

3 Winning Independence

★ Section Focus

★ **Key Terms** war materiel ■ Battle of Saratoga ■ partisan ■ Battle of Yorktown
★ ■ Treaty of Paris (1783)

★ **Main Idea** Despite British control of the major cities, the Patriots defeated the British because they had superior leadership and control of the countryside.

Objectives As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. What difficulties did Washington face as head of the American army?
2. What were the major battles of the war?
3. Why did the Americans win the war?

In 1776 Mercy Otis Warren, sister of James Otis, published *The Blockheads*, a play set in Boston during the British occupation. In the play a British officer, General Puff, complains:

Well, gentlemen, a pretty state for British generals and British troops—the terror of the world become mere scarecrows to themselves. We came to America, flushed with high expectations of conquest, and curbing these sons of riot. . . . But how are we deceived? Instead of this agreeable employ, we are shamefully confined within the bounds of three miles, wrangling and starving among ourselves.

General Puff's complaint describes the situation the British found themselves in throughout the Revolution. With the exception of Boston, the British were able to hold every seaboard city they chose to. They could do so by reason of their superior firepower, trained troops, and supply ships from Britain. But British troops went into the countryside at their peril. As another character in Warren's play noted: "These Yankee dogs . . . divert themselves by firing at us, as at a flock of partridges. A man can scarcely put his nose over the entrenchments without losing it."

THE COUNTRY DIVIDED

For all the frustrations experienced by the British, the Americans had their own problems. The Revolution was more than a revolt. It was a civil war that bitterly divided families and neighbors. About two-fifths of the Americans were active Patriots, about one-fifth were active Loyalists, and

the remainder were neutral. Both Patriots and Loyalists included Americans from all walks of life and from all parts of America. In general, however, New England and Virginia had the greatest share of Patriots. The Loyalists were most numerous in New York State, among Scottish immigrants of the Carolinas, and in the seaboard cities. Among those tending to remain neutral were the Quakers and the German population of Pennsylvania.

Most of the American Indians also sided with the British, for they felt the British were more likely to protect their land. However, the war permanently divided the Six Nations of the Iroquois. The Tuscaroras and Oneidas joined the Americans, and the rest favored the British.

AMERICANS AT WAR

Throughout the war George Washington faced the problem of how to hold the Continental Army together. His genius was that he succeeded in doing so against heavy odds.

The needs of the army were great: guns, wagons, horses, ammunition, shoes, clothes, tents, kettles, soap, food. The Continental Congress issued paper money to pay for the supplies, but the British were paying for the same goods in silver and gold. As the war dragged on, Continental money became worthless as suppliers refused to honor it.

At times the army seemed held together only by the respect the soldiers felt toward Washington himself. Although he could be stern and aloof, Washington cared deeply about the welfare of his soldiers, even when he could do nothing about it.

After the first days of revolutionary enthusiasm, Washington found it difficult to get men to enlist for long terms and to endure the necessary hardships. Only one group of people were willing to sign up for several years at a time. These were black men. At first Washington, a slaveholder himself, opposed the enlistment of African Americans. He and others feared that the arming of black people could threaten the slave system. But when the British offered freedom to slaves who fought for the king, Washington announced that the Patriot forces would welcome black soldiers. Altogether about 5,000 blacks served in the Continental Army.



This print shows Mary Ludwig Hays taking over her fallen husband's cannon. For her wartime services, she was awarded a lifetime pension by the government. **CULTURAL PLURALISM** In what other ways did American women help the revolutionary cause?

The army's problems would have been even worse were it not for Patriot women. Martha Washington was the most famous of those who followed their husbands in the army. Some did so because they had no independent way to survive. Others followed the army out of affection and caring. Whatever their reason, women busied themselves washing, cooking, nursing, sewing, and mending. A few women joined their men on the battlefield. One was Mary Ludwig Hays, who, even after her husband collapsed from the heat, continued to load and fire the cannon.

Women served in other ways as well. They gave up their pewter plates to be melted into musket balls. They spied. They forced merchants to set

fair prices and not profit from wartime scarcity. And they used their pens. Esther Reed's essay *The Sentiments of an American Woman* inspired the formation of the first national women's organization in 1780. Its members went door-to-door raising funds that were then used to make shirts for the troops.

THE NORTHERN CAMPAIGNS, 1776–1778

When the British sailed from Boston in March 1776, George Washington guessed that they would reappear at New York City. From New York the British could move easily in all directions. And if they could control the Hudson Valley, they could divide the country in two.

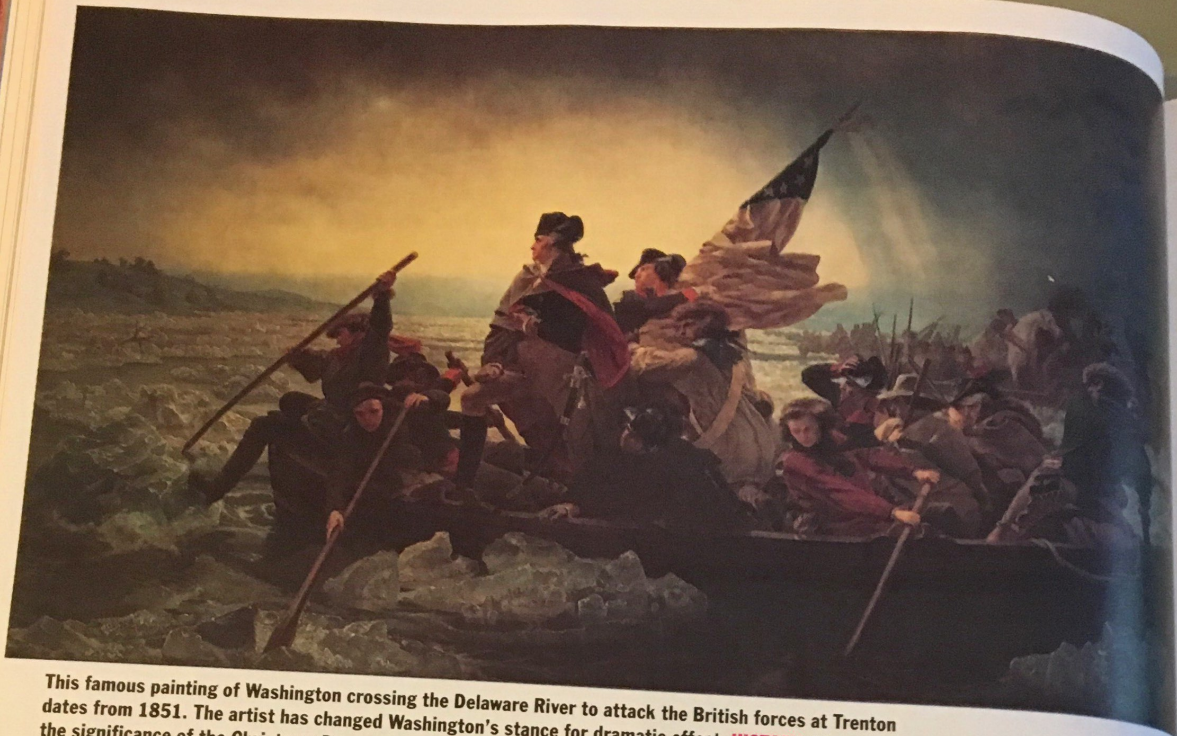
Acting on his hunch, Washington hastened with his raw army to New York. There he stationed his forces on both Manhattan and Long Island. The British commander Howe, who had spent two months in Nova Scotia after leaving Boston, finally made his move. In June the British arrived with the largest seaborne army ever launched. The ships were so numerous that the harbor resembled a forest of stripped trees.

The overwhelming strength of the British forces, including the Hessian mercenaries, forced Washington from Long Island and then from Manhattan. By September the ragged army was retreating into New Jersey with Howe at its heels. By December Washington had crossed the Delaware into Pennsylvania. It was now winter—and a cold one. Leaving Hessians in New Jersey, Howe returned to the warmth and gaiety of New York. After all, a proper army did not fight in winter. Besides, Howe reasoned, winter just might destroy what was left of Washington's ragtag army.

Patriot spirits were about as low as the thermometer. From a force of 20,000 the army had dwindled to a few thousand. To rekindle the patriotic fire, Thomas Paine published a new pamphlet. "These are the times that try men's souls," he

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—Thomas Paine, *The Crisis*



This famous painting of Washington crossing the Delaware River to attack the British forces at Trenton dates from 1851. The artist has changed Washington's stance for dramatic effect. **HISTORY** What was the significance of the Christmas Day surprise attack?

wrote in *The Crisis*. "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

★ **Historical Documents**

For an excerpt from *The Crisis*, see page R16 of this book.

With the situation desperate, Washington was willing to gamble all. Late on December 25 Washington and his troops rowed across the ice-clogged Delaware River to the New Jersey shore. From there they marched in the bitter pre-dawn cold to catch the Hessians at Trenton sleeping off their Christmas revels. The Patriots captured or felled more than 1,000 Hessians. In addition they acquired a great quantity of **war materiel**—the supplies, guns, and ammunition that make it possible to fight.

Washington's victories at Trenton and a week later at Princeton gave the Patriots new hope. The army's ranks swelled with recruits.

In the summer of 1777, Howe began a campaign to seize Philadelphia. He hoped that capturing the capital of the rebelling states would destroy their will. Howe took Philadelphia, but he failed to head the Patriot cause. The Continental Congress just picked up and moved to the town of York.

Howe's excursion to Philadelphia, however, did wreck a grand British plan to isolate New England. In the summer of 1777, a British army started to move south from Canada. At the same time, British forces were supposed to move east from Lake Ontario and north from New York. The three armies would meet in Albany, securing the Hudson Valley. However, Howe in New York had already decided to take Philadelphia and so ignored the orders to march north. Howe, a historian has written, was "one of the greatest bus-missers in British military history."

BATTLES IN THE MIDDLE STATES, 1776-1777



MAP SKILLS

What route did British troops take from New York to Philadelphia? In what state was the Battle of Trenton fought? **CRITICAL THINKING** Why might the capture of Philadelphia be described as a failure for the British?

Meanwhile, the British army under General John Burgoyne was working its way south from Canada and running into problems. Burgoyne thought his army could live off the countryside, but at the Battle of Bennington, Patriot forces destroyed his raiding party. As Burgoyne's weakened army reached Saratoga, it faced a powerful American army under Horatio Gates. Howe should have been closing in behind Gates, but was in Philadelphia. At the **Battle of Saratoga** in October 1777, Gates decisively defeated Burgoyne.

The American victory at Saratoga satisfied France that the American effort was a cause worth backing. In Paris, Benjamin Franklin had been doing his best to persuade Britain's old enemy France to ally itself with the Americans. The

victory at Saratoga was convincing, and France entered the war.

Driven from Philadelphia by Howe, Washington spent the winter of 1777-1778 at nearby Valley Forge. Ever after the name would symbolize the hunger and suffering endured by the Patriots. "No pay, no clothes, no provisions, no rum," soldiers wailed. And yet they stayed.

The winter also brought new hope and new men with good skills. From Germany came Baron von Steuben. A professional soldier and drillmaster, Von Steuben had turned the Valley Forge troops into a well-trained army by spring. From France came the Marquis de Lafayette, a young nobleman. He would become one of the army's most popular leaders.

WAR IN THE SOUTH, 1778–1781

After failing to secure the Hudson Valley or destroy Washington's army, the British changed their strategy by trying to take the South. There they expected a strong core of Loyalist support. They also (correctly) expected black slaves to join them in large numbers. Pursuing the promise of freedom, at least 50,000 blacks served the British as guides, spies, and laborers. Some saw action in the field.

The British took Savannah in November 1778, and in 1780 their assault on Charleston succeeded. As British forces under Lord Cornwallis set out to secure the countryside, however, a new wave of violence resulted.

Loyalists and Patriots formed guerrilla bands that conducted vicious raids in which all existing rules of warfare were cast aside. Loyalist and Patriot **partisans**, members of the guerrilla forces, slaughtered each other. British Colonel Banastre Tarleton, known as the “butcher” of the countryside, added to the violence by announcing he would “give no quarter”—show no mercy—to rebel captives. The Patriots responded in kind. At the battle of Kings Mountain, victorious Patriots shouted “Tarleton’s Quarter” as they killed Loyalist captives.

By 1780 a new general, Nathanael Greene, was put in charge of the American army in the South.

One of Washington's most able officers, Greene established a policy of mercy toward Loyalists. By successfully wooing the Cherokee Indians, he restored some order to the southern frontier. The attacks of his highly mobile forces so weakened the British that Cornwallis decided to retreat and establish a base at Yorktown, Virginia.

Meanwhile French help arrived. Almost 7,000 well-trained, well-supplied troops landed in Rhode Island under the command of General Rochambeau (roh-shahm-BOH). The French fleet of Admiral de Grasse was in American waters. The coordination of the French and American forces led to the battle that ended the war, the **Battle of Yorktown**.

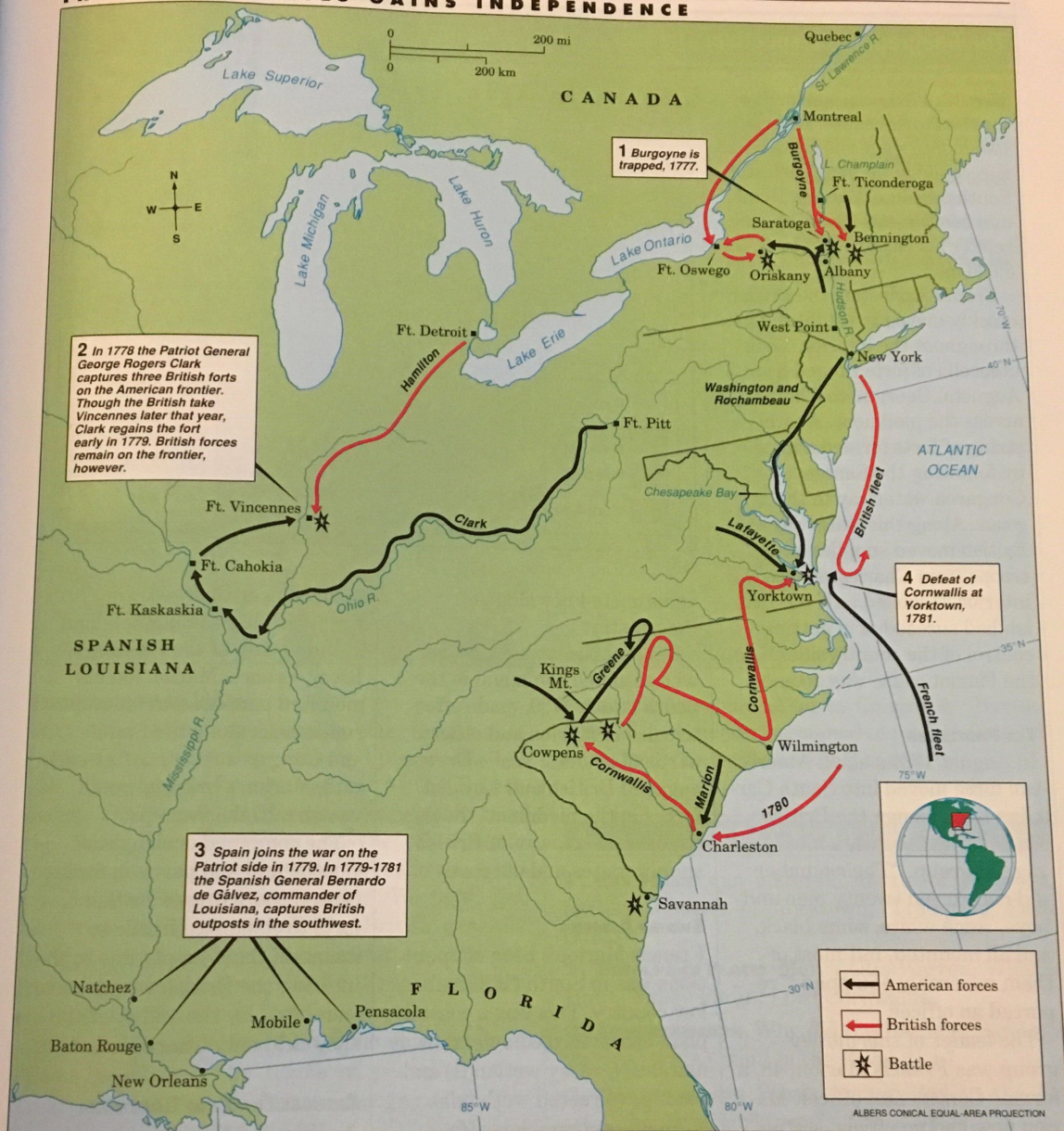
Cornwallis's position at Yorktown depended on British control of the seas. The American state and Continental navies had pestered British shipping, but it took the French navy to change the balance of sea power. De Grasse and his fleet blockaded the entrance to Chesapeake Bay, thereby preventing reinforcements from reaching Yorktown.

The armies of Washington and Rochambeau swiftly marched south, and together the American and French troops began a siege of Yorktown on September 28. On October 17, 1781, Cornwallis finally sent up the white flag of surrender. Two days later the British laid down their arms.



George Washington appears to the left of the American flag in this scene of the 1781 surrender of Cornwallis and the British troops at Yorktown, Virginia. The artist, John Trumbull, painted many scenes of the American Revolution. **HISTORY** What was the significance of the British surrender?

THE UNITED STATES GAINS INDEPENDENCE



American victories at Saratoga, Vincennes, and Yorktown led to independence. What was the role of the French fleet at Yorktown? What other European nation aided America? In what part of the country did the British concentrate their attacks in the later part of the war? Why?

NORTH AMERICA, 1783



MAP SKILLS

By signing the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Britain recognized American independence. What natural feature formed the western boundary of the United States at the time? Which nation claimed most of the land in the American west? **CRITICAL THINKING** What indications does the map give that additional conflicts with Britain lay ahead?

INDEPENDENCE WON

With their defeat at Yorktown the British lost their will to continue the war, and peace talks began. A variety of factors had led to the British defeat. The British could never control more than the cities. The Americans, on the other hand, could survive and regroup their forces in the countryside. As General Greene said, "We fight, get beat, rise and fight again." The British generals were also less capable and committed than the American commanders. Finally, French military aid made the victory at Yorktown possible.

In Paris Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams negotiated the terms of peace. By the **Treaty of Paris (1783)** Britain recognized the independence of the United States, with the Mississippi as its western boundary. (See map above.)

In early December, 1783, Washington and his officers met for a farewell dinner at Fraunces Tavern in New York City. Washington then headed south to his home at Mount Vernon. On the way he

handed in his commission to Congress. "Having now finished the work assigned to me," he said, "I retire from the great theatre of action."

SECTION REVIEW

- 1. KEY TERMS** war materiel, Battle of Saratoga, partisan, Battle of Yorktown, Treaty of Paris (1783)
- 2. PEOPLE AND PLACES** Mercy Otis Warren, William Howe, Valley Forge, Lord Cornwallis
- 3. COMPREHENSION** Why did the Battle of Saratoga mark a turning point in the Revolution?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** What strategy led to the Patriot victory at Yorktown?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** What was there about colonial America that made it possible for the British to win the cities and lose the war? How has America changed since then?