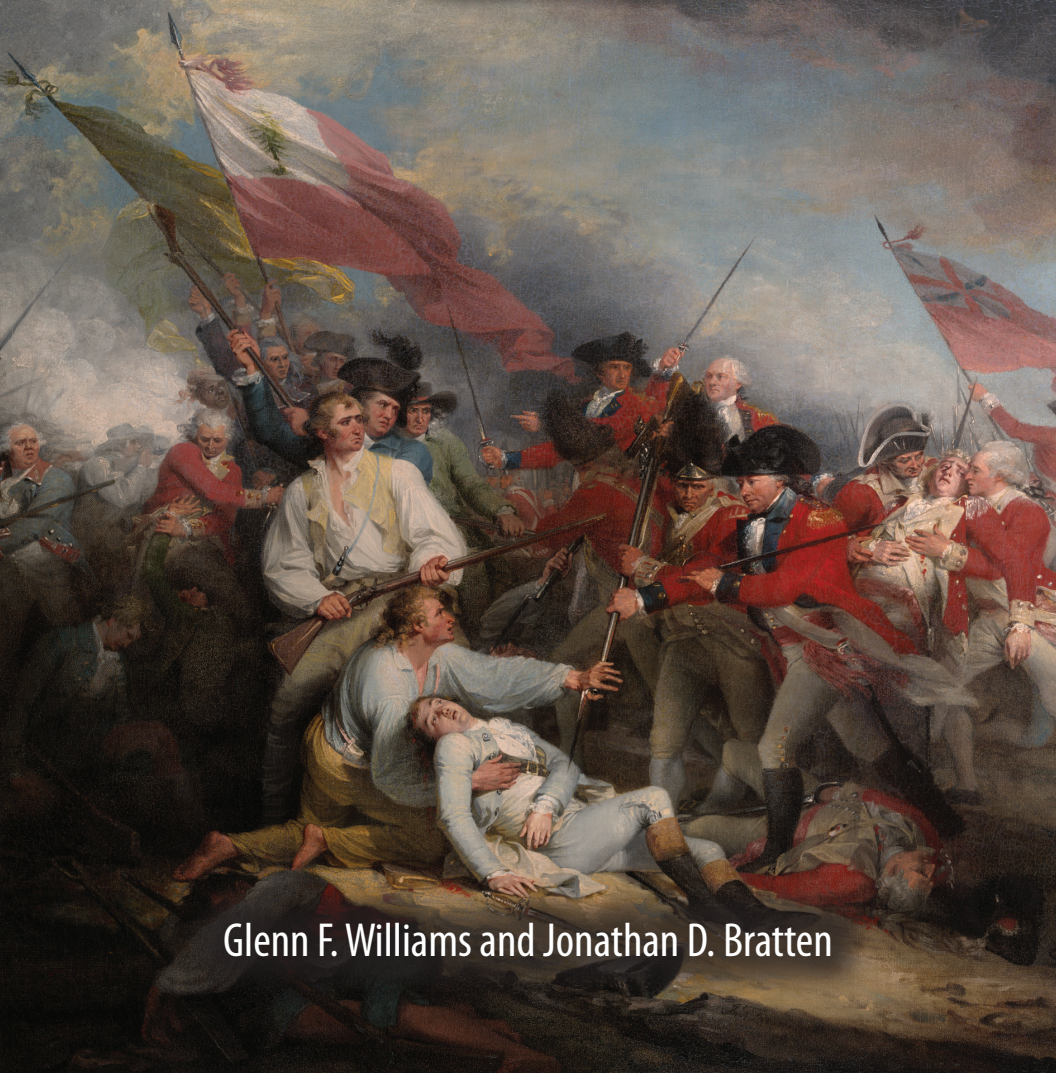


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# OPENING SHOTS

IN THE COLONIES, 1775–1776



Glenn F. Williams and Jonathan D. Bratten

# The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

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*Opening Shots in the Colonies, 1775–1776*

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*Cover: The Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775, John Trumbull, 1786. Beloved by his friends and respected by his enemies, Dr. Joseph Warren, whose death is depicted here, was a key leader in the revolutionary movement. (Trumbull Collection, Yale University Art Gallery)*

# The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

## OPENING SHOTS IN THE COLONIES 1775–1776

by  
Glenn F. Williams and Jonathan D. Bratten



Center of Military History  
United States Army  
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# INTRODUCTION



As America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War, it is a perfect time to reflect on the revolutionary generation. In the two-and-a-half centuries since the war, the United States has grappled with the complexities and paradoxes of its revolution. How could a nation be born from the idea that all men are created equal, and yet deny much of that freedom to women and to many of its own population based on the color of their skin? How should a central federal government balance power with state governments? Could those thirteen fractious colonies merge into one nation? The seeds of what would become our country's future political and military conflicts lie in these complexities, as do some of our greatest national accomplishments.

This milestone anniversary is also an appropriate time to reflect on the history of the United States Army. The Army stands as our first truly national institution, having been established by the Continental Congress on 14 June 1775. General George Washington's ability to meld the soldiers of the various colonies together into one national force provided an example to the rest of the country that national unity was possible. If the Army failed to overcome the regional sectionalism prevalent at the time, it would fall to superior British resources and organization. If the Army failed, the nation would fail. Washington gave us the precedent of military subordination to the civil authority, one of the core tenets of our political tradition and way of life. At the end of the war, he resigned his commission and voluntarily gave up all his power to return to civil life. His example has inspired us as a model of military and political leadership for generations.

The Massachusetts militiamen who fired the first shots of the war on 19 April 1775 had no blueprint for creating a nation—nor did many think that the conflict would result in a drive for independence. Deep-seated colonial resentments over their rights as English citizens had been simmering since before the 1750s. As the British Parliament enacted even more restrictive laws, peaceful protests turned to military organization, and finally open violence. As New England formed its Army of Observation in the wake of the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress saw the need for a national army.

For eight long years, the Continental Army maintained itself in the field, despite fighting superior odds, starvation, diminished resources, and divided leadership. Setbacks in the New York Campaign of 1776 nearly destroyed Washington's army as the British drove it into Pennsylvania. Yet as 1777 opened, Washington changed the operational situation by seizing the initiative in a series of tactical victories at Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey. That fall, a British invasion into northern New York met with failure and capture at the hands of the Northern Army and militia at Saratoga, ultimately bringing France into war on the side of the United States. At the same time, Washington kept a British army penned up in Philadelphia while he instituted a training regimen for his army at their encampment in Valley Forge that winter. Trained under the tutelage of German-born Frederick von Steuben, the Continentals harried the British out of Philadelphia and back to New York City, fighting like regulars at Monmouth in 1778.

General Washington faced the challenge of countering British victories at Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, when the British shifted the war south in 1780, while also containing powerful British forces in Canada and New York City. Relying on skilled subordinates such as Anthony Wayne, Nathanael Greene, and the Marquis de Lafayette—all of whom in turn worked closely with state militia—Washington was able to hold the delicate balance of power in both the northern and southern theaters. Seizing the opportunity presented by his French allies, Washington quickly shifted a large portion of his army from New York City to Yorktown,



Virginia. There, the allies laid siege to another British army, forcing it to capitulate in the fall of 1781. Although this victory sounded the death knell for British control of the American colonies, peace talks would last for two more years. During this time, Washington kept an army in the field, maintained the supremacy of civil authority over the military, and presented a credible threat to the remaining British garrisons. When the peace came, the true architects of the revolution's success were the Continental Army, state troops, and the militia.

The Revolutionary War created the model for our modern Army. It set the stage for what eventually would become a three-component force, with the Continentals and militia operating in complementary roles. Today, thirty-three National Guard units can trace their lineage to the Revolutionary War, which is a testament to their role in the formation of this country. Eight army branches also have their beginnings in the revolution. The U.S. Army's very motto, "This We'll Defend," is rooted in the "self-evident" truths enunciated in the Declaration of Independence and American interpretations of Enlightenment traditions, which came together in the seal for the Board of War and Ordnance and became the Department of the Army seal in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, it also would take until the twentieth century for the U.S. Army to be as racially integrated as its Continental Army forebears.

The traditions begun and precedents set by Washington and his soldiers continue to influence the U.S. Army and causes around the world. The seeds of hope shown at Trenton and Princeton have inspired leaders in other dark times, such as Bull Run, Shiloh, and Kasserine Pass. The revolutionary generation taught us that the true strength of our Army is our people; from the frontline soldiers to the camp followers who sustained the regiments. And it is to these individuals, who forged ahead through privation and misery to final victory and who rarely received any greater recognition in their own lifetimes than the simple epitaph "A Soldier of the Revolution," that these volumes are humbly dedicated.

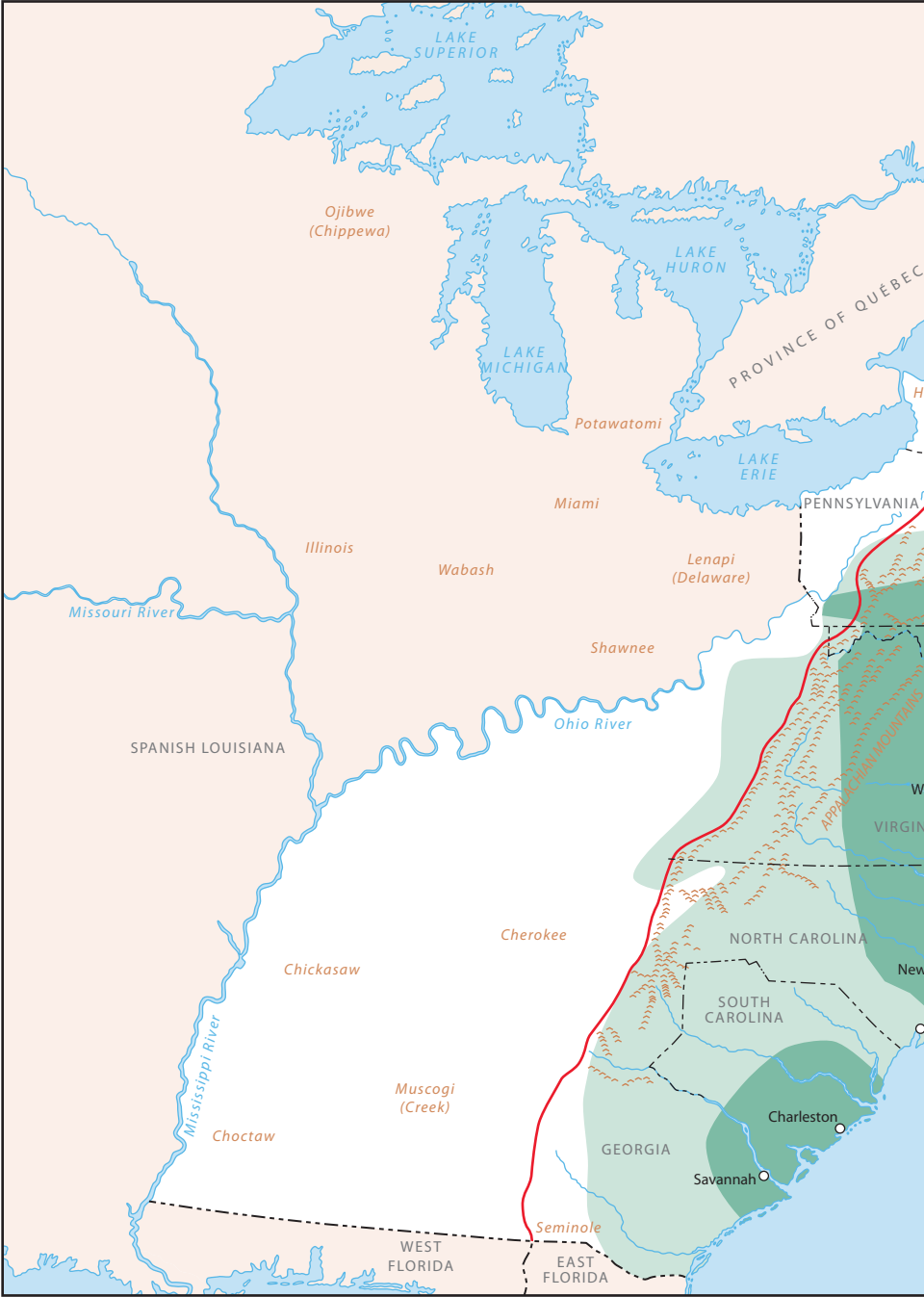
CHARLES R. BOWERY JR.  
Executive Director





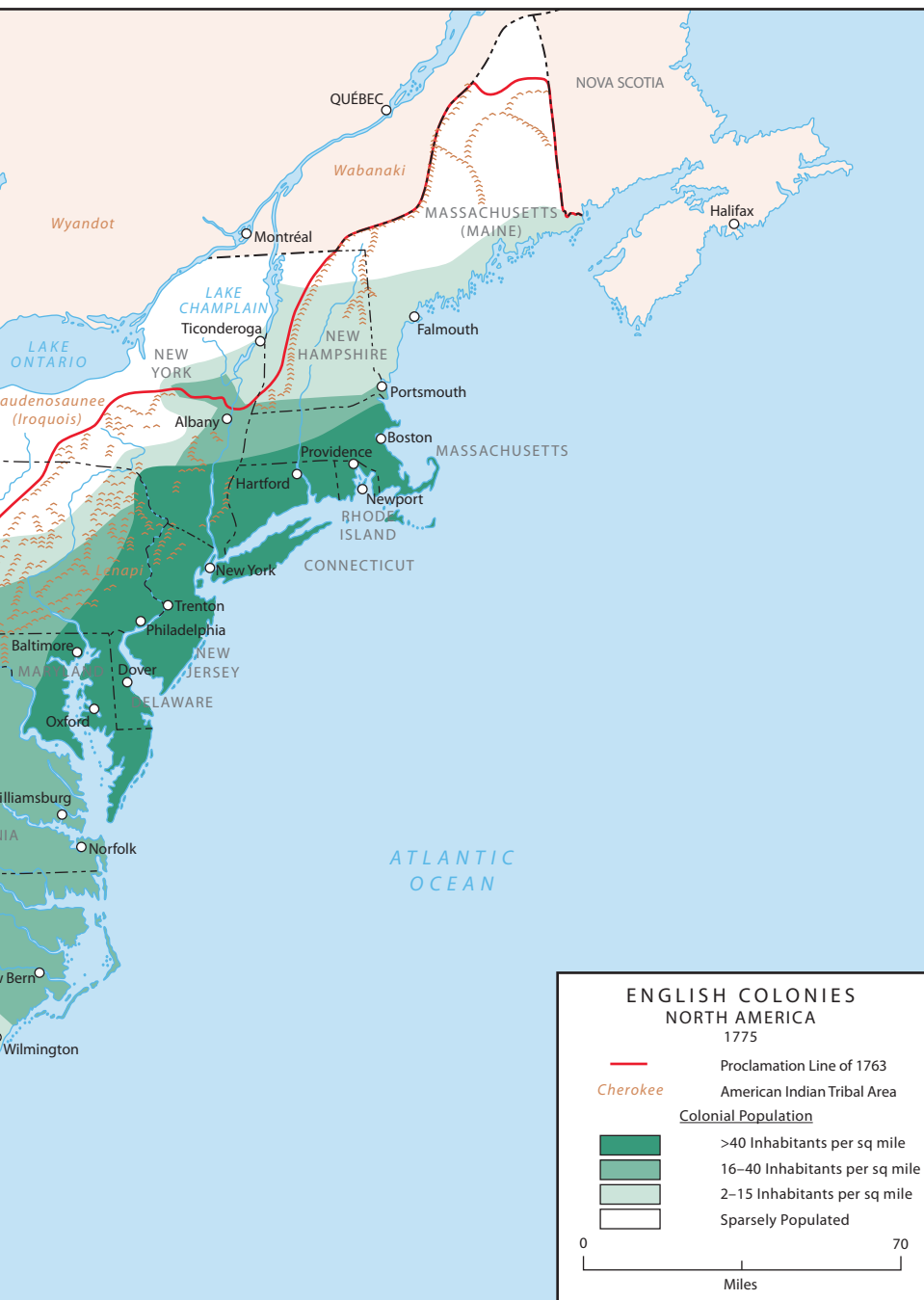
# OPENING SHOTS IN THE COLONIES 1775–1776

At the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Britain was the dominant world power, and no greater supporters of the British Crown existed than those inhabiting the string of English colonies that stretched along the Atlantic coastline of North America. Over the next twelve years, a shocking transition led to open violence between some of the colonists and their king. The Crown was determined to assert its imperial authority over the colonies, and they, in turn, insisted on maintaining their long-established ability to govern themselves. When the revolution began, few thought that it would take the form of a struggle for a new and independent nation, but the conflict that ensued created both the United States and its army (*Map 1*).



Map 1





## STRATEGIC SETTING

### **The Colonies**

By 1775, the English colonies on the Eastern Seaboard of North America had grown into a populous and prosperous extension of their mother country. Their borders ranged from as far as the province of Québec (modern-day eastern Canada) in the north down to East and West Florida in the south. The coastal plains of the Atlantic seaboard gave way in the interior to the Piedmont, a plateau of moderate elevation and rolling hills that stretched from New York down to the western Carolinas and Georgia. Further inland were the Appalachians, a system of foothills and mountain ranges running northeast to southwest. Towns and cities tended to cluster on the coast or along navigable rivers, while the often-mountainous backcountry along the western frontiers remained sparsely settled. The colonies had great expanses of undeveloped forest and grassland that attracted an increasing number of settlers, often resulting in clashes with the indigenous inhabitants. Abundant natural resources, productive arable land, and teeming offshore fisheries stimulated this growth and contributed to the economic wealth of the British Empire. This vast land stretched more than 1,240 miles from the District of Maine in Massachusetts to the colony of Georgia. Carriage and horseback were the quickest means to move overland, but colonial roads were renowned for their poor condition. The most efficient way to transport both people and goods was by water.

Inland and coastal waterways provided avenues of commerce as well as routes of invasion and military supply. In the north, with a few easy portages, Lake Champlain, Lake George, and the Hudson River joined the Richelieu and St. Lawrence Rivers to connect

New York City and ports in northern New Jersey to the province of Québec. Control of Champlain and the Hudson could dictate access to Québec, New England, and New York. Large estuaries such as Massachusetts and Narragansett Bays, Long Island Sound, and Delaware and Chesapeake Bays led to the deepwater ports of Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk, respectively. Their tributaries, including the Providence, Connecticut, Delaware, Susquehanna, Patapsco, Potomac, Rappahannock, York, and James Rivers, provided access to lesser ports and the interior of the New England, middle, and southern colonies. In the south, natural harbors such as Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, along with their networks of tributaries, likewise connected the colonies of the region to each other and to the British Empire in the Caribbean. In the west, the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers as far as the mouth of the Louisa (or Kentucky) River provided the boundary of Virginia's western frontier with the American Indian nations and former French settlements. The Ohio and Mississippi Rivers provided a navigable water route from Fort Pitt, Pennsylvania, at the forks formed by the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, to the Spanish colony of Louisiana and the port of New Orleans. Significantly, for those accustomed to European wars, the British North American colonies lacked major cities, fortifications, or other strategic locations, the capture of which could ensure victory.

Since the arrival of the first English settlers in the early 1600s, the British settlements in North America had evolved into thirteen distinctive colonies. Along with Québec and the Floridas, which came under British control in 1763, they were part of thirty Crown colonies throughout the New World. Although the thirteen colonies differed in government type—royal, proprietary, and chartered—each had grown used to a tradition of self-government. For the most part, the colonies modeled their governments on the constitutional structure of king and Parliament, with a royal governor serving as the king's representative, and general assemblies taking the place of Parliament. American colonists saw the monarch, King George III, as the supreme magistrate and final arbiter over Parliament as well as the several colonial general assemblies.

The population in the colonies tended to be highly religious, mostly Protestant Christians. The Great Awakening, an evangelical religious movement emphasizing spiritual individualism, had swept the Eastern Seaboard in the mid-1700s, and many colonists viewed the world through this lens. Ministers held great authority, especially in New England, not only as highly educated community leaders but also as the conduits of news from around the colonies. The fervor of the Great Awakening had given rise to a sense of millennialism, a view which held that an earthly kingdom of God was close at hand. This sentiment, combined with long-standing American colonial beliefs in religious exceptionalism, played a strong part in driving colonists toward the revolutionary cause. Religion would play a key factor in suspicion of British motivations after 1763.

Absorbing Dutch, Swedish, and other attempted European settlements along the Eastern Seaboard, the colonial population had experienced steady growth, reaching approximately two and a half million by the early 1770s and doubling every twenty-five years. Two-thirds of White American colonists owned land, as compared to one-fifth of the total population in England. Two-thirds of White colonial men could vote, compared to one-sixth of all Englishmen. About 50 percent of the White colonists were English or Welsh or their descendants, with about 8 percent of Scots-Irish heritage, 7 percent each of Scottish and German origin, and smaller numbers representing a variety of other European backgrounds. By the 1770s, an estimated 540,000 Americans, about 20 percent of the population, were of African descent. Nine out of ten were enslaved, with most living south of Pennsylvania. Without counting enslaved people or deducting those who would support the Crown, the colonial population included approximately 200,000 military-age men available for potential service.

Indigenous people remained major power brokers in this era. British and colonial representatives alike had long experience working alongside them, both diplomatically and militarily. By 1775, the nations, of which there were more than eighty on the Eastern Seaboard, had shrunk to a fraction of their pre-Columbian size because of disease and warfare. Around 250,000 native people



lived east of the Mississippi River, spoke dozens of languages, and practiced intricate diplomacy according to distinct political cultures. Expanding British and French settlements had driven the native people out west during the previous century and still posed the greatest threat to their survival. Most indigenous groups attempted neutrality in colonial disputes to preserve the delicate peace. Native American participation in any conflict could significantly affect the belligerents.

New England had a thriving merchant economy, with shipbuilding, farming, fishing, and trading common in its coastal regions. By 1775, the Wabanaki peoples of the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet nations lived in northern New England in relative peace with their English neighbors. Massachusetts—which also encompassed Maine—had the largest population of the New England colonies with 375,000 people, 15,000 of whom were in Boston. Although the city was the hotbed of revolutionary sentiment, many in and around Boston had strong connections to the Crown. Connecticut, with a population of 200,000, focused on shipbuilding, agriculture, and horse breeding. Rhode Island was heavily dependent on trade, with many colonists growing wealthy in what became known as the triangle trade. Ships transported enslaved people from Africa to the Caribbean to work on plantations that produced sugar; carried that commodity to New England, which turned it into rum and molasses; and then took those products to sell in Europe, which funded the ongoing slave trade. The colony had a large population of both free and enslaved African Americans, with some upward mobility for people of color. New Hampshire counted about 85,000 inhabitants, mostly small tradesmen, farmers, shipbuilders, and fishermen. New York and New Hampshire both laid claim to present-day Vermont, known then as the Hampshire Grants. New Englanders were highly pluralistic, emphasizing equality as individuals and exercising their rights to self-government. These complexities, combined with a booming population that was running out of land on which to settle, enabled revolutionary tendencies to brew.

New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland made up the middle colonies. New York City was a prosperous trading port of around 25,000 people out of an overall New York population of 185,000. On the northern frontier, settlers were divided between loyalist and revolutionary tendencies. The powerful Haudenosaunee, or Six Nations, also called this region home, with a hegemony extending into the Ohio country. Here, enslaved African Americans lived under the harshest slave code of the northern colonies and largely would side with whomever would promise freedom. New Jersey was like New York in many ways, with class and ethnic tensions at play in its population of about 135,000. With more than 250,000 inhabitants, Pennsylvania possessed the most robust economy of the middle colonies. It contained a diverse group of settlers, with varying religions and ethnicities, who had come to Pennsylvania for its rich farmland and the Penn family's promises of religious toleration. The Pacifist Society of Friends, also known as Quakers, was now a minority, but it still dominated the colony's politics. Philadelphia was the most prosperous city, with an estimated population near 30,000. Like those in the New England colonies, Pennsylvanians were politically active; however, they showed less general dissatisfaction with Parliament than did New Englanders. Consisting of only 37,000 people, Delaware was a part of Pennsylvania until 1776. While in some ways a mirror of Pennsylvania, it had a higher population of those who might remain loyal to Britain. Maryland had a diverse religious makeup, with many Catholics in its population of about 150,000. Tens of thousands of enslaved people worked on tobacco plantations or in the harbor city of Baltimore. The middle colonies were a complex mix of differing loyalties.

The southern colonies consisted of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. Virginia, with 500,000 inhabitants, was the most populous colony in North America and also the wealthiest, with its tobacco exports from the work of 210,000 enslaved people. Well-to-do planters owned half the land, creating an economic and class-based divide. Virginia's politics were usually measured and rejected radicalism, although its assembly had some strident

voices, such as that of Patrick Henry. By 1775, North Carolina's population had exploded to nearly 275,000 people—filled with a steady stream of Scots-Irish Presbyterians, Lutheran and Reformed Church Germans, Moravians, and Scottish highlanders, along with English settlers—plus around 90,000 enslaved African Americans. Coastal regions tended to have closer links with England, whereas the backcountry farmers were a mix of Scottish loyalists and revolutionary-minded yeomen. A similar seaboard and inland divide existed in South Carolina, where the population of enslaved Black families outnumbered the White population by 1775. South Carolina was a far wealthier colony than its northern neighbor. Elite rice- and indigo-growing planters dominated the colony's political and social life and kept close ties to England. Many were in debt to British merchants. Georgia was the last-settled colony of the thirteen and the most in need of support from the mother country. It was still a frontier, formed as a military buffer to protect South Carolina from Spanish threats to the south. Georgia and the Carolinas clashed constantly with the Creek and Cherokee nations, as colonial settlers continuously took their land. Warfare between these groups required Georgia's constant attention.

## **Great Britain**

Metropolitan Great Britain, formed by the union of England, Scotland, and Wales, at the time numbered about 8 million inhabitants, with about one-tenth of them (or 800,000) men of military age. London was the largest city in the Western world, with three-quarters of a million inhabitants. The islands of Britain lay at the heart of the British Empire, which extended from North America to the Mediterranean to Africa and Asia. Ruled by King George III and governed by the two houses of Parliament, the empire was one of the richest and largest the world had seen since Roman times. George III was an able administrator and incredibly well-read, with diverse interests in science and literature. Far from being aloof to government, he was involved intimately in colonial affairs and the administration of his military forces. He was, however, obstinate,

prejudiced, and above all, the king. To him, preservation of the British Empire was paramount. He would oppose any attempt to dissolve it.

American exports, such as tobacco, rum, lumber, hemp, indigo, wool, flax, iron, tar, and grain, supplied the economic and military growth of the British Empire, while the colonies provided a ready market for its finished products in a mutually beneficial mercantile relationship. Indeed, the colonies bought 20 percent of British manufactured goods. In addition, the fruits of colonial agriculture found their way to customers in England and helped to feed the large numbers of enslaved laborers in the British, French, and Spanish plantation islands of the West Indies. The North American colonies were highly profitable for the British Empire.

Between 1754 and 1763, or the period covering the Seven Years' War, about 300,000 men served in the British armed forces. By 1775, the British Army was authorized to have about 50,000 soldiers, but it could count no more than 36,000 in the ranks, with most of those serving in Ireland or abroad. Most of the officer corps had not seen significant action since the Seven Years' War, and many of the veterans from that conflict were leaving rather than serving again in North America. The most notable of these was Sir Jeffery Amherst, who had led the British Army to victory on the American continent but declined to serve in the colonies again in 1775. While its army was modest when compared to those of its European rivals, Britain relied on its excellent navy to project power abroad and its considerable wealth to subsidize allies to provide ground forces in a conflict. These allies included several German states, among them Hanover, which George III also ruled. "A conquest by land is unnecessary," said the secretary at war in 1775, speaking of the American colonies, "when the country can be reduced first to distress, and then to obedience, by our marine." Although the Royal Navy was the Crown's greatest military asset, much of it was in drydock and in need of repair by 1775.



## Political Background to Conflict

Before 1765, the government of Great Britain traditionally had allowed the North American colonies a degree of autonomy through a policy that British statesman Edmund Burke described as “salutary neglect.” The colonists considered their territory extensions of the British realm but were accustomed to managing their own affairs with little oversight from the central government in London. Parliament did not impose direct taxation and strict political subordination, as long as the colonies remained loyal and contributed to the economic wealth and power of the mother country.

From 1754 to 1763, Great Britain fought France in a global conflict known as the Seven Years’ War, with the campaigns in the North American theater of operations later known in the United States as the French and Indian War. Although Britain emerged triumphant, victory came at a heavy price: £100 million and the lingering enmity of France, Spain, and the Netherlands. To address the increased national debt, the British government redefined the imperial relationship with the North American colonies to improve colonial administration and defense. This came in two forms: restricting colonial settlement and direct taxation.

To prevent conflict between Anglo-American settlers and American Indians, Parliament issued the Proclamation of 1763. This restricted White Anglo-Americans from settling on the vast swathes of western land acquired in the Seven Years’ War, essentially not permitting settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Although individual settlers generally ignored the proclamation, it was largely successful in hindering the activity of private land speculation companies, most notably those owned by wealthy Virginians like George Washington hoping to recoup financial losses from the war. The proclamation was massively unpopular in the colonies, as most colonists believed the land to be rightfully theirs and thought of the legislation as favoring American Indians. It marked the first breakdown in trust between the North American colonies and the government of Britain.

To reduce the strain on the royal treasury, and with the tax burden already weighing heavily on British subjects at home, Parliament voted to levy a direct tax in North America. Whereas some in England asserted that victory in the recent war primarily had benefited the colonies, many colonists contended that the victory was more imperial than provincial and maintained that the king's North American subjects had contributed their fair share of blood and treasure. The colonists also argued that the revenue acts violated British common law and threatened their political liberty. Colonists maintained that as freeborn Englishmen they could be taxed only by their own consent or that of their elected representatives in the lower houses of their respective colonial legislatures. In response to Parliament bypassing the provincial assemblies, Patrick Henry of Virginia's House of Burgesses articulated the "taxation without representation is tyranny" argument, as did James Otis in Massachusetts. Colonists resisted parliamentary taxation with political demonstrations—some of which became violent—and refused to pay or avoided the taxes via a robust system of maritime smuggling while also presenting petitions to the king and both houses of Parliament for the redress of these grievances.

The taxes and regulations promulgated in the Duties in American Colonies Act, or Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Acts (1767), and the Tea Act (1773) raised colonial resistance to new levels. Some colonists formed radical political action groups, such as the Sons of Liberty, to lead the resistance against the new legislation. In the fall of 1768, when a Boston crowd led by the Sons of Liberty threatened several royal customs officers, Royal Governor Francis Barnard appealed for assistance to counter the protests and force compliance with the collection of the new duties. The arrival of about 2,000 British regulars from other American garrisons and an additional 2,000 from Ireland further enraged many Americans. The citizenry complained that the British ministry thus treated the colonies like an occupied enemy country rather than a loyal extension of the kingdom. On 5 March 1770, a civil disturbance turned deadly when British troops opened fire on an unruly mob in Boston and killed four Americans. Discontented leaders

and the Sons of Liberty exploited the propaganda value of the incident, which they called the Boston Massacre. Because of this mass disruption—which affected British industry at home as well as global trade—Parliament repealed each of these acts, except for the Tea Act, to great celebration in the colonies. In 1773, cities across North America saw various protests to the Tea Act, most notably in Boston, where disgruntled colonists boarded British East India Company ships and threw the imported tea overboard. This demonstration exhausted British patience. “I am much hurt,” King George said, when the news of the destruction of the tea in Boston reached him in 1774.

In retaliation, and to extract compensation for the destruction of property, the king consented for Parliament to impose a series of laws officially called the Coercive Acts but termed the Intolerable Acts by colonists. Parliament based these acts on three main assumptions, all of which turned out to be flawed: most colonists were still loyal, military force would intimidate into submission all those who were not, and failure to assert the Crown’s authority would have repercussions throughout the empire. The Boston Port Act closed the harbor to all commerce beginning on 1 June 1774. The following month, the Massachusetts Government Act dissolved the colony’s royal charter, replaced many colonial officials with men appointed by the British Crown, and restricted the colony’s town meetings. The king appointed Lt. Gen. Thomas Gage, then commander in chief of his forces in North America, as Massachusetts’s royal governor and gave him sweeping authority and orders to occupy Boston with 4,000 troops. The Administration of Justice Act followed. It required magistrates to transport all colonists charged with violations against the royal government or British officials to England for trial, nullifying the right of the accused to be heard by a jury of one’s peers. The Quartering Act formally extended to the colony of Massachusetts a system that required citizens to provide housing and conveniences for the British occupation forces.

With incredibly poor timing, Parliament also passed the Quebec Act in June 1774. It was not, in fact, in reaction to colonial discontent but had been under consideration for many years. The act extended



***Gen. Thomas Gage, John Singleton Copley, ca. 1768. Although sympathetic to the plight of English colonists in North America, by 1775, Thomas Gage found himself drawn into a war he had struggled to prevent. (Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art)***

the boundary of Québec to the area between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, encompassing land that now forms parts of Ontario, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. It restricted settlement of these lands, established a provincial government with an appointed governor and legislature, and continued the French legal system, which was based on Roman law instead of English common law. Most egregious to the Protestant New England colonies, the act

fully enfranchised the Roman Catholic ruling elite in Québec. New Englanders had spent the previous century fighting the Catholic French and were outraged at this perceived insult. Colonists from New York to the Carolinas were once again infuriated at having westward expansion curbed. By extending Québec's territory, the act further fueled the anger produced by the Proclamation of 1763.

The reaction from the North American colonies between Québec and the Floridas was swift and indignant. Although most colonists criticized the destruction of private property, they also viewed the heavy-handed British reaction as gravely unconstitutional and a major threat to political liberty. Other colonies expressed sympathy and pledged support for the city and people of Boston, as American resistance to British authority increased. In Virginia, Royal Governor John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore, dissolved the House of Burgesses when it proclaimed a day of fasting and prayer to protest the Boston Port Act. The burgesses reconvened in an extralegal session to propose a Virginia convention, which met in the capital of Williamsburg on 1 August. The attendees elected delegates to an intercolonial congress and voted to form the Virginia Association, which revived the nonimportation and nonexportation agreements that had been instrumental in securing favorable outcomes in the two previous constitutional crises.

On 5 September 1774, fifty-five delegates from twelve of the thirteen colonies that eventually would resolve for independence met in Philadelphia as the First Continental Congress to develop courses of action. While professing loyalty to the king and Great Britain, the delegates petitioned the monarch and both houses of Parliament for the redress of grievances as English citizens. They planned for collective resistance to unjust laws passed by Parliament and executed in the king's name by ministers who, they believed, acted without their sovereign's knowledge or approval. The delegates resolved to form the Continental Association, modeled on the Virginia Association, to halt all imports and exports with Britain. The association would take effect in all the colonies on 1 December and remain in place until the repeal of the Coercive Acts. Before they adjourned on 26 October, the delegates agreed to reconvene in

May 1775 to measure their progress and coordinate future actions. Québec and the Floridas did not take part in this Congress. East and West Florida, with their small populations, would remain loyalist to the end. Some sympathetic groups in Québec City and Montréal sent money to Boston, but the colony remained divided amongst the old French *habitants* and new English settlers, and a 1774 vote to send delegates to the second congress failed.

The Continental Association enforced its measures through local and elected committees of safety and inspection. In 1774, most colonies elected legislatures that heavily favored defiance of Britain. In some locations, the various committees soon functioned as shadow governments despite the presence of royal officials in the provincial capitals.

## **Military Preparations**

At the urging of the Congress, the local committees exercised authority over the existing militia where the legislature supported it and organized companies of independent volunteer militia members where the colonial militia was still under the authority of the royal governors. These units began stockpiling arms, powder, and equipment. Virginia resolved to put the colony “into a posture of defence” with a new militia law. Rallied by Patrick Henry’s impassioned “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” speech, the representatives named Henry, George Washington, Andrew Lewis, and Thomas Jefferson, among others, to a committee to develop a plan for that purpose. Within months, the independent companies of five counties invited George Washington to serve as their field commander.

Revolutionaries in Massachusetts went further. In October 1774, after General Gage dissolved the Massachusetts House of Representatives as it met in Salem, the members simply adjourned to nearby Concord and formed the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. This shadow government soon exercised actual authority throughout the colony outside of Boston. It diverted locally collected tax revenues to its treasury instead of the royal government’s. The Congress also

established committees of safety and of supplies to oversee military preparations for a potential conflict. These committees also had the authority to call out the militia in the Congress's name in emergencies. Dr. Joseph Warren, leader of the Sons of Liberty, served as chairman. The Provincial Congress also resolved to reform and reorganize the militia and directed the gathering of munitions and military supplies for an "Army of Observation"—an entity that, for the moment, existed only on paper— that could mobilize to oppose the British army and navy if necessary.

Militia reform was important because, at the onset of the American Revolution, the North American colonies had no standing army. To organize for local defense, the colonies had adopted the British militia tradition, a practice that traced its roots to 1181 when King Henry II proclaimed the Assize of Arms. This proclamation had obliged all free men of the realm to swear an oath of fealty to the sovereign, possess certain weapons and accoutrements according to their economic means and station, and bear them in the king's service when he commanded. In keeping with this longstanding ethos of service to the Crown, the colonists viewed the obligation to assemble for common defense as fundamental to the rights of enfranchised people.

By the eve of the Revolutionary War every colonial government except one had a formal military establishment in which membership was mandatory, with some exemptions, for all adult, White, able-bodied men. With its pacifist Quaker history, Pennsylvania relied entirely on its volunteer organization, the Military Association (today's 111th Infantry Regiment, Pennsylvania Army National Guard). By 1774, most colonies south of New England prohibited African Americans and American Indians from serving in the militia, although these minority groups frequently had shown notable periods of exceptional service during the colonial conflicts of the preceding century.

Each colony's militia establishment evolved along slightly different lines according to the colony's demography and needs. Colonial legislatures, which governed the administration and training of the militia, organized units on a regional basis with town-



level companies subordinate to the county's battalion or regiment. The law required each member to have a firearm, ammunition, and related equipment, although many colonies also supplied weapons during times of conflict. In peacetime, colonial governments required commanders to hold musters for training, but their frequency differed from colony to colony. Royal governors could call out the militia only with permission from the legislative assemblies or with a magistrate's authorization, though some militia laws delegated the authority down to the regimental or company commanders to mobilize their units in the event of invasion or domestic insurrection.

Militia service varied in the century and a half before the Revolutionary War and among the colonies. Generally, a militia member was obligated to serve only within specific geographic bounds, usually the borders of his colony. To support operations beyond that or for extended periods of time, governors had to organize ad hoc units using volunteers and conscripts from the standing militia. During the near-constant warfare between France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, colonies repeatedly relied on such units to augment the British regulars. These provincial contingents mostly performed logistics and other supporting tasks, but many also participated in combat. This was most notable in the French and Indian War, where in Massachusetts alone, more than 15,000 colonists served. This conflict created a large number of veteran soldiers who understood the tactical and logistical problems of fighting in North America.

The French and Indian War also gave the regulars and the provincials a chance to work together and assess each other. Much interaction was close and friendly, but many members of both groups developed largely unfavorable opinions of each other. The New England provincials decried the regulars' profanity, repressive discipline, and the practice of quartering troops in civilian homes. For their part, the regulars thought of the militia as ill-disciplined, overly religious, and filled with poor fighters. Each group had reason to question the battlefield performance of the other based on the outcomes of particular campaigns. Many of these entrenched judgments would carry into the 1770s.





THE "MINUTE-MEN" OF THE REVOLUTION.

*The "Minute-Men" of the Revolution, Currier & Ives, 1876. This stylized commemorative print depicts the concept of a citizen-soldier force that could respond to an alarm with relative quickness. (Library of Congress)*

The reform of the Massachusetts militia proceeded rapidly in 1774, with towns holding elections for officers to be confirmed or denied by the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. The Congress removed from command the few loyalist officers at more senior levels. In many cases, their only qualifications had been their devotion to the Crown. Veteran commanders with long experience in the colonial fighting in North America replaced them.

With political tensions increasing, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress also mandated the formation of a select body of militia members directly under the authority of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety. Each militia regiment, once reconstituted, was to enlist one quarter of the regiment into new battalions. Each battalion would have nine companies of fifty men each, "who shall equip and hold

themselves in readiness, on the shortest notice from the said committee of safety, to march to the place of rendezvous.” The companies elected their officers, who, in turn, elected the battalion commanders. Nearly one-third of the militia had taken part in military campaigns at some point between 1754 and 1763, and many of the best veterans found a home in these elite companies. The select militia units also recruited younger, physically fit, preferably single, enthusiastic men of revolutionary political leanings. The town meetings levied taxes to arm and equip these soldiers and to pay them for attending the frequent, rigorous training musters. Because the colony required them to be ready to march at a minute’s notice, these soldiers became known as minutemen. They also tended to be better trained and equipped; for example, some towns provided almost all minutemen with bayonets. Militia and minute companies filled rapidly with young men motivated by the revolutionary doctrine that had grown around them as they came of age as well as the growing eagerness for military service that was beginning to take hold in the colonies.

White citizens predominated in colonial military formations, but an estimated 2,100 people of color—African American and American Indian—served in the militia and the Continental Army from Massachusetts alone during the American Revolution. Massachusetts militia regulations did not bar people of color in 1775, nor did it distinguish between enslaved or free. Historians have confirmed that thirty-five Black men served in the first battle of the war, fighting around Lexington and Concord on 19 April. One company of Mahican American Indians from Stockbridge responded to that call to arms but arrived too late to participate.

The British government was not entirely united in its monarch’s assertion that “blows must decide” the events in Boston. As Prime Minister Frederick, Lord North pressed for Parliament to force the North American colonies into submission in January of 1775, England’s most venerable statesman rose to oppose him. William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, the former prime minister who had orchestrated the strategy that gave the British Empire victory in the Seven Years’ War, argued against the use of force on the colonies. “All attempts to impose servitude on such men, to establish despotism over such a

mighty continental nation must be in vain,” he argued. He advocated recognition of Congress, suspension of the Coercive Acts, and a halt to the military buildup then ongoing in Great Britain. The House of Lords roundly defeated the old statesman’s proposals in two votes. The government, Pitt wrote to his wife, was “violent beyond expectation, almost to madness.” With Parliament firmly of the mind that force would resolve the issue—one member stated that the colonists would “never dare to face an English army”—it voted on 8 February 1775 to declare Massachusetts in a state of rebellion.



## OPERATIONS



### Opposing Forces

Lt. Gen. Thomas Gage filled many roles in 1775: commander of *His Majesty’s Forces in North America*, governor of Massachusetts, and on-the-ground commander in Boston, carrying the strategic, operational, and tactical burdens of the British military in North America. Gage had extensive experience in North America, having served with distinction there in the French and Indian War and acted as the governor of Montréal from 1760 to 1763. He was well-versed in light infantry tactics, having raised and commanded the British Army’s first light regiment. He was affable, well-liked, and of sympathetic disposition to the provincials of North America. But for all that, he had reached the end of his patience and was prepared to use force against them.

Gage faced a rapidly decaying situation in New England. Through the fall and winter of 1774, the Committees of Safety in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire had been incredibly active in

removing cannons and powder from coastal fortifications before the regulars could secure them. Adding to this problem was the intelligence that more armed men had been training in the countryside. Gage's adjutant noted that New England could field an army of 30,000 men without much trouble. If they gained artillery, they could become a formidable field army. Gage did not have nearly enough troops to deal with a rebellion on that scale.

As 1775 began, the Crown had about 7,000 British troops in the colonies, with about 4,000 in three brigades occupying Boston. Of Gage's regiments in that city, most men had never seen active combat service. Several regiments had some experience in Ireland or the West Indies, but two—the *52d* and the *59th Foot*—had formed only recently. Only the *43d Foot* had seen service in North America during the French and Indian War, and that had been in 1762. Of his officers, the junior leaders were similarly inexperienced. Gage was eminently aware of this and had spent the winter and spring of 1774–1775 pushing his troops on toughening marches around the countryside outside Boston, conducting firearms familiarization, and drilling his light infantry.

During these marches, regulars and militia often stared each other down from a distance without any resultant clash of arms. In February 1775, Gage even had mounted a seaborne raid on Salem, 15 miles north of Boston, in the hope of seizing cannons stored there. Although the two sides differed in their telling of the story—the British claimed that they had cowed the rebels but found no cannons; the militia that they had dissuaded the regulars simply by standing under arms—the actual result was that the regulars found no cannons. The revolutionaries came away believing that the very presence of militia and minute companies was enough to deter the regulars and that the latter would not resort to violence.

For their part, the Massachusetts provincials were undergoing similar training and preparations at the beginning of 1775. Across the colony, the Provincial Congress organized the nearly 20,000 troops into militia regiments and minute battalions by county, forming the Massachusetts Provincial Army. The Provincial Congress appointed six generals, with varying levels of experience and military effectiveness, to the Provincial Army. With no brigade

or division-level organizations in the Provincial Army, the notion of what a general would do in this army was hazy at best. The real authority lay with the regimental commanders. These were all men from their local units, most of whom were in high standing in their communities.

Critical to the Massachusetts Provincial Army's plans was having a robust intelligence and signal network to alert this far-flung force whenever a threat appeared. Units could not stay on alert all the time. Consequently, the Committee of Safety established a system of alarm riders in the counties outside Boston to spread the word when the regulars emerged. Militia or minute companies would be called out by the pealing of local church bells or the drummer beating assembly on the town green.

Although the regulars had a formal logistics system, the Provincial Army was supported on paper by the Committee of Supplies. By April, the Provincial Army's stockpile had amassed 21,549 firearms, 9 tons of gunpowder, 11 tons of cannonballs, 10,000 bayonets, 145,000 flints, and 15 medicine chests. Each town provided for their companies the best that they could. Communities cached military stores around towns, hid them in farms and outbuildings, and buried them in fields. Concord militia colonel James Barrett recorded three dozen hiding spots around his town in his diary. Spouses and family members cooked for their soldiers and rolled cartridges for them. Town and county physicians provided medical support. When a militia or minute company went to war, the town essentially went with them. Indeed, sets of brothers, cousins, fathers and sons, and uncles and nephews were common in all Massachusetts companies. Colonel Barrett's son and son-in-law were officers in his regiment, and Philip Barrett, one of the family's enslaved African American men, acted as an orderly and later would serve in the Continental Army.

## **Lexington and Concord**

Early in April, General Gage's informants reported that the provincials had gathered military supplies and weapons at Concord in Middlesex County, 20 miles from Boston. On 14 April, Gage learned the Crown

had declared Massachusetts to be in rebellion and had ordered him to act decisively. Gage planned to send a strong expedition, consisting of some of his best troops, on a swift march to Concord to seize the gunpowder, military stores, and fourteen cannons that the Committee of Supplies had collected there. If possible, they would arrest a few revolutionary leaders in the process.

Gage wanted the people of all the colonies to view the Concord expedition as a necessary preemptive strike against rebels, not an act of aggression against the king's loyal American subjects. He hoped local inhabitants who observed the expedition would assume it was another march like the ones the regulars had been performing since the winter. Because British officers often rode their horses through the nearby countryside for pleasure as well as exercise, Gage directed them to use their excursions to gather intelligence. He hoped the judicious use of force might suppress the rebellion in a single, bloodless stroke.

From the thirteen British infantry regiments that occupied Boston on 15 April, Gage ordered the commanders of the *4th*, *5th*, *10th*, *18th*, *23d*, *38th*, *43d*, *47th*, *52d*, and *59th Foot* and the *1st Battalion of His Majesty's Marine Forces* to detach their flank companies—eleven grenadier and ten light infantry—or about 700 soldiers. He organized these into the *Light Infantry Battalion* and the *Grenadier Battalion*. None of the troops had trained together before, so no unit cohesion existed. Gage selected Lt. Col. Francis Smith of the *10th Foot* to command the expedition, with Maj. John Pitcairn of the *1st Battalion of Marines* as second in command. The ad hoc brigade did not have much time to prepare for its secret mission.

The general's written orders directed Colonel Smith "to seize and destroy all Artillery, Ammunition, Provisions, Tents, Small Arms, and all Military Stores whatever," found at Concord "for the Avowed Purpose of raising and supporting a Rebellion against His Majesty." The expedition would march the 20 miles to Concord "with the utmost expedition and Secrecy," keeping the soldiers under the strictest discipline and expressly forbidding them to "plunder the Inhabitants, or hurt private property." Gage gave Smith a sketch map showing the "Houses, Barns, &c." where the provincials were



suspected to have hidden military supplies. The soldiers were to destroy the gun carriages, render the guns unusable, empty every barrel of gunpowder and flour into the Concord River, burn all tents, and destroy any provisions they found. Smith had no written orders about what to do if anyone opposed them with armed force, and General Gage's verbal orders to Colonel Smith are unknown.

Gage took steps to ensure the expedition remained a secret. As the expedition prepared, Gage sent out a small, mounted party to prevent the alarm riders from alerting the militia or warning revolutionary leaders staying in Concord. To allow the brigade to march into the Massachusetts interior without parading through Boston and thereby alerting revolutionary observers, Gage worked with V. Adm. Samuel Graves to arrange for sailors and boats to ferry Smith's battalions from Boston Common to Lechmere Point on the north bank of the Charles River. Despite these efforts for secrecy, Boston's Sons of Liberty became aware of Gage's plan and sent word to the Provincial Congress in Concord. The delegates immediately adjourned.

On the evening of 18 April, Smith's light infantry, grenadiers, and marines marched from their several barracks in the city with thirty-six rounds of ammunition each and assembled on the Common near the bank of the Charles. Because of a shortage of boats, transfer of the brigade across the river took more time than expected. Once ashore, the British lost more time in arranging the companies in the order of march, trudging through the flooded tidal marsh, and distributing provisions. The column finally set off toward Lexington around 0130 on 19 April.

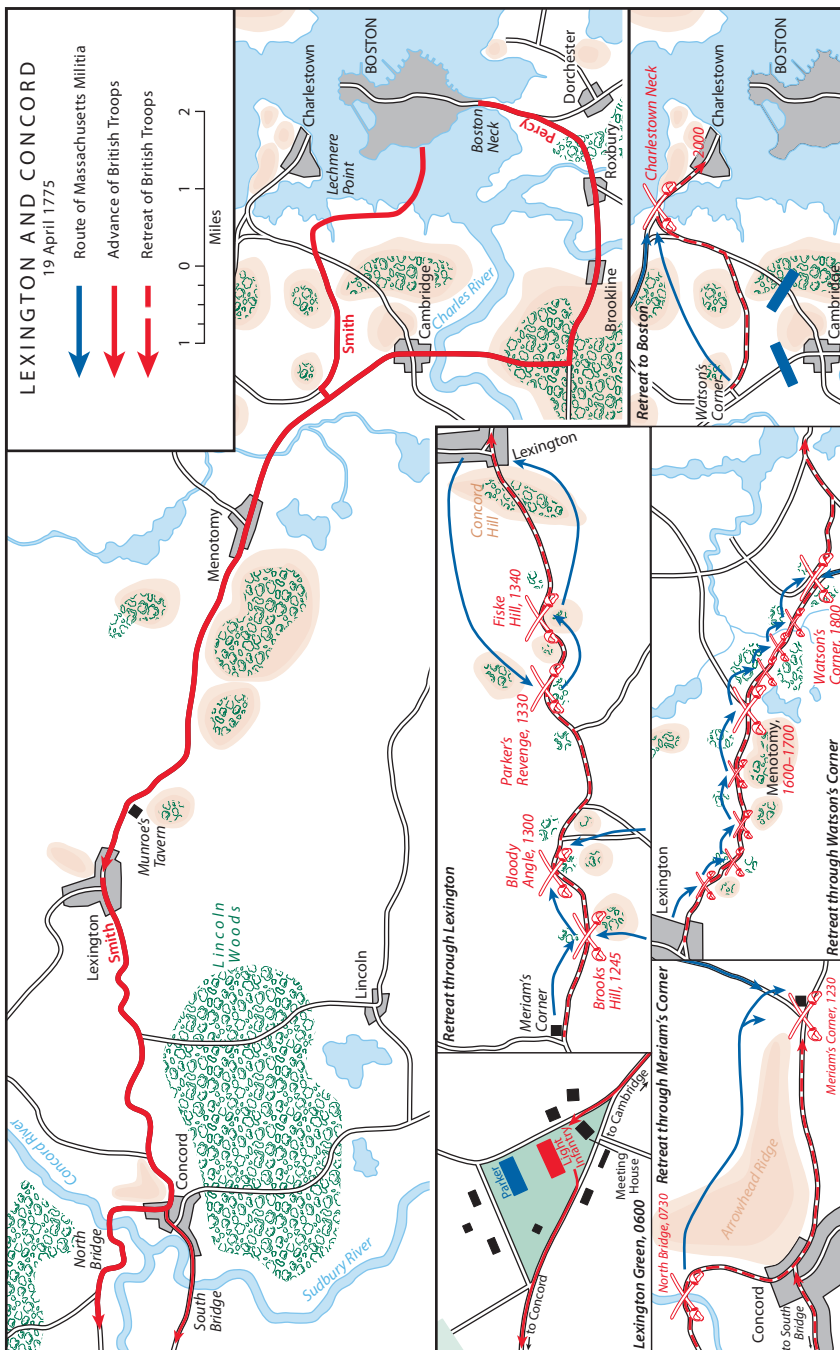
While Smith's brigade remained at the Common, at dusk, a Lexington militiaman observed one of Gage's mounted patrols. He informed 1st Sgt. William Munroe of Lexington's militia company. The sergeant assumed the well-armed regulars had come to arrest patriot leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams as they lodged in town at the home of Rev. Jonas Clarke. Sergeant Munroe posted nine guards at the parsonage and sent a messenger to inform the company commander, Capt. John Parker. Munroe then ordered three men to follow the British riders as they headed toward Concord. Captain

Parker immediately ordered one of his men to ring the meeting house bell, sounding the alarm for his company to muster. Within thirty minutes, around 0100, 130 men of Lexington's militia company assembled on the village green, a 2-acre triangle of public land in the center of town. After discussing the situation with the other officers, Parker determined that if the regulars approached, his men were to do nothing to provoke them, "even should they insult us." After sending out another three-man patrol to watch the road from Boston, Parker ordered the rest of the men to return home until they heard the signal to reassemble. After they fired a volley to clear their weapons, Parker dismissed them.

Except for some details about their route, the British plan was now an open secret. Joseph Warren activated the revolutionaries' alarm network. He instructed Paul Revere and William Dawes, assisted by other members of the Sons of Liberty in Boston, Cambridge, and Charlestown, to notify express riders to alert militia commanders that British troops were marching to Concord. Revere coordinated signal lanterns from the steeple of Old North Church in Boston to alert other alarm riders as to whether the British were moving by land or sea, before setting off across the Back Bay neighborhood for Charlestown. Aware of British efforts to intercept alarm riders, Warren sent Dawes by the alternate route over the Boston Neck. Once alerted, other express riders waited along the way to notify militia officers of approaching danger. Dawes passed the sentry posted on the neck without a challenge and soon joined Revere on the road. Both riders reached Lexington, informed Adams and Hancock of the situation, and continued toward Concord (*Map 2*).

Along the way, Dawes and Revere met Dr. Samuel Prescott as he returned to Concord after visiting a friend in Lexington. Prescott agreed to help alert the militia, but a British patrol surprised and captured the trio. Forced into a nearby pasture for questioning, they attempted an escape. Prescott and Revere spurred their horses, riding in opposite directions, while Dawes galloped back toward Lexington. Prescott and Dawes outran their pursuers, but the British recaptured Revere and threatened him with summary execution unless he divulged the revolutionaries' plans. Revere told them 500 militiamen





Map 2

stood between them and the British brigade marching from Boston. When they heard musketry—Parker’s men clearing their weapons—the patrol officers decided to avoid Lexington. After commandeering his horse, the British released Revere as well as Munroe’s three-man patrol, which they also had captured. Revere returned to Lexington on foot to warn Hancock and Adams.

In the meantime, the British column continued toward Lexington. When Smith and his officers heard bells ringing and musket shots in the distance, they knew that express riders had alerted the militia and they had lost the element of surprise. The column’s scouts encountered more traffic on the road before dawn than they had expected, and they detained farmers heading to market in Boston. One farmer reported 600 militia in Lexington. The scouts also captured the three other Lexington militiamen Captain Parker had sent to reconnoiter the road and brought them back for Major Pitcairn and Colonel Smith to question. Maj. Edward Mitchell, commanding the group who had captured Revere, also arrived and told the scouts of 500 militia reported in Lexington before galloping off to tell Smith and Pitcairn.

At 0300, the column had yet to reach Lexington. Smith sent Pitcairn ahead with six companies of light infantry to get into Lexington as quickly as possible, with Major Mitchell accompanying them. When the detachment drew closer to town, the officers and soldiers noticed armed men observing them from the high ground. Pitcairn sent out flanking parties and halted the column to order the troops to load their muskets but not to fire without orders. Back with the main body and suspecting trouble, Smith sent a messenger to Gage requesting reinforcements. Alarmed by the provincials’ preparations, tired from their long march, and on edge after months of tension, the regulars were growing anxious.

By daybreak, militia scouts reported observing regulars only a few miles from Lexington and approaching fast. Captain Parker ordered the company’s drummer to beat assembly. Men began forming near the northwest corner of the 2-acre triangular green, facing the fork in the road from Boston but not blocking the road to Concord. About seventy men stood in ranks at 0500 when the

first British company marched into town. As the regulars came down the hill toward the green, they spotted Parker's company and turned right on the Bedford Road rather than left on the Concord Road. Pitcairn, however, rode to the left and temporarily was divided from his unfamiliar command by the meeting house that stood at the head of the green.

Two companies of light infantry formed from column into line as Pitcairn, accompanied by officers of the advance party, rode forward and ordered the militiamen to "lay down [their] arms." The officers with him shouted, "Disperse, ye rebels!" and "Surrender!" Parker gave the order to disperse, and the militia members broke ranks, slowly heading off the green with their muskets. Pitcairn ordered his men "not to fire" but "surround and disarm them!" In this chaotic environment, with conflicting orders coming from multiple parties, someone fired a shot. The report unleashed all the pent-up anxiety and confusion of the regulars. According to Parker, the regulars "rushed furiously, [and] fired upon and killed eight of our party without receiving any provocation therefor from us."

Pitcairn was unable to restrain his troops as the companies all tumbled onto the green and pursued the Lexington militia. Only when Colonel Smith arrived on the scene and ordered a drummer to beat the order to cease fire did the soldiers fall back into their ranks. One regular had been wounded in the leg, but the British were otherwise unscathed. Eight members of the Lexington militia company lay dead or mortally wounded. Ten wounded militiamen limped or staggered to safety, including Prince Estabrook, an enslaved African American man who also had responded to the militia's call to arms. Smith rebuked his men for their lack of discipline. The brigade's main body arrived in Lexington ten minutes later. Smith allowed the light infantrymen of the two lead companies to give three cheers and fire a celebratory volley. The march to Concord resumed around 0530.

Knowing the British troops were heading to their town, but unaware of the deadly encounter at Lexington, the townspeople of Concord attempted to hide or remove the military supplies stored in and around the town. As dawn broke, Colonel Barrett, commanding officer of the local militia regiment, alerted the town's four companies,



*The Battle of Lexington, April 19th, 1775, Plate I, Amos Doolittle and Ralph Earl, 1775. Published shortly after the battle and based off interviews of eyewitnesses by militiaman Amos Doolittle, this widely viewed print helped influence public perceptions of the battle. (New York Public Library)*

two each of militia and minutemen, to muster in the center of town. The minute company from Lincoln soon arrived, bringing word of the bloodshed in Lexington. A scout, reporting that regulars were heading in their direction, confirmed firing. Colonel Barrett ordered Capt. David Brown's minute company to advance on the road to the junction at Meriam's Corner, and those of Capt. Nathan Barrett and Capt. George Minot to guard Brown's flank by advancing along the long ridge parallel and to the north of the road.

When the British officers noticed the minutemen in the road ahead and on the ridge, Smith had the light infantry deploy to the flank and the high ground. Following orders, Captain Barrett's and Captain Minot's minutemen retreated. When the grenadiers approached Captain Brown's minutemen on the road, the latter faced about and marched back toward Concord. After the three

companies returned, Colonel Barrett ordered all his men to withdraw to the high ground 400 yards north of town.

The first British troops entered Concord around 0700. Light infantrymen cut down the town's liberty pole as they descended the ridge to rejoin the brigade in town. Smith ordered the regulars to search the town and destroy all the military equipment and supplies they could find. He sent one light infantry company to secure the South Bridge over the Sudbury River and Capt. Lawrence Parsons of the *10th Foot* to lead seven light companies to the North Bridge over the Concord River. After detaching three companies to secure his line of retreat at the bridge in the event of trouble, Parsons led the other four companies 2 miles to Colonel Barrett's farm to find the cannons Gage's informants said were stored there.

About 0800, Barrett ordered the 250 men he had present to retreat across the North Bridge to Punkatasset Hill, the traditional militia muster site on high ground a mile west of town, until reinforcements arrived. The colonel placed Maj. John Buttrick of the minute battalion in temporary command and then raced to his farm to make sure he had concealed the weapons and supplies there properly. In Barrett's absence, Buttrick formed the troops into two battalions, with minute companies on the right and militia companies on the left. As more companies arrived, they joined the respective battalions.

Smith and Pitcairn remained at the town center to control the grenadiers and marines executing their tasks. The soldiers found and disabled or destroyed some military equipment and supplies, including setting wood and canvas equipment on fire. Some sacks of flour and the chest that contained the Provincial Congress treasury were left unmolested when the local inhabitants convinced the soldiers it was private property. When flying embers from the burning supplies set the roofs of nearby buildings on fire, British officers ordered their men to extinguish the flames.

Capt. Walter S. Laurie of the *43d Foot*, in charge of the three light infantry companies securing the North Bridge, watched as more companies joined the provincial force assembled on the hill above him, only 400 yards away. His two fellow captains thought it prudent

for their companies to retreat from their forward positions and rejoin Laurie on the far side of the Concord River. After a brief discussion, Laurie sent a subordinate to inform Smith of the situation and request reinforcements. The officer returned to tell Laurie reinforcements were on their way. The captain then had the three companies take a defensive stance on the east bank of the river to better guard the bridge until Parsons came back.

Colonel Barrett returned around 0900 to learn he now commanded a brigade of more than 500 men, with six minute and five militia companies. Barrett conferred with Major Buttrick and Lt. Col. John Robinson, second in command of a minute regiment still on its way to join them, to discuss their next move. When they saw the smoke from the fire in the town, regimental adjutant Joseph Hosmer asked Barrett, "Will you let them burn the town down?" With property and homes threatened, Barrett decided to act.

Barrett told the soldiers to load their muskets and prepare to march into Concord. He ordered none to fire unless the regulars fired first. Buttrick ordered his minute battalion to face to the right and march forward in a column of two files. They stepped off with the Acton company of Capt. Isaac Davis leading, while the mounted Colonel Barrett watched them pass, repeating his order for them not to fire first. Captain Davis's wife, Hannah Brown Davis, said he appeared thoughtful and serious that morning, and "as he led the company from the house, he turned himself round and seemed to have something to communicate. He only said, 'Take good care of the children,' and was soon out of sight."

Barrett's troops marched down the hill toward the riverbank, then turned left onto a causeway that carried the road through a flooded marsh. Buttrick and Davis marched near the head of the column as they approached the bridge. British Lt. William Sutherland noted with concern that "they began to march by divisions down upon us from their left in a very military manner." This was not a disorganized group of farmers.

Laurie directed one company to take positions to the left and right of the bridge on the east bank. He ordered the other two companies



to form columns on the bridge in the formation for “street firing,” a flexible tactic whereby the column could retreat or advance, firing from the front ranks but restricting the overall volume of fire. As the Americans drew closer, Laurie ordered some soldiers to remove planks from the bridge. While that might slow the American advance, it could also leave Parsons’s detachment stranded on the opposite side. They did not complete the task.

Around 1000, the leading minutemen approached within 40 yards of the bridge, and Laurie’s men fired a volley. Captain Davis and one other man fell dead instantly. When Major Buttrick realized the British had fired ball ammunition, he shouted, “Fire, fellow soldiers, for God’s sake fire!” The Acton company minutemen returned the fire to their front and along the riverbank.

Four of the eight British officers, a sergeant, and four privates fell wounded in the action later known as the “shot heard ‘round the world.” Casualties mounted as the Acton company was joined by the other units in a brisk, regular fire. The regulars, in contrast, fired too high, a characteristic usually indicative of poorly trained troops. Shocked by the volume of fire Buttrick’s men directed against them, the light infantry broke ranks, and the three companies fell back toward Concord just as Colonel Smith arrived with two companies of grenadiers. Major Buttrick ordered the minutemen who had crossed the bridge to take position behind a stone wall on the high ground a few hundred yards from the road.

Colonel Smith rallied and re-formed Laurie’s three companies. He assessed the situation, considering the number of provincials visible on both sides of the river. Concerned about the four companies with Captain Parsons, he resolved to lead his entire brigade to fight its way to their relief if necessary. Smith sent runners with orders for Major Pitcairn to halt the search for munitions and assemble all eleven companies at Wright Tavern while he led the five with him back from the bridge to join them. Ascending the hill above the burial ground around 1030, Smith and Pitcairn surveyed the surrounding terrain through their spyglasses. They observed militia companies advancing toward the South Bridge, as well as Parsons’s men marching at the

double-quick on the road to the North Bridge. Although militia members had taken position on the hills adjacent to the North Bridge, they allowed Parsons's four companies to trot across the bridge unmolested but unnerved at the sight of dead and dying comrades.

With his command reunited and the militia closing in, Smith decided to retreat to Boston. He thanked local doctors for their help tending his casualties and left the most severe cases to their care. The British seized wagons to evacuate their wounded officers, but the ambulatory wounded enlisted men had to walk. They left their dead behind for the people of Concord to bury.

Throughout the region, Massachusetts militia and minute companies mustered and marched to the scene of the fighting. Within marching distance of Concord were forty-seven regiments—some 14,000 men—all of whom had heard the alert and were on the move. The British officers realized that leading 700 tired soldiers on a march of 20 miles through an enemy-infested country would not be easy. At 1200, Smith ordered the light infantry companies to provide skirmishers on the flanks for security, and the half-mile-long column began its retreat to Boston without the accompanying sound of drums and fifes.

Although Barrett's men pursued, the British initially encountered no opposition until they reached the junction of the Lexington and Bedford Roads at Meriam's Corner. Approximately 500 waiting militia and minutemen were watching as the British column converged to cross a brook. Here, sources diverge as to what happened next. American sources state that the rear grenadier company turned about and fired a volley, which prompted the militia to open fire. British sources state that the provincials opened fire without any provocation and that the grenadiers then returned fire. Regardless of the narrative, open warfare was the result. The militia and minutemen fired from covered positions among Nathan and Abigail Meriam's farmhouse, barn, outbuildings, and stone fences, about 80 yards from the road. The light infantry flankers prevented American skirmishers from approaching for better shots as the column of regulars trudged along the road over hills, valleys,



and streams. The terrain—wooded, rocky, and crisscrossed with fences—offered good cover and concealment for troops waiting in ambush.

The British column moved as quickly as possible. American officers led their militia and minute companies through the brush and along the fields bordering the road, frequently changing positions, in a running battle that kept the regulars under almost constant fire. At Hardys Hill, 200 to 300 minutemen took the British under a withering fire from behind cover. This was repeated just past Elm Brook, where another 300 militia members of the Woburn regiment caught the regulars in a vicious crossfire at a sharp right turn in the road. The location later received the name Bloody Angle. British casualties mounted as places along the road became deadly. However, it was not an entirely one-sided fight. The regulars at times delivered effective volleys that took a toll on the attacking militia, and the light infantry flankers surprised and killed groups of Americans waiting in concealed positions. However, the regulars were running low on ammunition.

When the head of the column made the turn where the road crossed the town limits of Lexington, Parker's militia company waited in ambush to exact their revenge. The Lexington men opened fire into the now-staggering column, and about a dozen regulars went down in the volley. Colonel Smith, wounded in the thigh, fell from his horse. Major Pitcairn rode to the front of the column and sent grenadiers and light infantrymen to attack the flanks of the ambush. The militia withdrew after engaging in bitter fighting.

Meanwhile, the militia pursuing from the Bloody Angle continued to torment the rear and center companies of the column. At the head of the column, severe hand-to-hand fighting took place around and on Fiske Hill, the last elevation before entering Lexington. Desperate light infantry and marines pushed off the road to drive back fresh militia companies. It was here that British discipline gave way, and many regulars began to retreat toward Lexington at a run.

With their ammunition nearly exhausted, tired, hungry, and dragging their wounded, the dispirited regulars limped into Lexington. When Smith's brigade reached the Lexington Green,

men in the rear heard cheers from the front of the column. On a hill just east of the green, near Munroe's Tavern, the brigade of Brig. Gen. Hugh, Lord Percy had formed into line of battle with 1,000 infantrymen, supported by two 6-pounder artillery pieces. Gage had sent the reinforcements in response to Smith's request earlier in the day. The battered men of the expedition took position behind Percy's brigade and collapsed in exhaustion, as the British field guns kept the pursuing militia at bay. The provincials regrouped as Brig. Gen. William Heath and the chairman of the Committee of Safety, Joseph Warren, arrived to direct the movements of the Massachusetts forces in the field.

With 11 miles to Boston, the battle was not yet over for the regulars. Percy placed Smith's battered companies in the lead of the retreating column, wary of encountering more trouble, while the fresh troops would hold back the militia regiments assembling in Lexington. Percy ordered out flankers, and the combined British force marched toward the town of Menotomy (modern-day Arlington). Almost immediately, the militia and minutemen hit the regulars with repeated ambushes, firing from houses and hilltops. The fighting here became the fiercest of any on 19 April as it developed into hand-to-hand combat in the town. Furious regulars torched houses after receiving repeated fire from provincials hiding in them. In the savage, close-in fighting, 80-year-old militia veteran Samuel Whittemore engaged regulars with a pair of pistols and a musket, killing and wounding several before being shot, bayoneted thirteen times, and left for dead. Whittemore recovered and lived for nearly twenty years more. In Menotomy, the regulars lost forty killed and about eighty wounded—half of their total casualties on 19 April.

American troops blocked the road at Cambridge in an attempt to compel the British column to take the longer and more vulnerable route through Watertown. Percy's 6-pounders forced open the direct path through Cambridge to Charlestown. Under the guns of the *Royal Navy*, Percy collected his command on Bunker Hill and began establishing order. Gage ferried ammunition and reinforcements over the Charles and began removing the wounded during the night. The provincials did not pursue but set a strong guard over the



***Retreat of the British from Concord, Alonzo Chappel and James Smillie, ca. 1875. Created for the centennial commemoration of the events in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, this lithograph depicts the chaos of the retreat from Concord. (New York Public Library)***

peninsula. The battle was over. It had cost the British 73 dead, 174 wounded, and 26 missing. The Americans suffered around fifty dead, thirty-nine wounded, and five missing. Even though the worst of the fighting had stopped, American reinforcements continued to arrive, and the Provincial Army soon had the city surrounded and under siege. On 26 April, Gage abandoned the Charlestown peninsula.

In the month following the battle, revolutionaries in Massachusetts began establishing a New England Army of Observation with headquarters in Cambridge. Some of those who had responded to the 19 April alarm went home, some remained, and volunteers from the minute and militia companies replaced them. Among the new arrivals were members of the Mahican American Indian community at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, whose members vowed, “Wherever you go, we will be by your sides. Our bones shall die with yours. We are determined never to be at peace with the redcoats, while they are at variance with you.” The Massachusetts Committee of Safety established a term of enlistment for all regiments from April to December, and, by early June, had twenty-three regiments totaling about 11,500 men in the Army of Observation outside Boston. The Committee of Safety called on

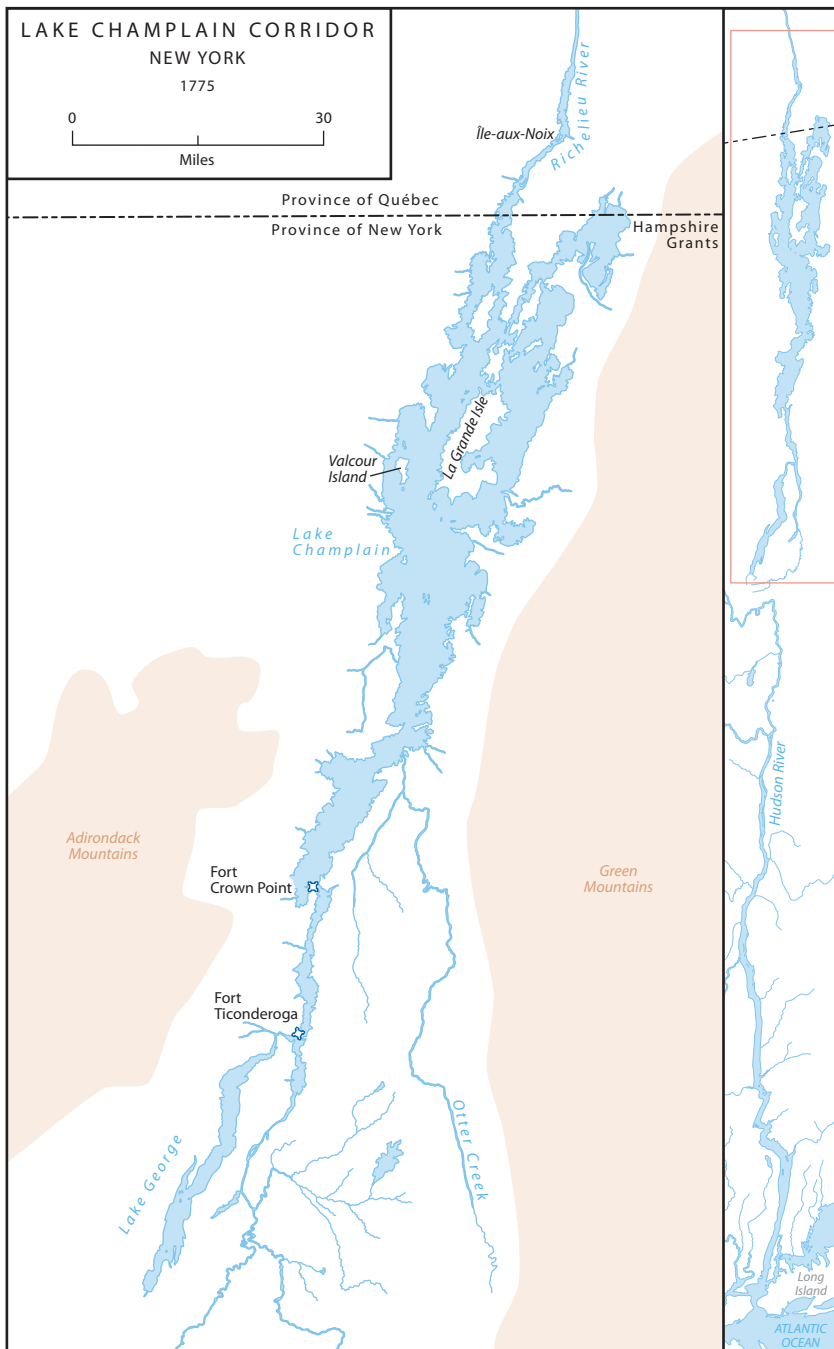
its New England neighbors to join them in the struggle, and Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire responded by sending military units.

News of Lexington and Concord spread quickly throughout the colonies. In three weeks, even colonists in Savannah were well aware of the events in Massachusetts. The news caused an explosion of military feeling. “The *rage militaire*, as the French call a passion for arms, has taken possession of the whole continent,” said a man in Philadelphia, watching new companies being formed daily. The revolutionary fervor was rapidly spreading.

## Ticonderoga and Crown Point

As the New England Army of Observation laid siege to General Gage’s army in and around Boston, revolutionary leaders began to focus on other prime British targets in the region. The two British posts on upper Lake Champlain in New York, Forts Ticonderoga and Crown Point, gained strategic importance. They not only secured the British line of communications between Canada and New York but also held many artillery pieces. The Massachusetts Provincial Congress commissioned Connecticut militia officer Benedict Arnold a colonel and directed him to capture the two posts. Meanwhile, Connecticut militia leaders urged Ethan Allen to do the same thing with the Green Mountain Boys, his independent militia of settlers from the Hampshire Grants (*Map 3*).

Arnold and Allen met on 9 May near Fort Ticonderoga. After some wrangling between the two men about who was in command, they agreed to seize the lightly held fort the next morning. Fort Ticonderoga’s small garrison fell quickly, before dawn, with no bloodshed. Colonel Arnold sent a detachment to seize Fort Crown Point the next day, but he was not through. He crewed a captured schooner with Massachusetts militia and sailed toward the Canadian shores of Lake Champlain. At the top of the lake, he captured a British sloop and named her the *Enterprise*. With his two ships, he cruised Lake Champlain, destroying all vessels he could not seize and capturing vital intelligence giving the disposition of all Crown



Map 3

forces in Canada. In less than a week, Arnold had delivered two forts into the revolutionaries' hands, gained naval superiority of Lake Champlain, and had the information needed for a further campaign. After completing an inventory of the captured artillery, he set off for Cambridge with his information.

## **Bunker Hill**

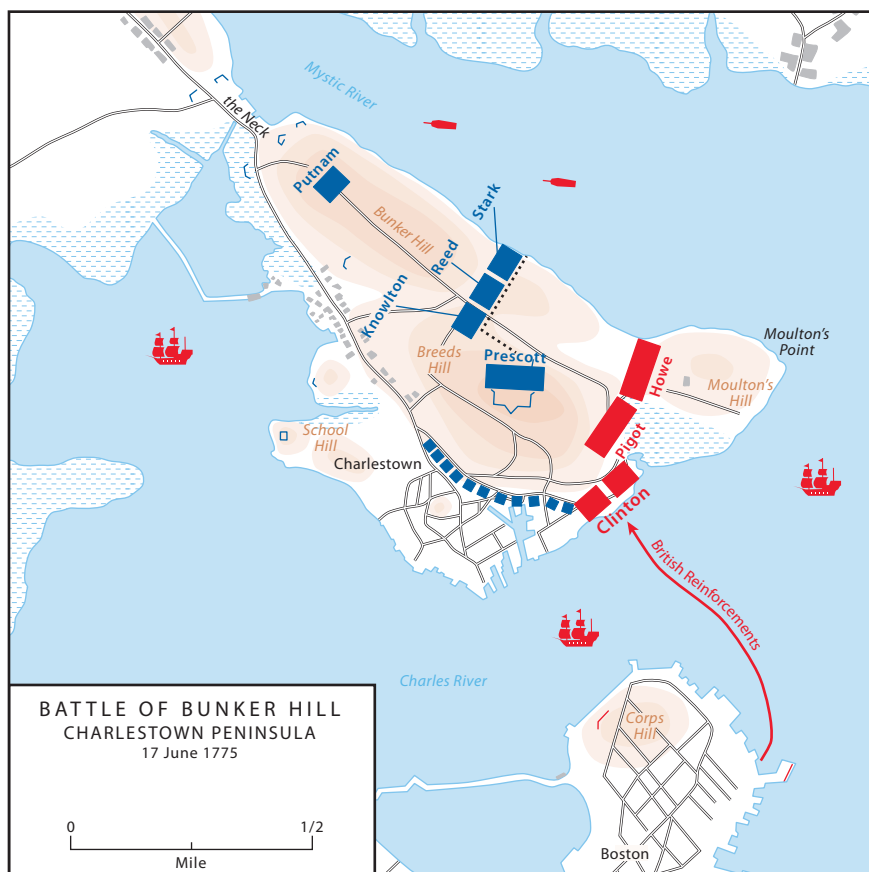
Following the battles of Lexington and Concord, General Gage received reinforcements increasing his strength in Boston to about 7,000 soldiers. Three major generals—William Howe, Henry Clinton, and John Burgoyne—arrived to assist Gage and command the brigades of the army at Boston. More aggressive than the commander in chief, the three new general officers emphasized the need to push back the forces surrounding the city. They advised mounting a two-pronged offensive as soon as possible, with one force landing at Charlestown and seizing Cambridge and the other breaking through the positions at Roxbury and Dorchester Neck. Once they ruptured the enemy siege lines, the two wings would advance to envelop the provincials.

Revolutionary leaders learned that the British planned to move against Charlestown. To counter this, the Provincial Congress ordered the Army of Observation's commander, Maj. Gen. Artemas Ward, to fortify Bunker Hill, the dominating high ground between the Charles and Mystic Rivers. By incorporating and improving the abandoned British earthwork, the Army of Observation could block the expected enemy advance. Around 2300 on 16 June, three Massachusetts regiments—about 1,200 men commanded by Col. William Prescott—marched over Charlestown Neck, which connected the mainland to the peninsula, and ascended Bunker Hill to erect fortifications. However, chief engineer Col. Richard Gridley identified nearby Breeds Hill as more defensible and ordered the men to begin digging in there. They were followed by Brig. Gen. Israel Putnam of Connecticut, who arrived ahead of his troops. Working through the night, the militiamen labored to construct earthworks before daylight (*Map 4*).





*The Honble Sr. Wm. Howe. Knight of the Bath, & Commander in Chief of his Majesty's Forces in America, Richard Purcell, 1777. Considered one of the ablest officers in the British army, William Howe succeeded Thomas Gage as the commander in chief in North America in 1776. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)*



**Map 4**

On the morning of 17 June, British soldiers and sailors were surprised to see a redoubt with 6-foot-high walls and breastworks along the crest of Breeds Hill. British installations along the Boston waterfront and ships in the harbor were within range of its six light field guns. The sloop-of-war *Lively* opened fire on the hill, but the crew could not elevate their guns sufficiently to damage the American fortifications on the high ground. Admiral Graves soon ordered them to cease.

General Gage convened his senior subordinates in a council of war at his headquarters to discuss possible courses of action. General Howe, a battle-tested commander in the Seven Years' War and member of one of Britain's elite families, recommended an



immediate amphibious landing with 2,300 men and attached field artillery, supported by the guns of the ships. Once ashore, Howe's troops would overcome the enemy position with a frontal assault to demonstrate the superiority of the British army and humble the rebellious colonials. Howe's forces could then continue advancing toward Cambridge according to the original plan. Gage approved, and, at 0700, Howe issued orders to assemble the force that included the battalions of light infantry and grenadiers from ten infantry regiments, five regiments of foot, and the two battalions of marines, in addition to three companies of artillery.

In the meantime, elements of nine Massachusetts regiments arrived to reinforce Prescott in the breastworks on Breeds Hill, with commanders holding some companies in reserve at Bunker Hill. They were followed by a 200-man detachment of Putnam's Regiment, commanded by Capt. Thomas Knowlton. Directed by Prescott to cover the ground between Breeds Hill and the Mystic River, Knowlton saw the vulnerability of Prescott's position. He reinforced a rail fence along a ditch 200 yards to the rear of the Massachusetts earthworks, creating a sturdy defensive position. That extended the American line north and down the slope toward the beach. Two New Hampshire regiments, led by colonels James Reed and John Stark (a former ranger officer in the French and Indian War and a formidable fighter), took position on Knowlton's left and completed the line to the shore. They erected a stone wall across the narrow strand to the waterline. With everything ready, the New England soldiers waited, three ranks deep, behind their defenses. When Joseph Warren—now a major general—arrived, he declined to take command because of his admitted lack of military experience and deferred to Putnam as the ranking officer. Warren then shouldered a musket and took his place as a volunteer private in the ranks. Putnam and Prescott needed every musket. Although parts of twelve New England regiments covered the front line, Prescott could count only about 900 defenders in position with two light field guns, the other artillery having inexplicably abandoned their position.

Around noon, twenty-eight *Royal Navy* boats began transporting the first 1,100 regulars one-third of a mile across

the Charles River to the landing site, as the vessels of the *Royal Navy* and several floating batteries swept the far shore and low ground in front of Breeds Hill with heavy gunfire. The boats pulled toward the beach at Moulton's Point on the northeastern end of the peninsula, where they would land the *Light Infantry Battalion*, *Grenadier Battalion*, and the battalion companies of the *5th* and *38th Foot*. *Royal Navy* ships moved up the Charles to take position to rake any Americans advancing or retreating across the Charlestown Neck. Their guns fired hot shot—cannonballs heated in shipboard galley stoves—while heavy 24-pounders in Boston hurled incendiary shells to ignite the abandoned buildings of Charlestown.

While the *Light Infantry* and *Grenadier Battalions*, elements of the *5th*, *35th*, *38th*, *43d*, and *52d Foot*, the *1st Battalion of Marines*, and the three companies of *Royal Artillery* with their twelve pieces slowly assembled on the beach, Howe on Moulton's Hill reconnoitered the enemy defenses through his spyglass. He noted the arrival of colonial reinforcements and sent a message for Gage to prepare to commit the reserve early; elements of the *63d Foot* and *2d Battalion of Marines* got ready to move across the river to support the coming engagement on the peninsula.

Howe devised a simple plan of attack with an advance of two wings. He determined the American line was weakest on its left flank, where the recent reinforcements had had little time to entrench. The right wing, under his personal command, would constitute the main effort. The *Grenadier Battalion*, commanded by Lt. Col. James Abercrombie, supported by the *5th* and *52d Foot*, would advance in two lines, three ranks deep, in a frontal assault against the American position at the rail fence. While the colonials focused attention to their front, the *Light Infantry Battalion*, commanded by Lt. Col. George Clark, was to turn the American left flank on the narrow beach, sweep behind the enemy defending along the rail fence, and assault the redoubt on Breeds Hill from behind. Brig. Gen. Sir Robert Pigot's left wing would make the supporting attack against the entrenchments on the American right. Pigot's wing consisted of the three grenadier and three light infantry companies formed as a battalion on the left, on



***Battle of Bunker Hill, E. Percy Moran, ca. 1909. British grenadiers assault the main redoubt on Breeds Hill in Massachusetts. (Library of Congress)***

line with the battalion companies of their respective parent units, the 38th, 43d, and 47th Foot and the 1st Battalion of Marines on line to their right.

Howe ordered the regulars to make the assault using the bayonet alone and gave the signal to begin the advance at 1500, as the temperature reached a sweltering 95°F. The *Royal Artillery* 12-pounders commenced firing a cannonade from Moulton's Hill as the 6-pounders prepared to support the assault. However, the artillerymen on the light guns discovered their ammunition boxes carried cartridges with 12-pound instead of 6-pound shot. The assault would have to go forward without their immediate support.

The regulars started up the hill in long, well-dressed double lines of battle. The grenadier companies had to halt repeatedly to negotiate low-lying fences that divided pastures and to reform before resuming the advance. Behind the earthworks and rail fence, revolutionary soldiers watched and nervously

waited in silence, while their officers crouched low and moved along their companies to remind the men to aim low and wait for the order to fire. To make certain the regulars were within musket range, Stark placed stakes 40 yards in front of his unit and ordered his men to aim at the leggings of the regulars, knowing the propensity of green troops to fire too high.

Stark's troops saw Clark's *Light Infantry Battalion* come into view first, marching rapidly in a column of four along the narrow, level, unobstructed beach, faster than the grenadiers on their left. When they were only 40 yards from the barricade, the New Hampshire officers gave the order to fire. Three successive, devastating volleys tore through the ranks of the leading *23d (Royal Welch Fusiliers) Foot's* light company. The column came to a brief halt, then attempted to close ranks and move forward again with the light company of the *4th (King's Own) Foot* marching through the stunned fusiliers, only to meet another series of withering volleys. The same fate met the rest of the light companies as Stark's men kept up a rotation of fire. The British light infantrymen retreated in disorder, leaving their dead and wounded behind on the beach. Their losses had been disastrous; four of the companies had taken 80 percent casualties.

Although they heard the musketry and cries of the wounded to their right—down the hill and below the plain on the beach out of sight—Howe urged the lines of grenadiers forward. As they cleared the last fence and prepared to charge the final 100 yards across the pasture to the provincials' position, some New Englanders fired without orders. Grenadier officers disregarded Howe's instructions and ordered their men to return fire, but they aimed too high and caused little damage. Knowlton and Reed gave the order to fire, and the volleys shattered the ranks of the grenadiers. Despite the gaps that appeared in their ranks, the British hurriedly reloaded and fired, again too high. Although staff officers and aides-de-camp fell dead and wounded around him, Howe stood unscathed. The support regiments came up behind the British grenadiers, but American volleys tore into them as well. Both lines, now badly mauled and

intermingled, faced about and retreated down the hill and out of range.

On the British left, Pigot advanced his wing slowly in what Howe had planned as a feint to hold the attention of the entrenched Americans in support of the main effort on the right. American skirmishers fired from the cover provided by the still-standing abandoned buildings in Charlestown and effectively harassed the flanks of Pigot's brigade. The general pulled his units back to their covered positions at the point. British warships renewed their cannonade, and Admiral Graves ordered a naval landing party to go ashore to set Charlestown's remaining buildings on fire to deny their use to the enemy.

The British attack had failed all along the line. The bodies of the British dead lay on the beach and in the meadow, while the wounded writhed in agony or tried to drag themselves to their army's lines. The revolutionary defenders cheered, but their commanders knew the battle was not yet over. Despite their success, some men had had enough and left their units without permission. Putnam tried to rally the stragglers and put unengaged men to work digging a second line of entrenchments. Reinforcements from Cambridge approached, but some companies were unwilling to cross the narrow Charlestown Neck, which was under fire from the warships just offshore.

Howe re-formed his units for another assault within a quarter of an hour. He combined the shattered light infantry with the grenadiers, and the lines of the right wing advanced. As happened in the first attack, they received no fire until they closed within 80 yards of the enemy. Once again, the New England line erupted in blasts of musketry, after which the men loaded and fired as fast as they could. They maintained a nearly continuous volume of musket fire for half an hour while artillery fired grapeshot that ripped into the advancing grenadiers and light infantrymen until they could take no more. Howe's first line failed to reach, much less penetrate, the American position. The right wing's second line crashed into the stalled first line from behind in the confusion, and the formations lost cohesion, faltered, and retreated. As Pigot's left wing attempted to advance, it likewise staggered under the revolutionaries' intense volume of fire, collapsed, and retreated in

disorder. The New Englanders were once again elated as they watched the redcoats retreat a second time.

Against the advice of his subordinates, Howe was determined to try once more. As he regrouped his battered battalions, General Clinton arrived with the 400 fresh troops from the *63d Foot* and the *2d Battalion of Marines*. The revolutionaries prepared to receive another attack, but they were low on ammunition. In comparison to their foes, their losses had been light. Although some more men had arrived to reinforce the line, officers in the rear area had not sent the vital ammunition forward. Without a formal logistics plan, the revolutionaries were handicapped.

As Howe prepared to renew the attack, he changed tactics. This time, the men of his wing would march in column most of the way up the hill before deploying in line for the bayonet charge. Wheeling to the left, what remained of the grenadiers and *52d Foot* would advance against the left of the breastworks instead of the rail fence, where a smaller force would make a demonstration. Howe brought all the available artillery forward to suppress the American line with grapeshot. When the artillery was in position, the third attack began.

The regulars advanced over fields where the high grass was now trampled, blood-stained, and littered with dead and dying comrades. The New Englanders fired and again took a toll on the regulars, but their ammunition was spent. As the fire slackened, British troops finally began to reach the entrenchments and closed with their bayonets. Fighting became hand-to-hand. On the left, Pigot's brigade swung around to the west to outflank the redoubt. The British marines came under heavy fire and halted to return fire instead of charging the entrenchments. While attempting to rally the battalion, Major Pitcairn was shot and killed. One of the shots came from Peter Salem, who was one of four African American soldiers in a company in Col. John Mansfield's Regiment (today's 101st Engineer Battalion, Massachusetts Army National Guard). Salem's commanding officer had emancipated him, and he would serve in the Continental Army until 1780.

The *47th Foot* formed on the left of the stalled marines, which allowed them to re-form and resume their advance with the bayonet. The British line staggered again under another blast of American



musketry and then surged forward. Bent on revenge, the nearly 1,000 regulars pressed the assault with brutal fury. The 150 New England soldiers in the redoubt, few of whom had bayonets, fought desperately with clubbed muskets and entrenching tools and even threw rocks at the attackers. As the British swarmed over the earthworks, the defenders began to retreat. Some could not disengage to escape the two converging enemy wings. Casualties mounted as resistance in and near the redoubt collapsed. General Warren was killed in the redoubt. The New Hampshire and Connecticut troops on the American left assumed the role of rear guard, and conducted a fighting withdrawal, bringing their wounded and one of the guns with them. Their stubborn fight and disciplined firing allowed other units to retreat and discouraged a British pursuit.

The British had achieved a Pyrrhic victory. They suffered 226 killed (including those who later died of wounds) and 828 wounded—more than 40 percent of the 2,600 men engaged. By comparison, the New England force of about 2,500 soldiers lost 138 killed, 276 wounded, and 30 missing, or 444 total casualties. The exact number of revolutionary participants is difficult to determine accurately because some units and individuals came and left during the battle.

Howe and his officers gained a measure of respect for their opponents. The British losses would weigh heavily on Howe in future campaigns. British officer casualties came to around one hundred, or a quarter of all commissioned ranks in North America. Although the revolutionaries had lost the battle, the disproportionate casualty numbers convinced them that the vaunted British regulars were not invincible. The engagement remembered as the Battle of Bunker Hill would be the only major combat of the prolonged siege of Boston.

## **Formation of the Continental Army**

On the same day Fort Ticonderoga fell, delegates from the thirteen colonies convened in Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress. The constitutional crisis, in which Americans sought a redress of grievances from the British king and Parliament, had erupted into open hostilities. New England appealed for help in



the common cause of American liberty. The delegates realized that even though many colonists desired reconciliation with the mother country, they now faced open warfare from Crown forces. The Continental Congress took the next step in transforming a rebellion against arbitrary policies into a war for national independence when it established the Continental Army.

On 14 June 1775, Congress resolved that “six companies of expert riflemen, be immediately raised in Pennsylvania, two in Maryland, and two in Virginia . . . [and,] as soon as completed, shall march and join the army near Boston . . . under the command of the chief Officer in that army.” The Congress then adopted the New England Army of Observation, as well as the regiments then being raised by New York. On 15 June, Congress appointed George Washington as commander of what would become known as the Continental Army. “The delegates of the United Colonies . . . reposing especial trust and confidence in [the] patriotism, conduct and fidelity” of George Washington, issued its first commission by appointing him “General and Commander in chief of the Army of the United Colonies and of all the forces raised or to be raised by them and of all others who shall voluntarily offer their services and join the said army for the defence of American Liberty and for repelling every hostile invasion thereof.”

General Washington took formal command of the besieging army at Cambridge on 3 July 1775. The next day he announced in general orders that the Continental Congress had “taken all the Troops of the several Colonies . . . into their Pay and Service,” and they were “now the Troops of the United Provinces of North America.” Creating a Continental Army out of each state’s militia, with their varying ideas about class, religion, and race, was a challenge to the 43-year-old George Washington and his fellow officers. Organization, discipline, and supply would be his main areas of focus, as he issued a stream of general orders through the summer and fall of 1775 to bring order out of chaos. Because so few uniforms were available, Washington ordered a system of rank identification with colored cockades and strips of cloth. He divided the army into three divisions, each headed by a major general and composed of two brigades apiece.

Maj. Gens. Israel Putnam, Artemas Ward, and Charles Lee led the approximately 16,000 troops in the three divisions. Regiments still were organized by state, bearing the state designation, such as the 1st New Hampshire Regiment, or, if from Massachusetts, the name of their colonel. Each consisted of ten companies. Officers in the army were of varying quality. Courts-martial—two dozen convictions in Washington's first few months alone—helped rid the Army of many bad officers while disciplinary actions brought the enlisted soldiers to some form of order. The commissary general, Col. Joseph Trumbull, struggled to develop a system of supply for food, forage, and firewood, sending agents across the colonies. But the most pressing shortage was gunpowder, with only enough on hand for nine rounds per soldier in August. Smuggled supplies brought the amount up to twenty-three rounds per soldier by November, but the powder shortage remained a constant problem for Washington and his leaders. With enlistments due to run out by the new year, Washington knew he had little time to bring this force into some semblance of an army.

Hygiene and field sanitation became Washington's chief concerns as he labored to preserve the health of his new army. He instructed his officers on 4 July 1775 to pay close attention to their soldiers' health and "inculcate upon them the necessity of cleanliness as essential to their health and service." Noting that the Continental Army establishment did not include authorization for a medical service corps, Washington requested Congress to amend this. On 27 July, Congress authorized "the establishing of an hospital for an army consisting of 20,000 men," with a chief physician and specifications for staff.

An additional concern for Washington was the smallpox epidemic ravaging North America. Beginning in 1775 and nicknamed the "Pox Americana," it lasted until 1782. Whereas the British Army routinely practiced inoculation, and most regulars had been exposed to the disease from a young age, the colonists were highly susceptible to smallpox. Inoculation in the colonies was controversial for a variety of reasons, ranging from fear of spreading the infection to religious concerns about circumventing God's will, and rural populations



*George Washington, Charles Willson Peale, ca. 1779–1781. Depicted here after the victories in Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey (in 1776 and 1777, respectively), General Washington faced the daunting challenge of building the Continental Army out of stubbornly regional colonists. (Gift of Collis P. Huntington, 1897, Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

proved more vulnerable to the disease. Washington quarantined any soldiers exposed to smallpox and restricted access to his camp from people coming from Boston for fear the British were attempting to infect his army. He would not begin voluntary inoculations until 1776 and would not mandate them until 1777.

While Washington readied his army for battle, on 5 July, the Continental Congress adopted the “Olive Branch Petition,” a formal appeal to King George III that expressed hope for reconciliation between the thirteen colonies and Great Britain. Many delegates, and many Americans as well, hoped to avoid a permanent break. The petition explained that the colonists only had taken up arms to resist enforcement of the unjust policies that threatened American liberty—policies which the king’s ministers had imposed on them, presumably without his knowledge. The British government rejected the petition in August and the king issued a Proclamation of Rebellion, placing all the thirteen colonies in a state of rebellion. It was a *de facto* declaration of war.

## **Dorchester Heights**

After the battle of Bunker Hill, the siege of British-occupied Boston became a stalemate. At the end of December 1775, the Continental Army at Boston had shrunk to about 8,000 troops as General Washington detached regiments for the invasion of Canada and as enlistments ran out. Washington began the delicate process to “at the same time disband one Army and recruit another within that distance of twenty odd British regiments.” The Continental Congress had created what is now known as the second establishment of the Continental Army, organizing it into twenty-six regiments of 728 officers and soldiers each, to go into effect on 1 January 1776. Each regiment consisted of eight companies with field and staff officers. Uniforms would be brown coats with different colored facings for each regiment. In comparison to the British regiments, Continental regiments would have a higher proportion of officers to enlisted soldiers for better control and would have more muskets on the line—640 as opposed to 448 in the British service.

Regimental designations were numerical by the seniority of the regiment’s colonel, while still being state-based. For example, Col. Edmund Phinney’s Regiment became the 18th Continental Regiment (today’s 133d Engineer Battalion, Maine Army National

Guard). The new establishment organized the artillery into one regiment of twelve companies, commanded by Col. Henry Knox, a Boston bookseller and militia officer with aspirations for military greatness. On 1 January 1776, Washington announced to his army, "This day giving commencement to the new army, which, in every point of View is entirely Continental, . . . His Excellency hopes that the Importance of the great Cause we are engaged in, will be deeply impressed upon every Man's mind, and wishes it to be considered, that an Army without Order, Regularity and Discipline, is no better than a Commission'd Mob." The reorganization would not be complete until March.

As Washington struggled to maintain an army in the field, he also faced the dilemma of how to evict the British from Boston. Without heavy guns and mortars that could threaten British defensive positions and shipping, the Americans could not assault successfully or force the British to evacuate Boston. Henry Knox proposed bringing the artillery captured at Forts Ticonderoga and Crown Point to the army around Boston to swing the tactical balance in favor of the Americans. Washington concurred, and Knox arrived at Fort Ticonderoga on 5 December. Once there, he selected fifty-nine pieces, which included guns, howitzers, and mortars. He also requisitioned the necessary artillery implements, ammunition, and other military equipment, 60 tons of material in all.

Under Knox's direction, a force of civilian wagon drivers moved the ordnance over land from Lake Champlain to the northern end of Lake George, where they used flat-bottom watercraft to ship everything to the south shore. From there, they loaded the weapons and equipment onto carts and wagons that carried them down the road along the Hudson River to Albany, New York. After waiting for the temperatures to fall, the teamsters placed the artillery and other materiel on forty-two strong sleds, which were pulled by eighty yoke of oxen across the ice-covered river and over the Berkshire Hills to Springfield, Massachusetts. Marching 300 strenuous miles, they finally arrived at Framingham, Massachusetts, on 25 January 1776. Knox sent a message to notify General Washington of the delivery of his "Noble Train of Artillery."

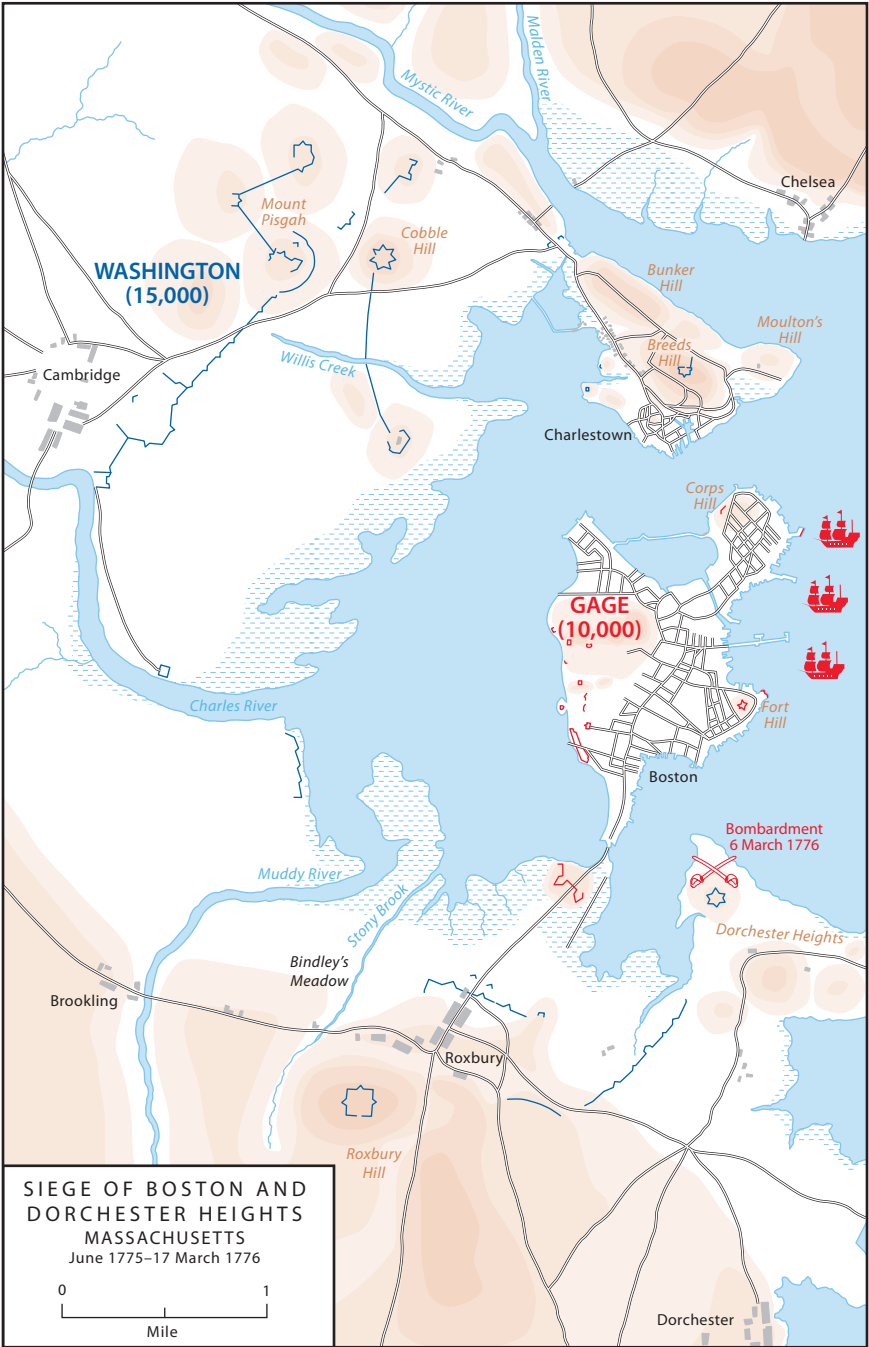




*Hauling Guns by Ox Teams from Fort Ticonderoga for the Siege of Boston, artist unknown, ca. 1775. Henry Knox led the seven-week expedition to transport 60 tons of weaponry across 300 miles in the dead of winter, using oxen, horses, sleds, and civilian wagoners. (National Archives)*

To use the heavy guns, Washington decided to seize the dominating high ground on Dorchester Heights. The Americans would have to erect fortifications in the darkness of a single night before the British opened fire with their artillery. Frozen ground compounded the problem. The months of siege warfare had taught the Continental Army valuable lessons about constructing field fortifications, and they could overcome such limitations. Soldiers made fascines—bundles of sticks, 6 feet long and 1 foot thick—which they could pile on top of one another. They also fashioned gabions—wicker cylinders that looked like large baskets, 3 feet wide and 3 feet deep—which they could fill with earth. From these light materials, which they easily carried to the heights, they could erect hasty protective positions (*Map 5*).

The Continental artillery batteries already in place around Boston opened fire on the evening of 2 March and continued the cannonade



Map 5



the next night. As soon as it grew dark on 4 March, the artillery resumed its now-routine nightly cannonade. Suspecting an imminent ground attack, the British artillery returned fire. In the darkness, Brig. Gen. John Thomas led his Continental division up Dorchester Heights. As a covering force of 800 men took position for security, 1,200 troops grounded arms and went to work. They spread hay along the farm lanes and across the pastures to muffle the sound of the yoked oxen and the 280 wheeled carts and wagons making multiple trips hauling entrenching material. As intended, the noise of the artillery exchange kept the British from hearing the activity as Knox and Gridley supervised the work of fortifying Dorchester Heights. By 2200, two forts with breastworks to shield the guns and the defending infantrymen stood ready. By 0300 on 5 March, a division of 3,000 Continental infantrymen, five companies of riflemen, and the supporting artillery arrived to complete the two redoubts, mount the guns, and improve the breastworks.

When British soldiers finally realized what was happening, they notified Brig. Gen. Francis Smith (promoted twice since his ordeal at Lexington and Concord), but he neither took any action nor informed General Howe. Eventually, shore batteries and *Royal Navy* warships opened fire on the fortifications, but their guns had neither the range nor elevation to engage their targets. V. Adm. Molyneux Shuldham, the new commander of British naval forces in North America, immediately notified Howe that the fleet, vulnerable to American artillery, no longer could remain in Boston Harbor. The risk of losing naval support left Howe with two options. He either could attack the Dorchester Heights fortifications or evacuate Boston.

Howe alerted a force of 3,800 troops for a two-pronged amphibious assault on Dorchester Heights after dark. As the troops prepared, a severe storm began in late afternoon with high winds and sheets of rain, making it impossible to mount the operation, and Howe countermanded the order. The next day, 6 March, the strong wind and rain continued. Howe convened a council of war, during which the assembled officers agreed with

the recommendation to evacuate Boston without fighting. British troops and thousands of loyalist civilians began packing.

Observers soon reported that the British had started loading ships. Howe contacted Washington with an offer to spare the city's destruction if he allowed British forces to evacuate unmolested. Washington agreed. The British military loaded supplies, equipment, and ordnance on ships, while loyalist civilians joined them with their families and as many possessions as they could carry. British military personnel began boarding their transports by 17 March, and by the 26th, the fleet was bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, with about 9,000 troops and many refugees. Washington ordered those American soldiers who already had had smallpox and were therefore immune to enter the city. After an eleven-month siege, he had won his first victory as commander in chief of the Continental Army.

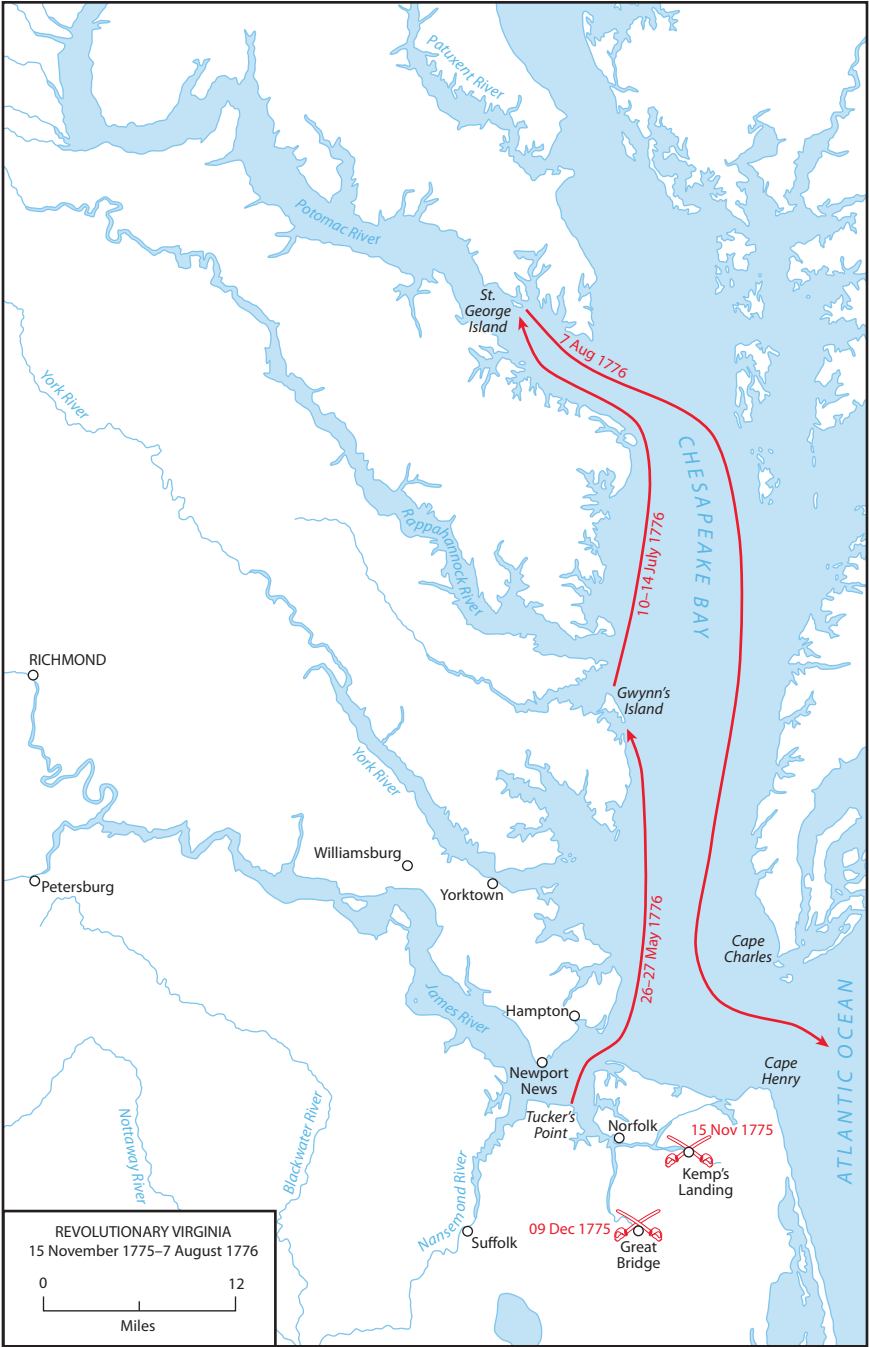
## Virginia

Despite the efforts of Royal Governor John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore, British authority in Virginia had steadily deteriorated, and his popularity had waned as the rebellion gained momentum. In a plan like Gage's in Massachusetts, Dunmore ordered Capt. Henry Collins of the *Royal Navy* armed schooner *Magdalen* to send a landing party of marines to remove fifteen barrels of gunpowder from the public magazine in Williamsburg, Virginia, the colonial capital. On the night of 20–21 April, before the news of Lexington and Concord reached the Virginia capital, the marines moved the powder to their ship for safe keeping. When the Virginians discovered the plot, Dunmore claimed he had acted out of precaution upon receiving intelligence of an imminent insurrection among the enslaved people. As captain of Hanover County's independent militia company, Patrick Henry mustered 150 men on 3 May and, joined by other companies, marched on Williamsburg to demand the powder's return. Before his men reached the capital, negotiations resulted in a settlement in which Dunmore agreed to pay the colony for the gunpowder. Just when anger over the governor's actions began to subside,

Virginians received word of the battle in Massachusetts. (See Map 6.)

Although he isolated himself at his residence, Governor Dunmore summoned the General Assembly to the capitol building in Williamsburg. Debate between the governor and burgesses grew increasingly heated, and attempts to mitigate disputes were unsuccessful. Dunmore felt threatened. About 0200 on 8 June, the governor, his family, and his attendants escaped to sea aboard the schooner *Magdalen*. Once off Yorktown, Dunmore transferred to the frigate *Fowey* and sent his family back to England along with dispatches for the government. To maintain royal control and disrupt the revolutionary takeover, Dunmore called on the king's loyal subjects to support his authority. He issued proclamations and threatened retribution against any Virginians he viewed as disloyal. The governor also appealed to General Gage for military assistance to suppress the rebellion.

In the meantime, the General Assembly remained in session at Williamsburg for the next three weeks. Dunmore refused the representatives' repeated requests that he return to complete business of colonial government, despite their promises to guarantee his safety. With the governor absent, the General Assembly ceased to function, and royal government ended. On 17 July, the Third Virginia Convention met in Richmond, Virginia, and replaced the General Assembly as the new government of Virginia. Representatives created a committee of safety with executive powers formerly held by the royal governor. The convention's primary concern was defense of the colony. Before they adjourned on 26 August, the delegates resolved to raise two regiments for adoption in the Continental Army. The convention divided the colony into sixteen military districts encompassing several counties each, with each district having a battalion of minutemen (except for the Eastern Shore) and each county organizing its military-age White male population into militia regiments and companies. The convention also passed ordinances for the purchase and manufacture of arms and ammunition for the defense of the colony.



Map 6

Dunmore began to receive the reinforcements he requested. In June, the *Royal Navy's* fourteen-gun sloop-of-war *Otter* joined *Fowey* in the York River. The governor commandeered the merchant vessel *Eilbeck* as his flagship and renamed it *Dunmore*. He added the schooner *Arundel* to his small provincial navy, which operated alongside the *Royal Navy* vessels. The following month, a company of regulars belonging to the *14th Foot* arrived from St. Augustine, East Florida. Virginia loyalists joined Dunmore's growing floating village in Hampton Roads. Governing the colony and commanding Crown forces from the decks of his flagship, Dunmore directed a series of minor military operations against the revolutionaries. His troops conducted small-scale waterborne raids on plantations, militia positions, and musters. British warships patrolled the James River to interdict or prevent militia forces crossing from the south. Loyalists, runaway enslaved people, and indentured servants made their way to join the governor's forces. The most notable action was at Kemp's Landing, where regulars routed the revolutionary militia on 15 November. This gained Dunmore more loyalist volunteers. With these reinforcements, Dunmore attempted to reestablish the Virginia royal government at Norfolk in the autumn of 1775. With a fine harbor, more than 1,300 buildings, and a population of more than 6,000 residents, which included a sizable community of loyalists, Norfolk was the largest town in the colony, and it became the base of British operations in the Chesapeake Bay region.

On 7 November, Lord Dunmore issued a proclamation of martial law requiring "every person capable of bearing arms" to rally to the king's standard or be considered a traitor and face the severest legal penalty. Furthermore, he declared freedom for all enslaved men and White indentured servants belonging to revolutionary masters and capable of bearing arms in the king's service. Enslaved men and indentured servants deserted their masters and headed to Dunmore's Norfolk stronghold. The governor formed two military units under his authority. He organized the *Queen's Own Loyal Virginia Regiment* out of White loyalists. He formed the enslaved men—those the governor did not return to their loyalist masters—into the *Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian*

*Regiment*, trained by a cadre of British sergeants. Dunmore did not emancipate his own enslaved families nor those of the loyalists.

Rather than dividing White southerners, Dunmore's proclamation united them. "Hell itself could not have vomited anything more black than his design of emancipating our slaves," said a letter-writer to a newspaper that December. Southerners condemned Dunmore's proclamation; Washington called him an "arch traitor to the rights of humanity." Although the proclamation brought many enslaved men to Dunmore's force, this did not outweigh the damage it did to his cause.

## Great Bridge

Following the successful Kemp's Landing engagement on 15 November, Governor Dunmore returned to Norfolk, where he continued to maintain a royal colonial government. He concentrated on erecting fortifications and raising a sufficient army to defeat the revolutionaries. By 7 December, his land forces included three companies of the *14th Foot* plus an ad hoc battalion of armed sailors and marines from the warships in the harbor. About 200 to 300 enslaved Black men had escaped to offer their services as soldiers, far fewer than the governor had expected would join *Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment*. Approximately 600 White volunteers enlisted in the *Queen's Own Loyal Virginia Regiment*. This gave Dunmore a total ground force of around 1,200 men, roughly half the number he required to defend Norfolk's land side adequately, much less defeat the growing revolutionary army. However, he continued the campaign of aggressive patrols and raids against revolutionary military, political, and economic targets.

Dunmore's forces were hard-pressed to control the few roads leading to the interior of the colony and to conduct foraging expeditions into the surrounding countryside of Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties. The only road that led into Norfolk from the south crossed the Great Dismal Swamp on a causeway and the narrow span across the Southern Branch Elizabeth River, called the Great Bridge. The town of Great Bridge, Virginia, lay to the south of the actual span.

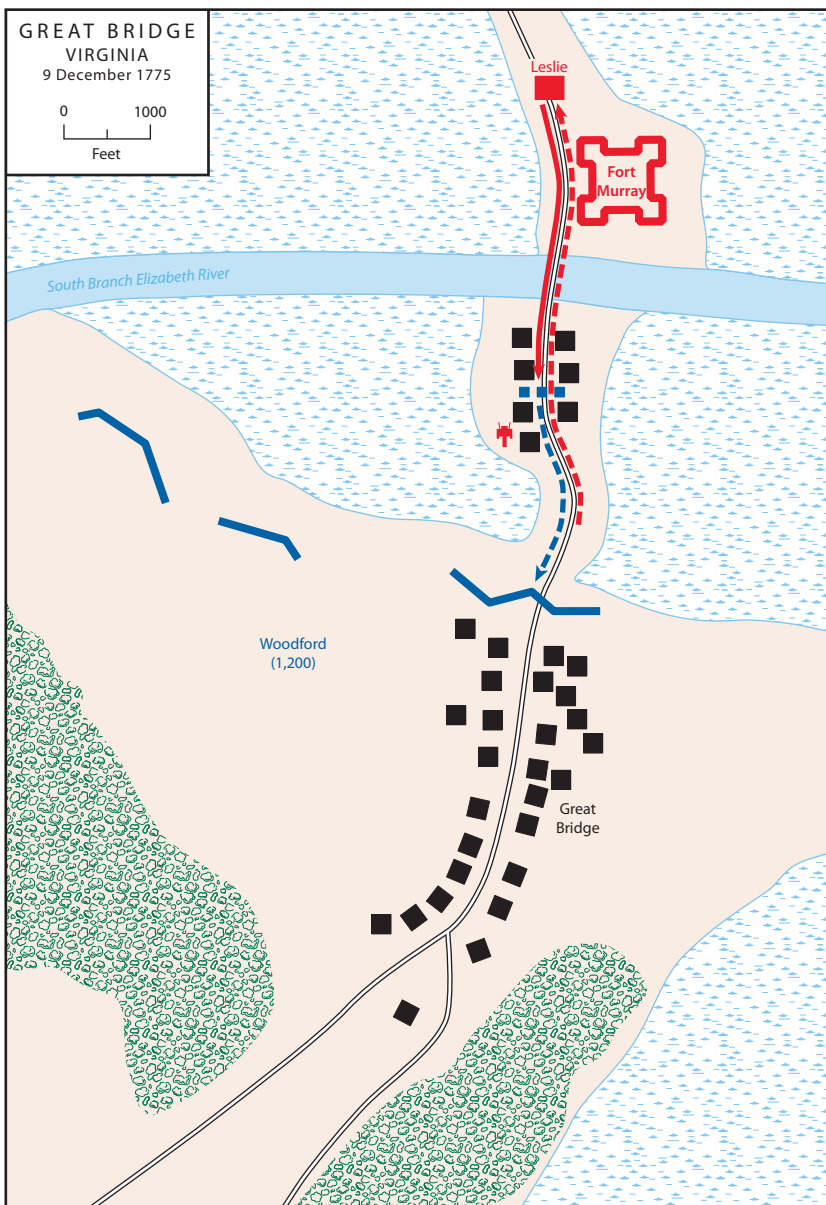
The loyalists built a redoubt on the north bank and named it Fort Murray. The governor posted about 150 loyalists and some British sailors with two light field guns at the redoubt. He deemed the post important for preventing enemy forces from crossing the river and cutting off Norfolk from food and supplies.

The terrain at Great Bridge was perfect for defense. The British fort on the north bank commanded the approach, and the defenders had removed most of the planks to prevent anyone crossing from the south. Marshes lined the causeway, restricting any movement to the road. The narrow causeway ran south from Fort Murray to the bridge. The actual bridge was unusually long and connected the two ends of the causeway. The southern end was elevated above the swamp with a cluster of buildings before it eventually reached the village of Great Bridge itself.

As soon as the Virginia Convention's Committee of Safety learned of the British presence north of Great Bridge on 21 November, it ordered Col. William Woodford to defend the town. The 500 soldiers of the 2d Virginia Regiment and 100 troops of the Culpeper County Minute Battalion marched from Williamsburg to the threatened area. With them was a 21-year-old Lt. John Marshall, future chief justice of the Supreme Court, in a company of riflemen. Woodford ordered his men to erect a strong breastwork 400 yards south of the bridge, just north of the town of Great Bridge. When complete, the breastwork ran westward along the slightly rising ground from the causeway to the riverbank. Skirmishing between opposing patrols began almost immediately. Virginia militia reinforcements from seven counties and North Carolina Continentals arrived to double the number of defenders. Despite their superior numbers, the revolutionaries would not attack an entrenched enemy without artillery support (*Map 7*).

Dunmore decided to act on 8 December, having received deceptive intelligence about the disposition and numbers of his enemies. He was confident the revolutionaries would flee when confronted by regulars making a spirited bayonet charge, as they had done at Kemp's Landing only a few weeks earlier. While he remained aboard his flagship, the governor ordered Capt. Samuel Leslie to march to Fort Murray with the three companies of regulars, the





Map 7

sailors, and marines, to drive the enemy away, and to take the town of Great Bridge.

Leslie's column arrived at the redoubt at 0300 the next morning, 9 December. The British officers recognized the superior strength of the enemy defenses and attempted to dissuade Leslie from attacking. However, Dunmore had given Leslie orders to assault, and Leslie understood his orders to be specific. Allowing the men to rest after the march from Norfolk, he gave the order to attack after daylight.

With morning, the British regulars marched quickly, replacing the missing planks on the bridge stringers as they advanced. After the regulars crossed the river, Virginia militia pickets detected them and fired a few shots while withdrawing back to the main lines. As the sound of picket firing alerted the revolutionary camp, Capt. Charles Fordyce of the *14th Foot's* grenadier company led the regulars across the bridge and then over the causeway, where a company of the 2d Virginia Regiment waited. The Virginians held their fire until the regulars came within 80 yards, then loosed a devastating volley. Several men, including Fordyce, fell dead, with many wounded. As more revolutionary troops rushed to take positions along the breastwork, the British retreated to the high ground south of the bridge and attempted to return fire, albeit with little effect. Before long, Colonel Woodford's whole force had rushed to its breastworks and opened fire. The British had no choice but to withdraw across the bridge and into their redoubt. Colonel Woodford's force did not pursue. Except for scattered musketry, the battle ended after about thirty minutes. British casualties included seventeen dead, forty-nine wounded, and seventeen captured, while the Americans suffered one man wounded. "They fought, bled, and died like Englishmen," said Capt. Kidder Meade of the 2d Virginia. A British officer summarized it as "an absurd, ridiculous & unnecessary attack."

Captain Leslie ordered a withdrawal under the cover of darkness. At 1900, British troops quietly abandoned the redoubt at Great Bridge, which left the road to Norfolk open for the revolutionaries. In the aftermath of the fighting, Lord Dunmore ordered the evacuation of British troops, loyalist residents, and refugees from Norfolk to vessels then in the harbor. On the morning of 10 December, Colonel

Woodford's force cautiously advanced across the bridge and took possession of Fort Murray but did not immediately advance toward the city.

## Norfolk and Gwynn's Island

American forces officially entered Norfolk on 14–15 December 1775, and Col. Robert Howe took overall command of Virginia and North Carolina troops by virtue of his Continental Army rank. Soon after the arrival of the twenty-eight-gun frigate *Liverpool* on 20 December, *Royal Navy* Capt. Henry Bellew sent a landing party ashore under a flag of truce and demanded that the inhabitants supply his majesty's ships at Norfolk with fresh provisions according to the standing custom. The revolutionaries refused to comply and fired on the British ships from positions in waterfront buildings. The British responded with a message advising noncombatants to immediately evacuate the town. On New Year's Day 1776, Captain Bellew ordered his four warships to open fire on the town and sent landing parties ashore to set fire to the buildings that sheltered enemy marksmen. The *Royal Navy* continued the bombardment for the next seven hours. With Virginia militia assistance—Woodford had little love for the loyalist city—the flames spread out of control; by 3 January, the conflagration had destroyed about 860 of the city's buildings. The Committee of Safety ordered Colonel Howe to abandon Norfolk and burn the 416 standing structures to deny their use to the British if they should return. On 6 February, the Continental and militia troops executed the order and left Norfolk.

British military personnel and loyalist refugees remained on the vessels of Dunmore's floating town in the harbor off Norfolk. The British forty-four-gun frigate *Roebuck*, commanded by Capt. Andrew Snape Hammond, arrived in the Chesapeake on 9 February 1776 with one hundred marines. The governor landed on Tucker's Point near Portsmouth, with its source of fresh water. He also used the island as a base from which to raid plantations and interdict American shipping on the bay. However, disease, starvation, and the

constant threat posed by Continental troops under the command of Maj. Gen. Charles Lee forced Dunmore to sea once again.

The British fleet sailed into Chesapeake Bay and dropped anchor at Gwynn's Island at the mouth of the Piankatank River on 26 May. The good harbor could accommodate the ships in his fleet. The island also had plenty of fresh water, of which his men and ships were in great need. At 0400 on 27 May, Captain Hammond, now commanding Dunmore's naval forces, secured the island. Loyalist troops, Black and White, established a camp, with quarantine huts for those infected with smallpox. Battle casualties, sickness, and desertion had reduced the number of British and loyalist fighting men to about 200 to 400, not nearly enough to defend an island of 3 to 4 square miles.

Shortly after Dunmore established his new camp, Brig. Gen. Andrew Lewis arrived with about 1,800 Virginia state troops, including artillery. The British had several defensive positions in place and had anchored warships to cover the channel crossing. The Americans constructed two strong batteries, but although Lewis's force had the firepower and a numerically superior force, it lacked enough boats for an assault crossing.

On the morning of 9 July, American troops observed that the governor's flagship *Dunmore* had changed positions in such a way that it was exposed to the 18-pounders in one of their batteries. At 0800, Lewis ordered the batteries to open fire. In a short time, American artillery scored a dozen hits on *Dunmore* and silenced the guns of the British battery across the channel. The governor was wounded, and other ships had to tow the badly damaged *Dunmore* out of range. *Otter* attempted to assist but also suffered severe damage. American fire destroyed seven British ships. Only the lack of boats to carry the American troops across the channel saved the British from complete destruction. Governor Dunmore's force had dwindled to fewer than 200 men, incapable of repelling the determined attack sure to come.

On Dunmore's order, British forces and loyalist refugees evacuated Gwynn's Island on the night of 10–11 July. The next morning, General Lewis gathered what boats he could acquire and sent his troops across the channel to the island in a hasty amphibious

assault. Once across, they found the island filled with the dead and dying and abandoned by the enemy. Of some 1,500 enslaved people who fled to Dunmore's banner, more than 1,000 had died of disease, starvation, and battle. Dunmore had sent dozens of men back to masters who declared their loyalty to the Crown.

Following the withdrawal from Gwynn's Island, Dunmore's fleet sailed north to St. George Island at the mouth of the Potomac River. After establishing a temporary base of operations on 14 July, Dunmore sent forces on a series of minor raids and an expedition up the Potomac River. Maryland and Virginia militia members turned out in force to oppose the invaders. Dunmore had had enough. On 7 August, the governor's fleet sailed away from the shores of Virginia. The fleet divided off the Virginia Capes, with several vessels headed for Great Britain and another group carrying loyalist refugees south to St. Augustine. Lord Dunmore led the third group north to New York to meet the joint British land and naval forces commanded by General Howe and his older brother V. Adm. Richard, 4th Viscount Howe, respectively. Virginia was free of Loyalist and British occupation.

## **North Carolina**

In North Carolina, as in other colonies, the Provincial Congress and local committees of safety had steadily gained power and exercised authority since 1774. When the General Assembly convened at New Bern in April 1775, Governor Josiah Martin appealed for the delegates to resist the growing power of the extralegal shadow governments. When it was clear that more than half the legislators were part of the Provincial Congress, also meeting in New Bern, Martin dissolved the assembly. Alarmed by the independent militia companies in New Bern and the surrounding area, Martin sent his family to safety and appealed to General Gage for troops to suppress the revolutionaries. Local anger increased when the rumor spread that Martin, like Lord Dunmore in Virginia, threatened to free and arm enslaved men with British weapons to maintain Crown authority. With resistance growing, the governor and a few faithful servants spiked the cannons at the colonial

capital in New Bern and fled to the safety of Fort Johnston, down river from Wilmington. As the colonial militia seized Fort Johnston and burned it in July, Martin took refuge on the *Royal Navy* sloop *Cruizer*.

Although confined to ship in 1775, Governor Martin sent William Legge, 2nd Earl of Dartmouth and Secretary of State for the Colonies, a plan to restore royal authority in North Carolina. Despite a string of setbacks, Martin believed he could rally loyal volunteers for a counterattack. He maintained the colony still had a substantial loyalist population, especially among the many recent immigrants from the highlands of Scotland. With a proper supply of arms, artillery, and other necessary supplies, he proposed to raise an initial force of 3,000 Scottish highlanders for the king's service, and, under their protection, possibly attract another 20,000 loyalists capable of bearing arms. With such a force, he believed he not only would restore North Carolina to British control but also would be able to threaten revolutionary control of Virginia. Furthermore, Martin had letters from pro-British backcountry settlers and promises that the Indian nations would remain the king's allies and support Crown forces by attacking revolutionary frontier settlements. In response, Gage sent Lt. Col. Donald MacDonald and Capt. Duncan McLeod to enlist men for the *Royal Highland Emigrants Regiment*. The officers arrived in July and went to work recruiting from the highland settlements in the backcountry.

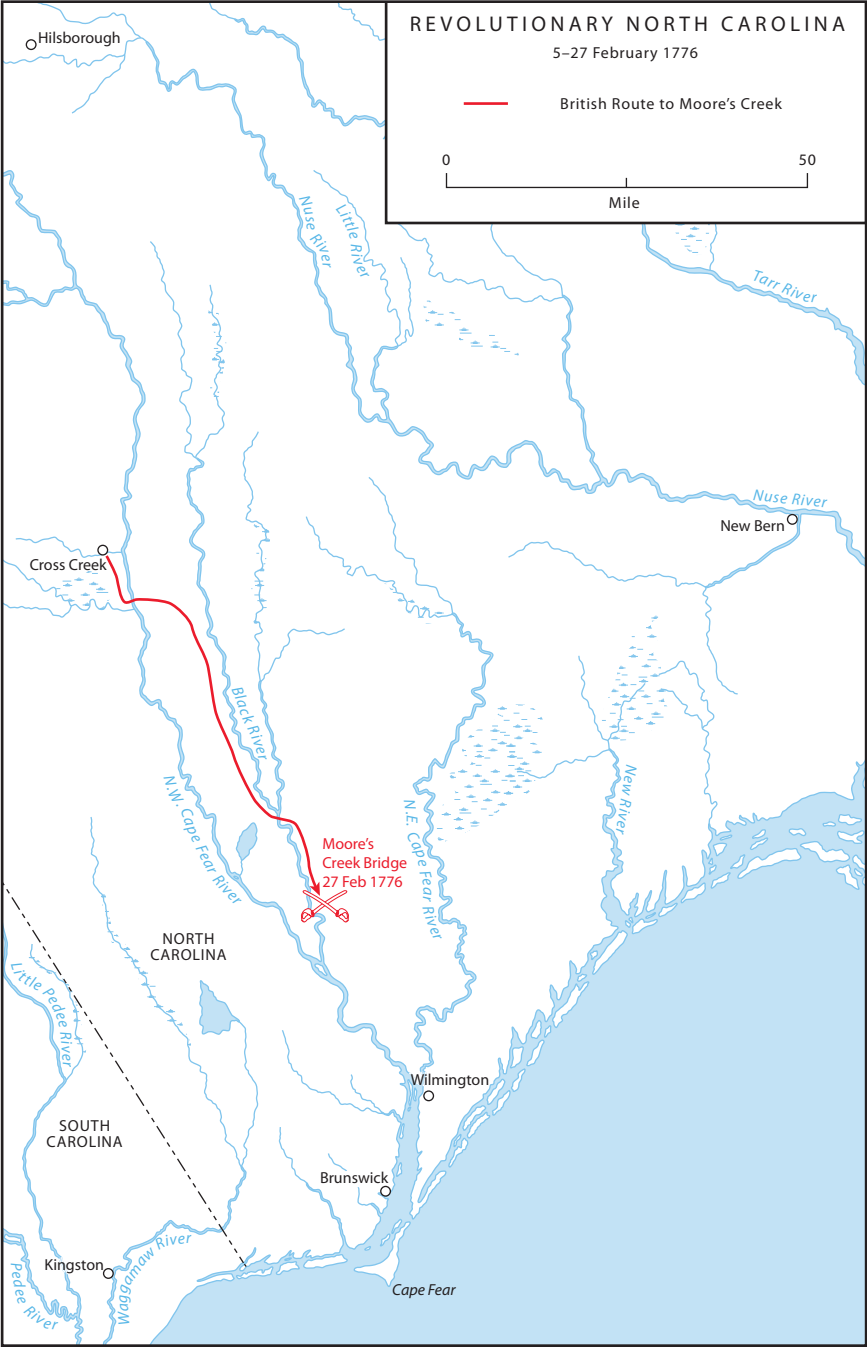
The perceived weakness of North Carolina revolutionaries and the assumed strength of loyalists aroused British government enthusiasm for Governor Martin's activities. From the one regiment promised by Lord Dartmouth in 1775 to help restore order in North Carolina, Prime Minister Lord North expanded the force to seven regiments, twenty guns, and a *Royal Navy* squadron to subdue both Carolinas. Lord George Germain, Dartmouth's replacement as Secretary of State for the Colonies, went further. In 1776, he ordered General Howe to detach Clinton with two companies from his army to rendezvous off Cape Fear with the convoy of transports carrying the regiments from England and Ireland commanded by Maj. Gen. Charles, 2nd Earl Cornwallis, and a squadron of *Royal Navy*

warships commanded by Commodore Sir Peter Parker. Once these components were assembled, Clinton would assume overall command, restore Governor Martin in North Carolina, and take Charleston, South Carolina, and perhaps Savannah as well, before reuniting with Howe in the north. Instead of merely helping to arm loyalists, the British government was opening an entirely new campaign in the winter of 1775–1776, even as commanders in Québec and Boston begged for more support.

Martin received dispatches from Germain on 3 January 1776 informing him that the troops to support his plan would embark from Britain on 23 December, and the governor could initiate his part of the campaign. On 10 January, Martin issued a proclamation to raise the king's standard and rally his majesty's loyal subjects to suppress the rebellion. He elevated MacDonald to the local rank of brigadier general of the North Carolina loyalist militia, with McLeod to serve as his second in command with the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel. Martin gave them orders to assemble their troops and be prepared to march to Brunswick by 15 February. The results of MacDonald's muster were disappointing. Most of those attracted to the British were recent arrivals, not the many longtime or native-born settlers. When MacDonald rendezvoused at Cross Creek (modern-day Fayetteville) on 15 February, he found about 1,400 loyalists, including more than 500 highlanders. Only about one-third of them possessed firearms (*Map 8*).

The revolutionary mobilization enjoyed more success. The Provincial Congress called forth the colony's minute and militia units and requested assistance from its neighbors. Although North Carolina's two Continental Army regiments, the 1st North Carolina Regiment, commanded by Col. James Moore, and the 2d North Carolina Regiment, under Col. Robert Howe, had yet to complete their organization, they marched to meet the threat. The New Bern Committee of Safety ordered Col. Richard Caswell to muster the Craven County militia, including its two-gun artillery company, while the committees of Dobbs, Johnston, and Pitt Counties ordered their contingents to join forces with Caswell.





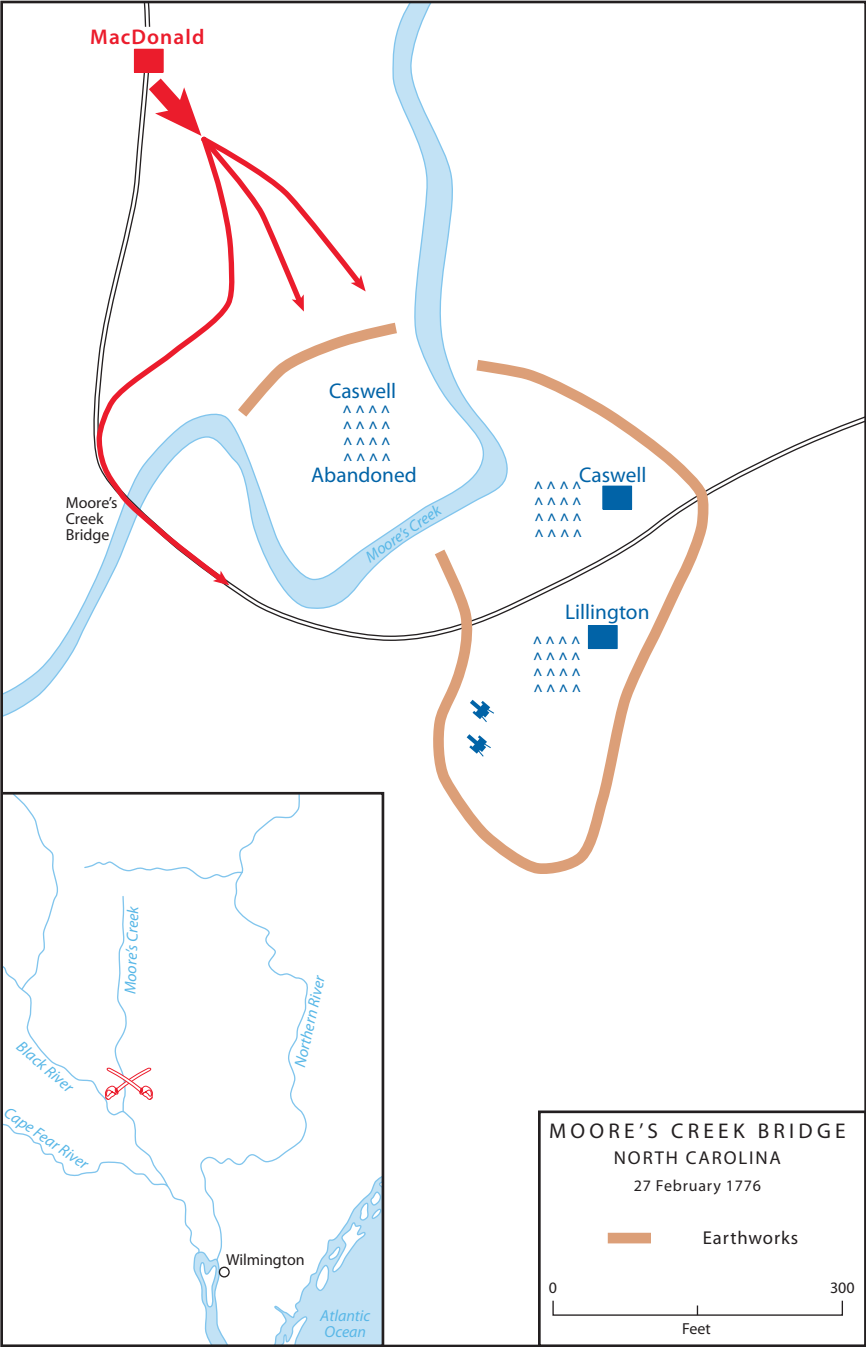
Map 8

General MacDonald's troops marched from the loyalist rendezvous at Cross Creek on 18 February, heading toward the coast and the expected junction with British regulars. Colonel Moore led 650 Continentals to intercept the advancing loyalists at the bridge across Rockfish Creek. The next day, militia reinforcements raised Moore's force to about 1,100 men, supported by five pieces of artillery. Wishing to accomplish his mission while avoiding battle, MacDonald sent officers under a flag of truce to convince Moore to surrender or return to loyalty. When, on 20 February, Moore and his subordinate officers rejected the British proposal and invited loyalists to join the revolutionary cause instead, the two sides prepared for battle. MacDonald received information that Colonel Caswell was marching to support Moore with 800 troops, and he ordered his men to march to the coast by an alternate route rather than fight.

Over the next few days, MacDonald maneuvered with Caswell across multiple river and stream crossings, as he attempted to get to the coast. By 26 February, MacDonald had flanked Caswell out of every position and had given him the slip, leaving a rearguard to deceive Caswell's men, and marching to the Moore's Creek Bridge crossing. This tributary of the Black River blocked MacDonald from Wilmington, now 8 miles away. Caswell moved his men at once for the crossing at Moore's Creek Bridge. The bridge site, a narrow span located in a swamp, offered an excellent defensive position protected by the creek, which was about 50 feet wide and 3 to 5 feet deep. The tidal creek flowed into Black River about 10 miles above its confluence with the Cape Fear River.

In the race to the bridge, Caswell arrived first. He found Col. John A. Lillington's 150-man Wilmington Minute Battalion already in position on the east bank, along an elevated knoll it had fortified. Caswell assumed overall command, strengthening the existing defenses as well as building earthworks on the western side of the bridge. Caswell positioned his two artillery pieces where they could sweep the bridge with grapeshot.

MacDonald fell ill and relinquished command to McLeod. Despite their numbers, the loyalists decided to attack Caswell's



Map 9

position. At 0100 on 27 February, the fewer than 1,000 loyalists began the 6-mile approach march to the bridge. To achieve surprise, McLeod formed his troops into three columns, the center of which advanced along the road, with the two others in the woods on either flank. The center column entered the enemy camp only to find it empty. Caswell had removed his entire force to the eastern side of the bridge. Still unaware of the exact location of the bridge, McLeod ordered his columns to deploy into line of battle. (*See Map 9.*)

With drums beating and bagpipes skirling, McLeod came forward with broadsword men arrayed in the center of his line. He discovered the revolutionaries had removed half the planks of the bridge and coated the exposed stringers with slippery tallow. With their lieutenant colonel leading the way, the highlanders crossed in column, McLeod leading one file across the stringers on one side, Capt. John Campbell leading the file on the other. The highlanders used the points of their broadswords to keep their balance on the slippery stringers. As the two leaders reached the east bank and advanced toward the earthwork, Caswell's artillery and the infantry opened fire. The first volley swept the bridge clear, mortally wounding both McLeod and Campbell. McLeod managed to regain his feet and urged his men forward until he fell dead only a few paces from the earthwork. Some highlanders who were not killed outright were wounded and drowned when they fell into the water. The survivors broke and fled in panic.

The panic became contagious, and the loyalists were soon in full retreat, running along the road or through the swamp to their camp of the previous night. The engagement had lasted three minutes. The battle had cost the loyalists thirty known killed and forty wounded, with more presumed to have died of wounds or drowned in the creek. The militia, in contrast, suffered two men wounded, one of whom later died of his wounds. The loyalist survivors were rounded up by revolutionary units, and MacDonald, too weak to move, surrendered in his camp. About 850 loyalist enlisted soldiers took parole—on the condition that they would not bear arms against the revolutionary cause again—and went home. Their officers, however, became prisoners of war. Governor Martin's planned loyalist uprising had collapsed in a bloody shamble.



*General Sir Henry Clinton, Andrea Soldi, ca. 1765. A capable and unassuming officer, Henry Clinton found himself part of the British ministry's growing yet confused strategy for the war in North America. (© American Museum & Gardens, Claverton Manor, Bath)*

## South Carolina

Delayed by bad weather, General Clinton's expedition at last arrived off the Cape Fear River on 14 March, well after the loyalist defeat at Moore's Creek Bridge. The first warships of Parker's squadron did not reach the area until mid-April. The rest of the warships and transports bringing Cornwallis's reinforcements from Ireland

did not appear until 3 May, having encountered terrible storms in the trans-Atlantic crossing. This gave Clinton time to ponder how “to gain the hearts & subdue the minds of America.” Governor Martin attempted to convince General Clinton that an immediate show of force could reestablish royal authority in North Carolina. Clinton rejected that plan and, after conferring with General Cornwallis and Commodore Parker, moved to seize Charleston.

While enemy ships rode at anchor off the North Carolina coast during most of the month, Americans remained unsure where the enemy’s next move would be—Virginia, North Carolina, or South Carolina. Congress appointed Maj. Gen. Charles Lee to command revolutionary forces in the south. Lee, an eccentric former British Army officer, led a force of Virginia and North Carolina troops to shadow the movements of the enemy. The British revealed their intentions when the fleet appeared off Charleston on 1 June 1776, and Lee headed in that direction to reinforce the South Carolinians.

Clinton, Cornwallis, and Parker began planning to seize Charleston. Eliminating the outer defenses on Sullivan’s Island became the first objective. The sand-covered island, 4 miles long and a few hundred yards wide, stretched from northeast to southwest off the mainland. A difficult sandbar crossed the entrance to the harbor and created a narrow shipping channel that passed the southern tip of the island. Revolutionary forces on the island consisted of about 1,000 men of the 2d and 3d South Carolina Regiments’ state troops, commanded by Cols. William Moultrie and William Thomson, respectively, plus artillery units of the 4th South Carolina Regiment (today’s 132d Military Police Company, South Carolina Army National Guard) with thirty-one cannons. Some South Carolina troops had experience fighting the Cherokee, but most were untried. Over the past few decades, South Carolina’s militia primarily had focused on preventing an uprising of enslaved people, because the enslaved population outnumbered the White population 104,000 to 70,000. In December 1775, on Sullivan’s Island, the South Carolina militia had attacked several hundred fugitives from slavery who were seeking shelter on British ships, killing around fifty and capturing the rest.





***Charles Lee, Esq'r.—Major General of the Continental Army in America, Thomlinson, 1775. A former British Army officer, General Lee was a temperamental and idiosyncratic leader. Because of his experience, he was placed in charge of coordinating Continental Army operations in the south in 1776. (Library of Congress)***

At the southern tip of the island, Moultrie's infantry and artillerymen erected the square-shaped Fort Sullivan with the help of enslaved laborers. By piling spongy palmetto logs 20 feet high and filling the spaces between them with sand, they created a stout rampart that could absorb heavy shot fired from an intense cannonade. The parapet and adjoining bastions rose 10 feet, and laborers cut embrasures for

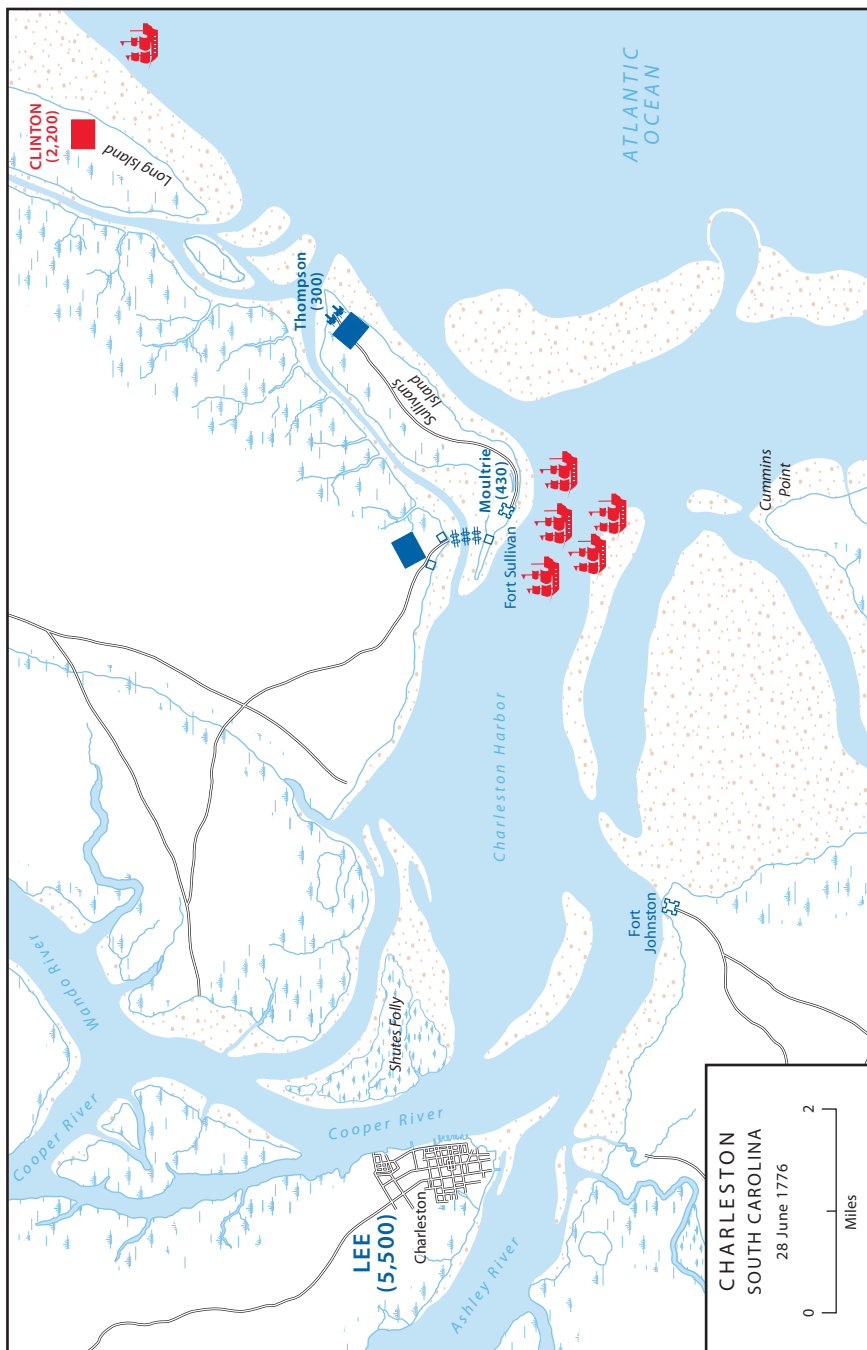


the cannons. The revolutionaries had trained their heaviest guns—including 12- and 18-pounders—on the shipping channel that led to the inner harbor. The Americans faced their lighter guns toward the ocean and the landward side to repel an amphibious landing and a ground attack, respectively. Colonel Thomson additionally oversaw work to fortify the approaches facing Long Island to the northeast, what today is called Isle of Palms. Over the heads of the working men—both enslaved and free—fluttered a blue flag with a white crescent and the word *LIBERTY* emblazoned on it.

Lee arrived with the Continental reinforcements on 3 June, and he assumed command of all the revolutionary forces, now numbering about 6,500 men in and around Charleston. He set the troops to the task of improving the city's defenses—angering many when he ordered White men to do manual labor usually assigned to enslaved men—and sent additional troops to reinforce Sullivan's Island.

The British commanders decided on a joint army-navy operation to overcome the American outer defense. General Clinton's 2,000 troops would land on Long Island with naval support. They would then wade across the inlet, which they believed fordable, and attack Fort Sullivan's land side. Commodore Parker's squadron of warships would attack the fort's seaward side with an intense cannonade, including seaborne mortars, at a range of about 400 yards. Once they subdued the fort, the *Royal Navy's* warships could enter the harbor to engage American naval forces, and the transports could bring the ground troops to attack the city's land defenses.

Rough seas and bad weather delayed the British amphibious landing on Long Island until 18 June. Clinton informed Parker that a close reconnaissance of the inlet between Long and Sullivan's Islands revealed a depth of 7 feet even at low tide, making it unfordable. With wading out of the question, Clinton would not risk sending his troops across the inlet piecemeal in the few available boats against an entrenched enemy with artillery. The original plan for a coordinated land-sea attack would not happen, although Clinton agreed to make a diversion. Parker decided to make the naval attack without army support, but contrary winds and storms caused further delay (*Map 10*).



Map 10



*Charleston, 28 June 1776, H. Charles McBarron, 1974. During the fight for Fort Sullivan, South Carolina, the fort's colors were severed from their staff by British fire. Despite the danger, Sgt. William Jasper jumped on the parapet and secured the flag to a makeshift pole. (U.S. Army Center of Military History)*

Shallow water further frustrated the attackers. At 1030 on 28 June, the mortars of Parker's bomb ship *Thunder* began firing into the fort from their maximum range of 1½ miles. The warships, led by Parker's fifty-gun flagship *Bristol*, followed by the frigate *Experiment*, also with fifty guns, and the twenty-eight-gun frigates *Solbay* and *Active*, sailed in line formation toward the fort, dropped anchor, and opened a heavy fire around 1100. They were soon joined by three sloops-of-war. The Americans returned the fire at a slow but steady rate to preserve ammunition. When the three sloops-of-war attempted to sail past the fort to reach a cove to its west, each ran aground in the shoal water and attracted artillery fire. Two managed to get free, but the crew of the third sloop-of-war burned it to prevent capture. Clinton's diversion, several sorties of regulars in boats from Long Island, also came to grief. Under heavy fire, the regulars could not get close enough to the forts and quickly rowed out of range.

Firing ceased about 2100 when the British vessels withdrew. The fort's artillerymen had served their pieces with great effect. *Bristol* suffered extensive damage and the loss of forty-six killed and eighty-six wounded men, including the ship's captain, who later died of his wounds. *Experiment* also emerged from the fight with severe damage and lost forty-three dead and seventy-five wounded, including the captain. The other two frigates suffered lighter damage and fifteen casualties each. The garrison took surprisingly light losses, with eleven dead and twenty-five wounded. The British troops on Long Island reembarked aboard their transports on 21 June, and the combined land and naval forces sailed north to join General Howe's army as it prepared to attack New York.

All told, these events discouraged, although did not end, loyalism in North and South Carolina, later prompting British commanders to initiate the "Southern Strategy" in 1778. News of the events in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina served to encourage revolutionary ardor in the American colonies at large. The victory also persuaded the North Carolina Provincial Congress, which met in April 1776, to empower its delegates to the Continental Congress to vote for independence that summer.



## CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS



In the brief span of a few years, thirteen English colonies had gone from a state of discontent to one of open warfare. In 1775 alone, the previously disunited colonies had shown enough cohesion to form a loose central government and organize a Continental Army. This army not only had contained the Crown's primary military force in North America in Boston but also had invaded Québec and provided support to the militia to discourage loyalist uprisings in half a dozen colonies. By April 1776, every single southern governor was exiled to a *Royal Navy* ship, and the British controlled no port between Halifax and St. Augustine. The British government would have to reassert its authority without possessing any strongholds in the thirteen colonies. Six main factors aided the revolutionaries: a long practice of self-government via salutary neglect, strong military experience in the militia, social changes in the colonies, distance from Great Britain, the Crown's failure to understand the American problem, and genuine leadership at the local level.

For the revolution to succeed, it needed to become general and not remain local to Massachusetts. Resistance to the Crown had been building across the colonies, and the bloodshed around Boston in April and June of 1775 shocked the other colonies into action. Because of their decades of experience in town, county, and colonial governance, revolutionary legislators were able to establish effective shadow governments quickly. These governments not only oversaw the militia but also passed laws, managed trade, collected taxes, gathered military stores and supplies, and established courts of justice. Raising, manning, and supplying a military force would have been out



of the question without these colonial governments. The provincial legislature and, later, the Continental Congress epitomized how experience in self-government aided the revolutionary cause. Inside this Congress, representatives put aside their myriad differences to build the basis of national self-governance, including raising and providing for an army.

Even before the onset of hostilities, British authorities, both civil and military, assumed that the raw power of the British regulars and *Royal Navy* would overwhelm the amateur colonists. Instead, British soldiers were shocked to find that the provincials were both disciplined and courageous. From Bunker Hill to Fort Sullivan, the part-time militia did not back down in the face of massive firepower. This was, in large part, because of the military experience that leaders and soldiers had amassed in the decades of colonial wars and conflicts with American Indian nations. Massachusetts in particular had a strong militia tradition that was aptly suited to bringing many experienced citizens under arms rapidly, because they frequently had mobilized to face border threats in the preceding hundred years. This held true across New England. Experience as provincial forces in the French and Indian War provided tactical knowledge and also gave many the insights they needed to sustain an army. Only because of this experience and organizational background were the New Englanders able to put a force of 15,000 troops in the field in April 1775 so quickly. These existing militia organizations formed the nucleus of the Army of Observation and then the Continental Army.

Good tactics alone cannot explain the initial successes of the revolutionary forces in 1775 and 1776. For companies and battalions to exist on the field, leaders had to have enough troops. North American society was fertile ground in which the revolutionary ideology could take hold. The Great Awakening, with its emphasis on the individual's relationship with God and its rejection of earthly authority, played a major role in creating a social environment hospitable to revolution. Ministers had used the language of the millennium—the second coming of Jesus Christ—when rallying people to the cause in the French and Indian War, arguing that people could help bring about the millennium only if New

France was destroyed. In the years leading up to 1775, the Crown began to take the place of the French in this religious-influenced rhetoric. Others rallied to the cause out of the more concrete, earthly desire for land, as the numbers of new immigrants and established land-holding families swelled along the Eastern Seaboard. The Proclamation of 1763, which prohibited White settlers from claiming lands west of the Appalachians, soon gave rise to a burgeoning population of landless, restive young men. In this societal fluctuation of class and generation, many found their way into movements like the Sons of Liberty or became part of governing bodies in colonies with active Provincial Congresses. The desire for military service—the rage militaire—that swept through the colonies in 1775 following the first shots of the war helped bring thousands of colonists under arms. Religiously, socially, and financially, English North America was ready for a revolution.

Geography also helps explain the successes of the revolutionaries at the outset of the war. Separated by the Atlantic and its unpredictable weather, British government officials could expect to wait three to four months before they received a reply from the colonies. This tyranny of time and space governed policy as well as reaction to events in the colonies. In this, the revolutionary colonists would always have the upper hand. They largely could control the narrative in the colonies, knowing with certainty that it was their words that colonists would hear before hearing anything from the Crown. This also meant that the British government's military response would be slow at first. Once it became clear that the colonies were in general rebellion, it would be six months before British troops and ships could arrive in any numbers to make a difference in North America. With the bulk of British forces in North America restricted to Boston, the Crown could do little to check the early efforts of the revolutionaries. These restraints on British movement help to account for the revolutionaries' successes on Lake Champlain, the seizure of Montréal, and the loyalist defeats in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Time always would be Great Britain's enemy in this contest.



Another key factor in the series of victories in the colonies in this period was the miscalculation of British officials, from royal governors to Parliament to King George III. Royal governors routinely overestimated the number and reliability of loyalist forces. General Gage, while rightfully cautious about not wanting to start a conflict, was surrounded by loyalists in Boston in the spring of 1775. In this echo chamber, he did not develop a holistic picture of what was happening in the towns around Massachusetts. When Parliament drafted the Coercive Acts in 1774, with the underlying belief that the rebellion was limited to Massachusetts and that force would bring it into line, it set into motion the chain of events that led to Lexington and Concord. The assumption that amateurs would run at the first sight of British regulars belied the experience in war that the colonists had amassed alongside those same regulars. The voices of men like William Pitt and Jeffery Amherst, who did not underestimate the colonists' understanding of warfare, largely were ignored by the Crown. British leadership continued to miscalculate into 1776, scattering their forces around the colonies and wasting an opportunity to mass them at one single place.

Lastly, the revolutionary cause did so well in 1775–1776 because of local leaders willing to take the initiative, no matter the burden. Many, like James Barrett, were motivated by local patriotism. Some, like George Washington, were spurred by a desire for public service and grievances against the Crown. Many, such as the company of Mahican American Indians out of Stockbridge, were driven by a sense of duty and loyalty. Some, like Benedict Arnold, were stirred by the desire for self-advancement. From Massachusetts to South Carolina, many were willing to step forward and make the sometimes-fatal choice of opposing the British government by leading others. This leadership, which preserved revolutionary fortunes across the north and south in 1775 and early 1776, was notably concentrated in the Continental Army. This was fortunate, as that army would face some of its darkest days before eventually achieving victory.





## APPENDIX



### **“Order, Regularity, & Discipline”: Waging War in the Eighteenth Century**

by Joseph A. Seymour

By 1775, armies in Europe and North America had developed into complex forces organized around the infantry regiment. Artillery provided fire support. Mounted units performed reconnaissance, screened attacks and retreats, and added shock. Engineers and pioneers built and demolished fortifications and other works. Artificers repaired and maintained weapons and ordnance. Surgeons treated the sick and wounded. Civilian commissaries made, procured, and transported supplies and rations. All of them supported the foot soldiers, who usually dominated the battlefield.

#### **Composition**

The Continental Army and state militia generally organized their infantry regiments using the British model, with a colonel in command, aided by a lieutenant colonel, major, and regimental staff. A regiment had ten companies, including one light and one grenadier company. The light company consisted of the best shots, the cleverest, and the most agile in the regiment. These soldiers specialized in screening, skirmishing, patrolling, and scouting. Congress dispensed early on with the grenadier company, with its brawny shock troops who often formed the vanguard of assaults, and usually authorized

nine companies. Each company carried equipment and additional ammunition in one or two wagons. When the situation called for the infantry to operate away from its baggage train, soldiers placed extra ammunition and essential items in their knapsacks. Most companies had a few women on their rolls. Although not officially in the army, they could draw rations, and sometimes pay, by performing various essential duties, including nursing the sick and wounded and laundering the soldiers' clothing. Captains and lieutenants directed the maneuver and fire of the platoons in their companies. Sergeants and corporals maintained unit cohesion in battle, assisted officers, and enforced discipline in the sections under their charge. Drummers, who ranked between corporals and sergeants, communicated orders in camp and battle.

## Equipment

A soldier's basic fighting equipment was known as a stand of arms, which commonly consisted of a musket; a bayonet; a cartridge box of wood, leather, or tin containing between twenty-three and twenty-nine paper cartridges; and cleaning tools. A standard firearm of the period was the British Land Pattern musket. It fired a powerful load consisting of a 1-ounce lead ball propelled by nearly a half ounce of gunpowder. Its oversized barrel of about 0.76- to 0.80-inch diameter made it easier to load. A ball fired from a musket of this type could reach massed troops out to 300 yards. At 100 yards, it was accurate enough to hit an individual and powerful enough to penetrate a two-inch elm plank. Continental, state, and militia forces augmented existing musket stores with locally made copies of the Land Pattern and imported French, German, Dutch, and Spanish arms of similar bore sizes and ballistics. Soldiers also shouldered sporting (nonmilitary issue) arms of different calibers, sometimes retrofitted to mount bayonets. The lack of serviceable arms slowed augmentation and the integration of reinforcements. Furthermore, companies equipped with a mix of arms could not easily sustain fire, let alone mount effective bayonet assaults.

Both armies also issued rifles to light troops or recruited experienced riflemen who brought their own. The rifles usually followed two patterns: the short-barreled, large-bore Germanic or *Jäger* (hunter) rifle, and the long-barreled, small-bore Pennsylvania rifle. Less powerful than muskets, both were accurate to about 300 yards and took about one minute to load. Neither could mount a bayonet. In 1777, British Maj. Patrick Ferguson fielded an innovative breech-loading rifle that mounted a bayonet, but it saw limited service.

## Tactics

The musket's capabilities shaped tactics. A trained soldier could fire three rounds per minute. After twenty-five shots, the piece became too hot to handle, and the accumulation of residual gunpowder (known as powder-fouling) required cleaning and slowed reloading. Regiments formed in line at close order, presenting a continuous front of muskets and bayonets to concentrate their fire and mass to maximum effect. Close ranks also enabled company commanders to keep their troops together and thus better control them. The soldiers easily could hear orders communicated by drumbeat and could support each other using linear tactics described in tactical publications such as the *Manual Exercise, As Ordered by His Majesty in 1764*. In 1778, the Continental Army introduced a system spelled out in the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, nicknamed the Blue Book. Well-drilled companies could execute a variety of maneuvers to bring their firepower or bayonets to bear, unleashing simultaneous volleys with devastating effect, or firing alternately by platoon to sustain a running fire. Infantry usually closed to the optimal range of 40 yards for a killing volley before a bayonet assault. While battalions also could extend their intervals to optimize individual fire, volume rather than accuracy usually decided a battle's outcome.

Artillery on both sides organized as separate regiments and battalions but fought as detachments as needed. With a range of several hundred yards, 3-, 4-, and 6-pounder guns supported

battalions in battle. With their slightly longer range, 8- and 12-pounders supported brigades, while larger guns with greater range operated from fortifications. Mortars fired exploding shells in a high arc to get over walls or other obstacles. Howitzers fired shells either directly at troops or in an arc. Artillerists and wagon teams were valuable assets. Commanders therefore often ordered crews that were about to be overrun by the enemy to disable their guns with spikes and mallets and abandon the weapons to save themselves and their teams.

Both forces also employed light dragoons, a type of mounted infantry. The scarcity of large horse breeds in America, the cost of transporting such mounts, and the uneven topography challenged the use of cavalry. Organized as regiments or separate troops, dragoons fought both mounted and dismounted and were armed with sabers, carbines, and, occasionally, pistols. Depending on time and terrain, both armies frequently detached light infantry, riflemen, artillery, and dragoons into separate battalions or combined them into corps or legions.

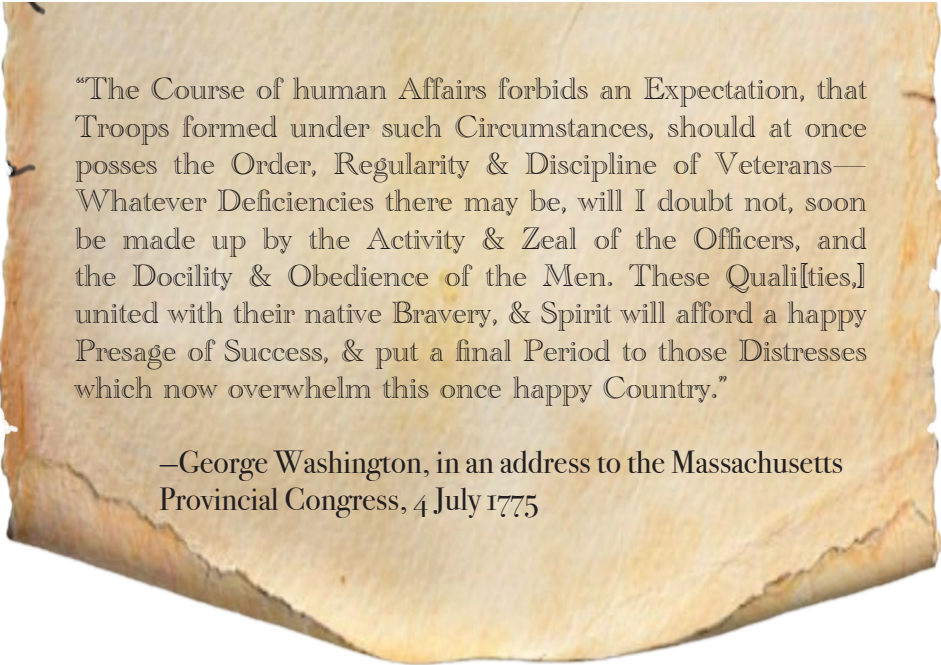
## **Fortifications**

European and colonial governments constructed dozens of forts before and during the war to defend important cities, towns, and key points. Field fortifications included fort-like redoubts, arrow-shaped *flèches*, and crescent-shaped *lunettes*. These structures were built of large wicker cylinders, called *gabions*, which were filled with soil or rubble, and then reinforced by bundles of sticks called *fascines*, covered with soil and sod, and surrounded by moats. As time permitted, soldiers erected *palisades* (walls of vertical wooden stakes), placed *fraises* (sharpened stakes) at a slant on the inner surface of the moat, and laid an *abatis* (a network of felled trees with sharpened branches) to slow infantry assaults. For a portable obstacle, artificers would use a *cheval-de-frise*, which typically consisted of sharpened stakes projecting from a log or beam. To fortify harbor defenses and block rivers, engineers employed log booms connected

with heavy chains and created the naval version of a cheval-de-frise by constructing rock-filled timber boxes bearing sharpened logs.



Technology dictated tactics, which in turn influenced formations. The contending forces frequently deviated from the standards prescribed by regulations or government allocations as they dealt with issues of personnel, materiel, and authority. Necessity and mission spurred the evolution of regulations, tactics, and equipment during the war. That was particularly the case for the new army of the United States. As the war progressed, American soldiers attained a high level of proficiency that earned the confidence of those they served and the respect of both allies and enemies.



"The Course of human Affairs forbids an Expectation, that Troops formed under such Circumstances, should at once posses the Order, Regularity & Discipline of Veterans— Whatever Deficiencies there may be, will I doubt not, soon be made up by the Activity & Zeal of the Officers, and the Docility & Obedience of the Men. These Quali[ties,] united with their native Bravery, & Spirit will afford a happy Presage of Success, & put a final Period to those Distresses which now overwhelm this once happy Country."

—George Washington, in an address to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, 4 July 1775







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