



U.S. ARMY

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250 U.S. ARMY THIS WE'LL DEFEND

IMPACT OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The American Revolution's origins trace back years before the actual conflict begins. While many of the well-known causes, such as taxes and lack of representation, were important, deeper influences played a significant role. One of the most impactful was the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that challenged the authority of religion and monarchies. The Enlightenment reached British colonists through scientific, political, and philosophical discourse. With the increasing use of the printing press, books became more accessible, and a widespread focus on acquiring knowledge emerged. This shift also aligned with the English belief in individual liberty, a concept rooted in the idea that certain rights could not be infringed upon by governments. Philosopher John Locke was instrumental in shaping this belief with his idea of natural rights — rights granted by God that no government could revoke. Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* argued for religious toleration, the separation of church and state, and the protection of certain individual freedoms.

As these Enlightenment ideals spread, tensions between the British government and the colonists grew. The French and Indian War, which began in 1754, was a significant event that exacerbated these tensions. The war, driven by a territorial dispute between Britain and France over North America, ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris, which left Britain heavily in debt. To pay off this debt, Britain began imposing taxes on the American colonies, starting with the Sugar Act of 1764, which taxed sugar and other commodities. The Stamp Act of 1765 taxed paper goods such as newspapers and legal documents. Colonists resisted these taxes, forming the Stamp Act Congress to coordinate their opposition. Their efforts led to the repeal of the Stamp Act, but the Declaratory Act of 1766 warned that Parliament still had the authority to impose taxes on the colonies.

The tensions reached a breaking point with the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, when British soldiers killed several colonists during a protest. These incidents fueled anti-British sentiments and led to further protests like the Boston Tea Party of 1773, where members of the Sons of Liberty, disguised as Native Americans, dumped an entire shipment of British tea into Boston Harbor to protest the Tea Act, which granted the British East India Company a monopoly on tea imports to the colonies.

The phrase “no taxation without representation” became a rallying cry for colonists who believed the British were violating their rights as Englishmen. The British government, in turn, responded with increasing force. In 1774, Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, also known as the Intolerable Acts, to punish Massachusetts for its rebellious actions. These acts closed Boston’s port, restricted Massachusetts’ self-government, and allowed royal officials to be tried outside of the colonies. In response, the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1774, drafting a statement of colonial grievances and calling for a boycott of British goods. In March 1775, Patrick Henry famously declared in his speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses, “Give me liberty or give me death!” The Revolution seemed inevitable.

The first shots were fired at the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, marking the beginning of open conflict between Britain and the colonies. Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, published in January 1776, further fueled the revolutionary cause. Paine used biblical language to argue for the necessity of breaking away from British rule, making the case for independence accessible to a wide audience.

By June 1776, Virginia’s George Mason had drafted the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which declared that “all men are by nature equally free and independent.” Around the same time, Thomas Jefferson, a delegate to the Second Continental Congress, began drafting the Declaration of Independence, influenced by the Enlightenment principles of individual liberty and self-governance. Jefferson’s draft, revised with the help of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, was adopted by Congress on July 4, 1776.

The ideals of the Enlightenment were foundational to the establishment of the United States. These ideas about individual rights, the rule of law, and government by consent of the governed continue to shape American political institutions and remain at the heart of the country’s democratic principles.

In 2025, the United States will commemorate 250 years of Army history, reflecting on events like the Revolution that helped shape the nation’s founding. Through a series of articles, the history of the American Revolution and its lasting impact will be explored in detail.

THERE'S MORE TO THIS STORY!



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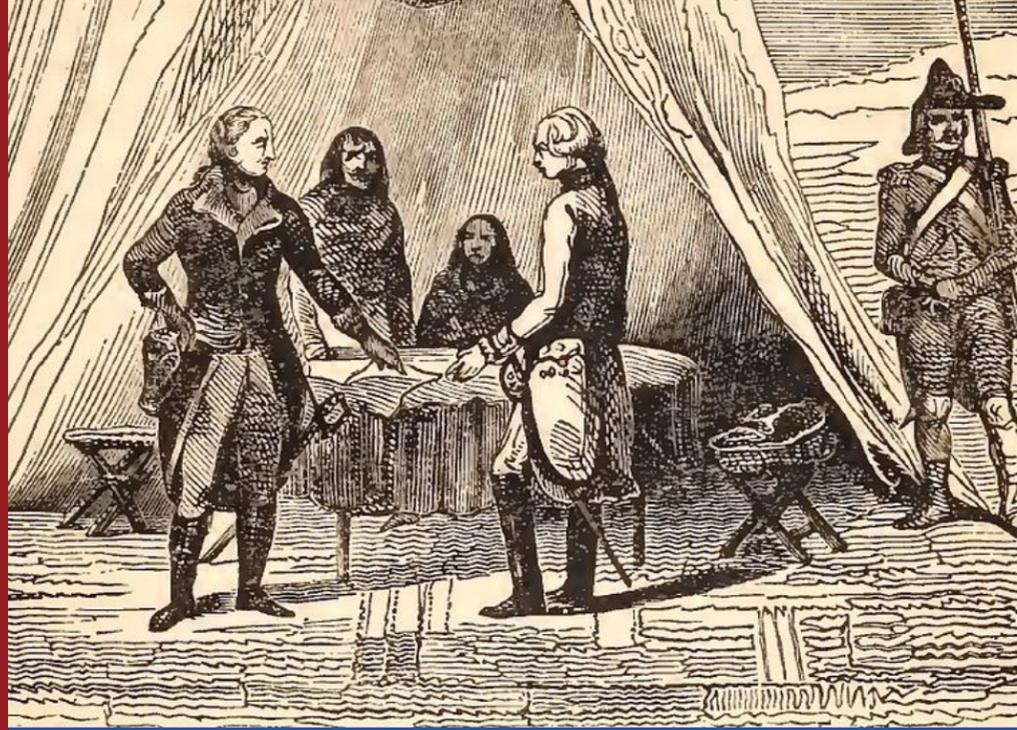


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THE ROCKY RISE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

George Washington's early military career started fairly rocky for a person, we as Americans, hail as the champion of the American Revolution. Washington was appointed a major in the Virginia militia in February 1752 at the age of 20 by Virginia's Royal Lt. Governor, Robert Dinwiddie due to mutual business interests. In 1753, Lt Governor Dinwiddie sent Washington on a mission to deliver a message to the French demanding they vacate land claimed by the British in the Ohio Country. This mission, though ultimately unsuccessful in achieving its goal, provided Washington with valuable experience and military exposure. He was appointed commander of the Virginia Regiment in 1754, tasked with defending the colony against the French. He led the regiment in several engagements, including the Battle of Fort Necessity in 1754, where he was ultimately forced to surrender to the French. Washington resigned his commission in 1758, disappointed by the limited opportunities for advancement and the lack of recognition for his service. By the British.

Below: Washington's meeting with the French at Fort LeBoeuf on 11 December 1753



JANUARY TRIVIA

1. How old was the youngest American Soldier during the revolution?
2. Who was known to be terrible at dancing but once spent three straight hours on the dance floor?
3. Who wrote the new American Army's first manual?

LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS

1. When was the original song “Jingle Bells” created?
1857
2. What were some common Christmas tree decorations during the Civil War
Dried fruit, popcorn, pinecones, hardtack and small gifts.
3. What gift did GEN Sherman give to President Lincoln in December 1864?
The city of Savannah, GA.

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