Having failed to crush the American rebellion in the northern colonies, the British decided in late 1778 to concentrate their efforts in the South. There were more loyalists in South Carolina and Georgia, they believed; if these were rallied and organized, they could help bring the rest of the colonies under control. Therefore, General Henry Clinton was ordered to send an army southward and restore order to these most southern colonies

The first step in this southern strategy proved easy. In December 1788, transport ships carried Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell and 3500 men to Georgia, landing fifteen miles below Savannah. On December 29, they stormed the town and quickly routed the 1,000 undisciplined militia raised for its defense.

1779

February 3 - Battle of Port Royal Island, SC

February 14 - Battle of Kettle Creek, GA

February 23–24 - George Rogers Clark captures Vincennes, in modern Indiana

March 3 - Battle of Brier Creek, GA

June 18 - Sullivan expedition attacks Indian villages in NY

June 20 - Battle of Stono River, SC

June 21 - Spain declares war on Great Britain
July 7 - British burn Fairfield, CT
July 11 - British burn Norwalk, CT
July 16 - Americans capture Stony Point, NY
July 24 - August 14 - Penobscot Expedition (Castine, ME)
July 28 - Battle of Fort Mifflin, PA
August 19 - Battle of Paulus Hook, NJ
August 29 - Battle of Newtown, NY
September 16 - October 19 - American/French effort to retake Savannah fails
September 23 - John Paul Jones and the USS Bonhomme Richard capture HMS Serapis near English coast
November - Washington's Main Army begins camping at Morristown, NJ

1780

January 28 - Fort Nashborough established (now Nashville, TN)
March 14 - Spanish capture Mobile
May 12 - British capture Charleston, SC

in 1780, British General Henry Clinton vowed to take the city to cap Britain's new southern strategy. He sent 14,000 men (more than three times the Continentals and militia guarding the city). And rather than attack by sea, he opted to land below the city, march to its edge, and employ the classic strategy of the siege.,

On April 1, British troops began to dig a huge trench about 800 yards from the city's defensive fortifications. This would be the first of the many that would bring them closer and closer to the city's barricades. The work was incredibly slow and dangerous. American artillery fired everything they could find - broken shovels, small hatchets, irons, locks, and glass. The British responded with more conventional but equally deadly ammunition.

This artillery exchange took a physical and psychic toll on both sides. Clinton hoped that the local population would also be unnerved by the relentless advance of his mole-army and therefore demand that city officials surrender the city. Moreover, since the primary purpose of the campaign was to rally southern loyalists, a damaging invasion of the city was the last thing Clinton wanted.

Ultimately, Clinton's plan worked. By mid-May the armies could practically touch one another. One last shelling broke the spirit of the townspeople and they demanded that the city be surrendered. Hoping to win southern hearts and minds, Clinton paroled all of the American militiamen. But the 2,500 Continentals engaged in the city's defense were taken prisoner.

Charleston was a brutal blow to the American effort, probably the most severe defeat since the Battle of New York. More than an army was lost; many soft-Patriots and fence-straddlers in the Deep South concluded that the war was over and accepted Clinton's offer of clemency in return for a pledge of loyalty to the Crown. Tory militia were inspired to join the British ranks and increase their attack on their Patriot counterparts. In other words, the victory achieved much of what British policymakers had hoped it would.

May 25 - Mutiny of Connecticut regiments at Morristown, NJ
May 26 - Battle at St. Louis, now in Missouri
May 29 - Battle of Waxhaws, SC
June 20 - Battle of Ramseur's Mill, NC
June 23 - Washington's Main Army leaves their winter camps at Morristown, NJ
July 11 - French troops arrive at Newport, RI
August 6 - Battle of Hanging Rock, SC
August 16 - Battle of Camden, SC

Despite the crushing defeat at Charleston, Patriot loyalists in the Carolina interior waged a dogged campaign against British and Loyalist forces. In April, General Washington sent them some support in the form of 1,400 men under the leadership of Horatio Gates.

Gates enthusiastically embraced this challenge. Upon reaching the Carolinas he immediately ordered a rapid advance toward a British post at Camden, South Carolina. En route he added about 2,000 militia to his 1,400 regulars. By the time his march-weary troops reached Camden, British General Cornwallis had increased the post's strength to almost 2,500—most of them British regulars.

Not properly identifying the forces arrayed against him, Gates set his undisciplined Virginia militia opposite battle-hardened British regulars on his left. Then he ordered them to make the first move against the British lines. The British regulars responded, firing volleys and advancing with bayonets fixed. With this, the Virginians panicked and ran. The North Carolina militia followed their lead and took off without firing a shot.

Camden was a disaster for the American southern effort and an even greater disaster for Gates. The hero of Saratoga was humiliated and only narrowly avoided a court martial. Washington quickly replaced him with Greene; it would take longer to repair Patriot morale in the South.

August 19 - Battle of Musgrove Mill, SC
September 23 - British officer John Andre arrested for spying
October 7 - Battle of Kings Mountain, SC
October 14 - Gen. Nathanael Greene named commander of the southern Continental Army
October 18 - British occupy Wilmington, NC

1781

January 17 - Battle of Cowpens, SC

After the disaster at Camden, Nathaniel Greene was given command over America's southern army. More prudent than Gates, he avoided a direct confrontation with Cornwallis and his increasingly confident British troops. Instead, he sent Daniel Morgan to harass Britain's western posts and Henry Lee to disrupt the supply lines linking Cornwallis's main army at Winnsborough to Charleston, South Carolina.

Britain's Cornwallis decided to match force with force and dispatched the Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton to engage Morgan. They met each other at Cowpens on 17 January, a large meadow roughly 500 yards long and just as wide, anchored at its southern end by two small hills about 70 yards apart. The two forces were roughly equal in size. Both had cavalry units and both supplemented their regulars with militia. And both knew the reputation of the American militia. Morgan, however, used this knowledge to better advantage.

At the front of his lines, Morgan placed 150 sharpshooters. Behind them he positioned 300 militia, and behind them, on the crest of the first hill, another 450 men. Behind these, between the first and second hills, Morgan positioned his small cavalry of about 125 horsemen. Tarleton, as expected, sent his cavalry and infantry directly into the center of the Americans' front line. Morgan's sharpshooters fired several rounds at the cavalry before retreating to the back line. The American militia held their fire until the infantry had advanced within musket range; then they fired two volleys before also falling back behind the first hill as previously instructed.

The British, believing that the American militia was retreating as usual, pressed toward the center of the main American line at the top of the hill. There they met stiff resistance from the forces deployed there. Only the American right gave way and, smelling blood, the British poured through the opening. But when they did, they ran smack into blazing guns of the militia who had fallen back to other side of the hill. At this point Greene also sent his cavalry, hidden between the hills, into the flank of the stunned enemy.

Tarleton managed to escape with about 50 others. More than 100 British soldiers were killed and more than 800 prisoners were taken. The Americans suffered fewer than 100 casualties and received a tremendous boost in morale.

February 1 - Battle of Cowan's Ford, NC
February 12 - Spanish forces take Fort St. Joseph, now Miles, MI
March 2 - Articles of Confederation adopted; Battle of Clapp's Mill, NC
March 6 - Battle of Weitzel's Mill, NC
March 15 - Battle of Guilford Courthouse, NC

After the Battle of Cowpens (January 17, 1781), Cornwallis resolved to track Morgan down and he did at Guilford Courthouse. By then, Morgan had reunited with Greene bringing their combined forces to almost 4,500 men. In the battle fought on March 15, the British eventually won the field, but they suffered more than 500 casualties, forcing Cornwallis to fall back to Wilmington until he could be re-enforced with fresh troops. The Americans felt that the South was back in play.

April 25 - Battle of Hobkirk's Hill, SC
May 9 - Spanish capture Pensacola
May 15 - Battle of Fort Granby, SC
May 22–June 18 - Siege of Ninety Six, SC
June 6 - Americans retake Augusta, GA
July 6 - Battle at Green Spring, VA
August 28 - Battle of Elizabethtown, NC

September 5 - Battle of the Capes, Chesapeake Bay
September 8 - Battle of Eutaw Springs, SC
September 28 - October 19 - Siege of Yorktown, VA

After the crushing defeat at Cowpens and the costly “victory” at Guilford Court, British General Charles Cornwallis decided that the Carolinas could not be subdued until Virginia, which had supplied militia and supplies to the Carolina Patriots, was brought under control.

Therefore in April 1781, he marched his army out of Wilmington, North Carolina and into Virginia. There he rendezvoused with Banastre Tarleton and American turncoat Benedict Arnold and continued the attack on Virginia’s government initiated by Arnold in January when he burned the capital in Richmond.

But when Washington sent more troops to Virginia to re-enforce the small army under the Marquis de Lafayette, Cornwallis withdrew to the coastal town of Yorktown. There he could better communicate with General Clinton in New York.

French Admiral de Grasse had sent word that he had left the West Indies and expected to reach the Chesapeake with his fleet of 29 ships and 3000 men by mid-October. Washington immediately dropped his plans for an attack against Clinton in New York and prepared to march the Continental and French armies to Virginia.

Lafayette also played a critical role in the campaign: he and his 4,500 men were near Yorktown discouraging Cornwallis from moving his army. This impediment to flight increased on August 30 when de Grasse reached Yorktown, set up a naval blockade, and added an additional 3000 troops to Lafayette’s force. Cornwallis’s situation was already grim by the time Washington arrived with the 7,000 men he had brought from New York (2,000 Americans and 5,000 French) as well as 3,000 Virginia militia that he had gathered en route.

Cornwallis now faced a besieging army of 17,500 men. A sea escape was impossible given the size of de Grasse’s fleet; fighting his way through Washington’s forces by land would be even more suicidal. Cornwallis eventually dispatched a small fleet (about two-thirds the size of the French fleet deployed at Yorktown) and 7,000 troops. They reached the waters outside Yorktown on October 24, five days after Cornwallis had surrendered.

October 19 - General Cornwallis officially surrenders at Yorktown, VA

The American victory at Yorktown did not bring an immediate end to the war. Clinton still had a large army in New York, and King George could not stomach the thought of surrendering his colonies. But the already-fading support for the war in Parliament dried up completely following news of Yorktown.

In February and March 1782, Parliament passed a series of measures calling for the end of the war and the negotiation of a peace settlement with America.

1782

March 8—9 - Indians attacked by militia at Gnadenhutten, in modern OH
March 20 - Lord North resigns as Prime Minister of Great Britain
April 19 - Netherlands recognizes American independence
May 8 - American and Spanish forces capture Nassau, Bahamas
July 11 - British evacuate Savannah, GA
July 13 - British/Indian raid on Hannahstown, PA
August 7 - Washington establishes the Badge of Military Merit, now known as the Purple Heart
August 19 - Battle of Blue Licks, KY
November 4 - Encounter at John's Ferry, SC
November 10 - George Rogers Clark raids Chillicothe, modern OH
November 30 - British and Americans sign preliminary Articles of Peace
December 14 - British evacuate Charleston, SC

1783

March 15 - Washington addresses the Newburgh Conspiracy and discontent in the Continental Army, Newburgh, NY
April 19 - Congress ratifies the preliminary peace treaty
September 3 - US and Great Britain sign the Treaty of Paris
November 25 - British evacuate New York City
December 4 - Washington bids farewell to his officers in New York City
December 23 - Washington resigns as commander in Annapolis, MD

Information here is primarily from American Battlefield Trust (timeline and some text); Shmoop Editorial Team (bulk of the battle text)

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young