**THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR BEGINS**

Despite protests by the First Continental Congress and a renewed boycott of British goods, Great Britain stood firm against its rebellious colonies. So the colonists began to prepare for war. Groups of men throughout the colonies began to meet for military exercises. In Massachusetts, where tensions were the greatest, steps were taken to organize an army.

Most colonists still hoped King George and Parliament would eventually relax their grip on the colonies. But a growing number of others favored a war for independence. Patrick Henry summed up their feelings in a speech in March, 1775. He ended his speech by declaring, “I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!”

Meanwhile in Boston, pressure was mounting on General Thomas Gage, the British-appointed governor of Massachusetts. The colonists were stockpiling guns and ammunition at nearby Concord. Rebels in the countryside were hoping for a military confrontation with the hated “redcoats.” Dummies made up to look like General Gage were being burned at patriot rallies. Even Gage’s men were ready for a fight. British troops had become impatient with the general’s lack of action, and were calling him “Tommy, the old woman.” Finally, in April of 1775, the government of Great Britain instructed General Gage to use force against the rebels.

Gage decided to raid Concord and take possession of the colonial arms and ammunition stored there. On the way to Concord, the British planned to march through Lexington, where they hoped to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Adams and Hancock were the leaders of the anti-British activities in the Boston area. Adams was one of the first public figures to speak openly for independence. He helped organize the Sons of Liberty, Committees of Correspondence, and the Boston Tea Party. John Hancock, the richest man in Boston, had become immensely popular in Massachusetts for his defiance of the British.

Gage’s plan to march to Lexington and Concord was a poorly kept secret. Two days before the British left Boston, Paul Revere informed the patriots that the redcoats expected to arrest Adams and Hancock in Lexington. They would then try to capture the military stores at Concord. On the night the British finally left Boston, Revere rode throughout the countryside. He and a companion named William Dawes warned Adams, Hancock, and the patriots that the British were on their way. So when an advance guard of the king’s troops reached Lexington, they were met by a band of 40 to 50 minutemen. The minutemen, who had been organized for quick action against the British, stood on the village green with muskets in hand. Soon, a pistol shot rang out, and the redcoats opened fire. Eight minutemen were killed and ten were wounded.

The British regulars marched six more miles to Concord, where they burned the courthouse and destroyed military supplies. At Concord’s North Bridge, another group of minutemen routed three companies of British light infantry, leaving three redcoats dead and eight wounded. The British began the 16-mile march back to Boston. By then, news of the skirmish at Lexington had spread throughout the countryside. Hundreds of minutemen rushed to the scene and took up positions along the road to Boston. As the redcoats passed by, the minutemen fired at them from behind walls, hedges, and trees. The British suffered more than 250 casualties, including 73 dead, before reaching the safety of Boston.

The battles of Lexington and Concord signaled the beginning of the war. Colonial representatives once again assembled in Philadelphia to coordinate actions against the British. Delegates to the Second Continental Congress, as the meeting was called, voted to organize the Continental Army. George Washington was chosen as commander in chief of the colonial troops.

**Comparing Strengths and Weaknesses**

When the war began, many people in America and Europe though the colonists had little chance of defeating the British. A close look at the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides makes it obvious why the odds were against the patriots.

For each of the areas of comparison, decide whether the colonist and British are strong or weak in that particular category. For a strong rating, give the British or colonists 3 or 2 points. Give 1 or 0 points for a weak rating. For example, in the first area of comparison, Great Britain has a much larger population than the colonies. This means the British are capable of putting a larger army on the battlefield. It would be reasonable to give the British 3 points and just 1 point to the colonists.

Award points to the colonist and British in all twelve areas of comparison. Then, look again at the twelve areas and decide which three might have the greatest effect on the outcome of the war. For example, the “size of navy” (number 3) would be much more important than “uniforms and awards” (number 8). For the three areas that you have decided are of greatest important, change the scoring by multiplying the points for each side by 3. Therefore, is you gave the British 3 points for “size of the navy” and the colonists 1 point, the numbers would be changed to 9 points and 3 points.

After changing the points in the three most important categories, add up the points for both sides. Your totals should show which side had the advantage at the beginning of the war.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Area of Comparison** | **Colonists** | **British** |
| **Population** | 2,750,000\_\_\_\_\_ points | 12,000,000\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Support of the people** | 1/3 of the people were loyalists; many others were against the war\_\_\_\_\_ points | The war was unpopular in Great Britain; the British had recently been involved in a war with France\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Size of the navy** | No regular navy; many privateers\_\_\_\_\_ points | Best navy in the world\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Familiarity with the land** | Fighting on home ground\_\_\_\_\_ points | Fighting in unfamiliar territory\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Area of Comparison** | **Colonists** | **British** |
| **Organization of the army** | As a general rule, troops in one colony would not fight under officers from another colony; men from different sections did not mingle; the militia, made up of local citizens, usually refused to leave their own colony to fight elsewhere\_\_\_\_\_ points | Highly-organized; soldiers fought wherever they were needed\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Officers and soldiers** | Many arguments between officers from different areas; for the most part, officers were poorly trained; soldiers often refused to obey orders, and freely criticized their commanders\_\_\_\_\_ points | Highly-disciplined army; soldiers respected their well-trained officers; orders were readily obeyed\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Terms of military duty** | Normal term of service was one year; Congress did not have the power to draft men; the small regular army was more dependable than the militia, where desertions were high\_\_\_\_\_ points | Soldiers were drafted, and could be counted on for a lengthy term of duty\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Uniforms and awards** | The average soldier wore ordinary clothes instead of a uniform; no awards or decorations for outstanding soldiers\_\_\_\_\_ points | Red uniforms were worn by all; awards and decorations given to outstanding soldiers\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Weapons, supplies, and transportation** | Shortage of food, clothing tents, blankets, medical supplies, arms, and ammunition; depended on land transportation because sea routes were threatened by British navy\_\_\_\_\_ points | Had everything which colonists lacked; controlled travel along seacoast\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Area of Comparison** | **Colonists** | **British** |
| **Reason for fighting** | Fighting to protect homes, families, and freedom to govern themselves\_\_\_\_\_ points | British soldiers had no particular interest in the war; Britain itself was not threatened\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Amount of wealth** | Very little money; Congress did not have the power to tax; the wealthiest colonists were loyalists\_\_\_\_\_ points | Richest country in the world\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Amount of manufacturing** | Very little manufacturing\_\_\_\_\_ points | Produced more manufactured goods than any other country in the world\_\_\_\_\_ points |
| **Total Points:** |  |  |