

The Patriots used skill, cunning, and determination to survive early defeats and win a key victory at Saratoga.

The Two Armies Face Off

[SS.8.A.1.2](#), [SS.8.A.1.6](#), [SS.8.A.3.3](#), [SS.8.A.3.4](#), [SS.8.A.3.6](#), [SS.8.A.3.8](#), [SS.8.A.3.15](#), [SS.8.G.1.2](#)

Who were the opposing sides in the American Revolution?

In April 1776, colonial leader John Adams predicted "We shall have a long . . . and bloody war to go through." Few people agreed with him. Each side thought they would win the war quickly. The British planned to crush the colonists by force. Most Patriots—Americans who supported independence—believed the British would give up after losing one or two major battles.

British Advantages

As the war began, the British seemed to have a big advantage. They had the strongest navy in the world. The British also had a well-trained army. They were supported by the wealth of their empire. Great Britain also had more people. More than 8 million people lived in Britain. There were only 2.5 million Americans.

The Patriots did not seem to be a match for the British. They had no regular army and a weak navy. American soldiers also lacked experience and weapons for fighting. Much of the Patriot military force was in the form of militia groups. These volunteer soldiers fought only for short periods of time and then returned home.

In addition, not all Americans supported the struggle for independence. Some Americans remained loyal to Britain. Others, such as the Quakers, were neutral. They would not take part in the war because they opposed all armed conflict.

Loyalists in the Colonies

At least one in five Americans was thought to be a "Loyalist" or "Tory." The number may have been as high as one in three. These Americans remained loyal to Britain and opposed independence. Some Americans changed sides during the war. Loyalist support also varied from region to region. In general, support for Britain was strongest in the Carolinas and Georgia and weakest in New England.

Loyalists had reasons to support Britain. Some depended on the British for their jobs. Some feared the Revolution would throw America into chaos. Others simply could not understand why the colonies wanted independence. For them, Patriot complaints seemed minor and not worth fighting over.

The British actively sought the support of African Americans. Virginia's royal governor, Lord Dunmore, promised freedom to those African Americans who joined the British cause. Many men answered his call. Eventually some of them ended up free in Canada. Others settled in the British colony of Sierra Leone in Africa.

Loyalty to Britain divided friends and family. For example, William Franklin, son of Patriot Benjamin Franklin, was a Loyalist who had served as a royal governor of New Jersey. This disagreement caused lasting damage to their relationship. As one Connecticut man observed: "Neighbor [was] . . . against neighbor, father against son and son against father, and he that would not thrust his own blade through his brother's heart was called an infamous villain."

Advantages of the Patriots

The Patriots did hold some advantages. They were fighting on their own ground. The British, on the other hand, had to fight from thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean. It took time and money to ship soldiers and supplies.

The Patriot soldier also had greater motivation, or sense of purpose. The British relied on **mercenaries** (MUHR • suh • nehr • eez) to fight for them. The Americans called these mercenaries "Hessians" (HEH • shuhnz) after the region in Germany from which most of them came. The Patriots fought for the freedom of their own land. This gave them a greater stake in the war's outcome than soldiers who fought for money. The Americans also lured the Hessians away with promises of land.

The Patriots' greatest advantage was probably their leader, George Washington. Few could match him for courage and determination. The war might have taken a different turn without Washington.

The Continental Army

After the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress served as the national government. However, the Congress lacked the power to raise money through taxes. Delegates led by James Madison of Virginia called for a stronger national government to bind the colonies together. They believed that winning independence was possible only under a strong national government.

Not every American agreed. They placed great value on liberty and personal freedom. After rejecting the rule of the British Parliament, they were unwilling to transfer power to their own Continental Congress. As a result, the American Revolution was in some ways 13 separate wars, with each state fighting for its own interests. This made it hard for the Congress to get soldiers and raise money.

Local militia made up a key part of the Patriot forces. These troops were limited. Many were farmers who needed to provide for their families and did not want to leave their fields unattended. The Patriots also needed well-trained soldiers who could fight the British

throughout the colonies. To meet this need, the Congress established the Continental Army, which depended on the states to recruit (ree • KROOT) soldiers.

At first, soldiers signed up for just one year, but General Washington asked for longer terms. "If we ever hope for success," he said, "we must have men enlisted for the whole term of the war." Eventually the Continental Congress invited soldiers to sign up for three years or until the war ended. Most soldiers, however, still signed up for only one year.

The Continental Army also had a hard time finding officers—qualified military commanders. Some were young men who were recruited from the ranks. The best officers had experience from previous, or earlier, wars.

Men did all the fighting—with a few exceptions. For example, Margaret Corbin of Pennsylvania went with her husband when he joined the Continental Army. After he died in battle, she took his place. Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley joined her husband in battle as well. The soldiers called her "Moll of the Pitcher," or "Molly Pitcher," because she carried water pitchers to the soldiers. Legend has it she also took part in combat. On February 21, 1822, Pennsylvania recognized Molly Pitcher's service by granting her an annual payment of \$40. Deborah Sampson of Massachusetts took a different route to the battlefield. She joined up as a soldier by disguising herself as a man.

Summarizing What disadvantages did the Patriots face in fighting the British?

Thinking Like a HISTORIAN

Drawing Inferences and Conclusions

Made in the 1750s, the Liberty Bell hung in the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall). Legend has it that on July 8, 1776, the bell's ringing announced the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. □ The Liberty Bell also rang every Fourth of July and for many public events until a crack appeared in about 1846. Today, the Liberty Bell stands as a symbol of freedom. Why do you think such symbols are important to the people of a country? For more about drawing inferences and conclusions, review *Thinking Like a Historian*.

Early Campaigns

[SS.8.A.1.2](#), [SS.8.A.3.3](#), [SS.8.A.3.4](#), [SS.8.A.3.6](#), [SS.8.A.3.15](#)

What were significant battles in the early years of the American Revolution?

Relatively few soldiers fought in the war's early battles. At Bunker Hill, for example, about 2,200 British soldiers fought 1,200 Americans. The British had not yet won a clear victory. They realized they were going to need more troops.

During the summer of 1776, Britain sent 32,000 troops across the Atlantic to New York. The British commander, General William Howe, hoped the sheer size of his army would convince the Patriots to give up. He was soon disappointed.

Patriot Defeat on Long Island

Only 20,000 soldiers made up the Patriot force under George Washington. Yet the Americans were determined to fight. The two sides clashed in the Battle of Long Island in late August 1776. The British badly defeated the outnumbered Continental Army.

One Patriot, Nathan Hale, showed his bravery at Long Island. Hale disguised himself as a Dutch schoolteacher and went to spy on British troops. The British caught Hale and hanged him as punishment. According to legend, Hale went to his death saying, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

The Patriots fought hard on Long Island but could not overcome the larger and better-equipped British army. A British officer wrote that many Patriot soldiers killed on Long Island had not been wearing shoes, socks, or jackets. "They are also in great want of blankets," he said, predicting that the rebels would suffer during the winter.

After the defeat, Washington retreated from New York, which became a Loyalist stronghold. The British chased the Continental Army across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. Satisfied that Washington was beaten, the British let him go.

A Low Point for the Patriots

Washington and his forces had managed to escape the British. As winter approached, however, the Patriots' cause was near collapse. The Continental Army had fewer than 5,000 soldiers. Many had completed their terms. Others had run away.

Washington wrote his brother that if new soldiers were not found soon, "I think the game is pretty near up." Yet he remained hopeful that the fight for freedom would succeed.

Washington begged the Continental Congress for more troops. He suggested allowing free African Americans to enlist, but many Americans opposed this idea. Early in the war, the Southern Colonies had persuaded the Congress not to take this step. Many white people in the South worried about giving guns and training to African Americans. They feared the possibility of revolt among the enslaved population.

African Americans in Battle

The growing need for soldiers led some states to ignore the ban on African Americans. Rhode Island raised an all-African American regiment in 1778. By the war's end, every state except South Carolina enlisted African Americans to fight.

Historians believe that as many as 5,000 African Americans joined the Patriots. One example was Peter Salem, an enslaved African American from Massachusetts. Salem fought at Concord and at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and he served the Patriot cause throughout the war. In return for his service, Salem won his freedom.

African Americans had many reasons to fight. Some fought because they believed in the Patriot cause. Others may have joined up for the chance to earn money. Some were enslaved Africans who had run away or who, like Salem, were allowed by their owners to enlist.

The Battles of Trenton and Princeton

While the Patriots were struggling through the winter, the main British force was settled in New York. The British also left some troops in Princeton and Trenton, New Jersey. Washington saw a chance to catch the British by surprise.

Washington was camped in Pennsylvania, across the Delaware River from the British camp in New Jersey. On Christmas night 1776, Washington led 2,400 troops across the icy river to surprise the enemy at Trenton the next day. Washington then escaped and marched to Princeton; his army scattered the British force there.

Explaining Why was the winter of 1776–1777 significant?

British Strategy

[SS.8.A.3.6](#), [LA.8.1.6.1](#)

Was the British plan for victory successful?

In early 1777, the British began a three-pronged battle plan. Their goal was to seize Albany, New York, and gain control of the Hudson River. If they controlled the Hudson, they would cut off New England from the Middle Colonies.

First, General John Burgoyne would lead troops south from Canada. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger would move east from Lake Ontario. A third group, under General Howe, would move north up the Hudson. The three British forces would then attack Patriot troops at Albany.

The British Capture Philadelphia

Before the attack on Albany, Howe sought to capture Philadelphia—the home of the Continental Congress. Howe won battles in September 1777 at Brandywine and Paoli, near Philadelphia. Then Howe's troops captured Philadelphia, forcing the Continental Congress to flee. By now, winter was coming. Howe decided to stay in Philadelphia instead of going to Albany.

The Battle of Saratoga

Meanwhile, the British plan for taking Albany was in trouble. In August, American soldiers led by Benedict Arnold stopped St. Leger at Fort Stanwix, New York.

General Burgoyne's army hadn't reached Albany either. In July he captured Fort Ticonderoga, but he needed supplies. He sent a force to the American supply base at Bennington, Vermont. A local militia group, the Green Mountain Boys, defeated them. Burgoyne retreated to Saratoga, New York.

Here Burgoyne found himself in serious trouble—and alone. Patriots had stopped St. Leger at Fort Stanwix. Howe was still in Philadelphia. Now American troops under General Horatio Gates blocked and surrounded Burgoyne's army. Burgoyne made a desperate attack on October 7. The Patriots held firm.

On October 17, 1777, General Burgoyne surrendered. The British plan had failed. The Continental Army had won an enormous victory that changed the course of the war.

Analyzing Why did Howe's Philadelphia victory lead to defeat at Saratoga?

LESSON 1 REVIEW

Review Vocabulary

1. Use each of the following words in a sentence that demonstrates its meaning.

a. mercenary b. recruit

[LA.8.1.6.1](#)

Answer the Guiding Questions

2. **Contrasting** How did the two sides in the American Revolution differ?

[SS.8.A.3.4](#), [SS.8.A.3.6](#)

3. **Summarizing** How did the Continental Army fare in the early battles of the war?

[SS.8.A.3.6](#)

4. Explaining What key factors led to the American victory at Saratoga?

[SS.8.A.3.6](#)

5. PERSUASIVE WRITING As a Patriot, write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Point out the Patriot strengths and why you think the Patriots will win the war for independence.

[SS.8.A.3.4](#), [SS.8.A.3.6](#), [SS.8.A.3.8](#)