

Hawai'i at the Time of the American Revolution

On April 19, 1775, the Battles of Lexington and Concord were the first military engagements of the American Revolutionary War. The battles marked the outbreak of open armed conflict between the Kingdom of Great Britain and its thirteen American colonies.

"The shot heard round the world" was fired just as the sun was rising at Lexington. Following this, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, and it was signed by 56-members of the Congress (1776.)

The next eight years (1775-1783,) war was waging on the eastern side of the continent. The main result was an American victory and European recognition of the independence of the United States (the war ended in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.)

In Hawai'i, over the centuries, the islands weren't unified under single rule. Leadership sometimes covered portions of an island sometimes covered a whole island or groups of islands. Island rulers ascended to power through family successions or warfare.

At the time of the start of the American Revolution, the Hawaiian Islands were divided into 4 kingdoms: (1) Hawai'i Island, under the rule of Kalani'ōpu'u, who also had possession of Hāna in east Maui; (2) Maui (except Hāna) Molokai, Lanai and Kaho'olawe, ruled by Kahekili; (3) O'ahu, under the rule of Kahahana; and (4) Kauai & Ni'ihau, Kamakahelei was ruler.

In 1775, war between Hawai'i and Maui Chiefs broke out at Kaupō on the island of Maui; it was the first battle that the rising warrior Kamehameha took part in.

Kalani'ōpu'u's army was routed and retreated, and barely a remnant escaped and returned to Hāna. (Although often defeated, Kalani'ōpu'u managed to hold the famous fort in Hāna for more than twenty years.)

Kalani'ōpu'u returned to Hawai'i, met with Captain Cook on January 26, 1779, and exchanged gifts.

Following Kalani'ōpu'u's death in April 1782, his kingship was inherited by his son Kīwala'ō; Kamehameha (Kīwala'ō's cousin) was given guardianship of the Hawaiian god of war.

In the Islands, about the time of the Treaty of Paris, war broke out between Kīwala'ō's forces and chiefs under Kamehameha. Kīwala'ō was killed.

War in the Islands continued into the 1790s. After solidifying his rule of the Island of Hawai'i, Kamehameha invaded/conquered Maui, Molokai & O'ahu.

Then, Kamehameha looked to conquer the last kingdom, Kauai (under the control of Kaumuali'i).

In 1804 (the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition of lands in the Louisiana Purchase), King Kamehameha moved his capital from Lāhainā, Maui to Honolulu, and planned to attack Kauai.



Weather and sickness thwarted the invasions. However, in 1810 (just before war broke out on the continent, again (War of 1812)), Kaumuali'i peacefully joined the rest of the Kingdom of Hawai'i under the rule of Kamehameha. (Kaumuali'i's son, Humehume, was on the continent at the time and enlisted in the US Navy and fought in the war of 1812; Humehume returned to the Islands with the American Protestant missionaries in 1820.)

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

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