

# Chapter 4: The Revolution

## 1. Rebellion

### The Second Continental Congress

In May 1775, colonial **representatives** met in Philadelphia for the Second **Continental Congress**. They created the Continental Army and appointed George Washington to lead it. Yet, most delegates wanted to avoid **war** so they sent King George III the Olive Branch Petition asking for peace. The king rejected it and instead declared the colonies in a state of rebellion.

## 2. Independence

### Common Sense

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, a pamphlet urging Americans to break from Britain. Paine believed the British government was too corrupt to fix and America could only be happy without Great Britain. He also urged America to write a document explaining British abuses to send to foreign governments to get their help.

Paine's plain writing style made it easy for people to read *Common Sense* and it became one of the best-selling books in American history. His arguments convinced many ordinary people and politicians to want **independence**.

### Declaration of Independence

After many debates in Congress, the thirteen united colonies voted for independence on July 2, 1776. In order to gain foreign support, Congress approved Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of

Independence on July 4, 1776. In that document, Jefferson began by explaining that government existed to protect the people's natural rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When government failed to do so, the people had a right to change or replace that government. Jefferson included many examples of British abuses against the colonists. Finally, Jefferson ended by stating the colonies deserved to be an independent country with the right to make foreign **alliances**.

Across the Atlantic, Britain's archenemy France was watching events unfold. France was ruled by a king and had little interest in American democracy, but it did want to see American independence from Britain. France lost its New World colonies to Britain at the end of the French and Indian War over a decade earlier. France wanted to see Britain lose its colonies now.

## 3. Victories

### Battle of Trenton

By November 1776, Washington's army was falling apart. The well trained British army defeated the Continental Army in every battle and chased Washington from New York, across New Jersey, and into Pennsylvania. Britain believed the war was over.

On Christmas night, in desperation, Washington rowed 2,000 men across the near frozen Delaware River and surprised the Hessians, German mercenaries working for the British. This was the first American victory of the war and gave hope that the American cause for independence was not lost.

## **The Battle of Saratoga**

In the fall of 1777, a British army moved down from Canada into New York to separate the New England colonies from the rest of colonies. The British were used to fighting on open battle spaces, not in heavily forested backcountry like New York. After two months of fighting, the British army surrendered to the Americans at Saratoga.

Up to this time, France had been secretly giving supplies to the Americans. With this victory, France openly declared war on Britain and made a public alliance to support American independence. Soon, Spain and Holland would declare war on Britain as well. Britain now had to divert war resources needed in America to other parts of the world.

## **4. Foreign Help**

### **Valley Forge**

By the winter of 1777-78, Britain had captured the city of Philadelphia and forced Congress to flee. Unable to stop the British, Washington settled his troops into winter camp at Valley Forge about twenty miles from Philadelphia.

A Prussian officer, Baron Wilhelm von Steuben, arrived at Washington's camp and offered to help train the army. By the end of the winter, Washington's rag-tag army emerged as a well-trained fighting force.

### **Yorktown**

In 1781, the French army landed in America and joined with the Continental Army. The French fleet was also on its way from the Caribbean Islands. In Virginia, British general Charles

Cornwallis was moving his army into the coastal town of Yorktown. The French and Americans realized this was an opportunity to hurt the British.

The American and French armies marched from New York to Virginia and surrounded Yorktown on land while the French fleet prevented Cornwallis from escaping by sea. After several weeks of fighting, Cornwallis surrendered his army to General Washington.

When news of Cornwallis' surrender reached Parliament in Britain, the prime minister cried, "Oh God! It is all over!" Britain was tired of fighting and reluctantly began to offer peace.

## **5. The War Ends**

### **Treaty of Paris**

Benjamin Franklin had been in France since 1777 working to get and keep French support. At the end of the war, John Adams and John Jay would join Franklin to negotiate a peace treaty with Britain. Britain agreed to give America its independence and extend its western boundaries to the Mississippi River. America agreed to return property to American Loyalists who supported the British during the war. The Treaty of Paris was signed by all parties in 1783 and ratified by the Congress and Parliament in 1784.