

The American Colonies Fight for Independence

The Second Continental Congress

Because the king of England refused to listen to the colonists' list of complaints, representatives met in Philadelphia for another meeting—the **Second Continental Congress**. It was May, 1775. Many important decisions were made at this meeting. Two of the most important were (1) America must have an organized Continental Army; and (2) George Washington would command the American army.

The meeting of the Second Continental Congress lasted for over a year.

The Battle of Bunker Hill

At the time, the British soldiers were staying in Boston. They did not feel that the American colonists had the strength or power to chase the powerful British army out of Boston.

In the darkness of night, while the British army was sleeping, more than a thousand colonists climbed Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill, which overlook Boston. All through the night, they dug **trenches** to protect themselves. When the British woke, they were very surprised.



British soldiers marched straight into deadly American gunfire. Although the patriots fought bravely, the British eventually won the Battle of Bunker Hill.

*On June 16, 1775, the **Battle of Bunker Hill** was fought.* Many people who lived in Boston climbed on their roofs to watch the battle. The British began to climb the hill, but the colonists beat them back. Again the British tried, and again they were beaten back. When the British tried the third time, the colonists ran out of gunpowder. This time, the Americans were beaten back.

Though the Americans were beaten back, they did show the British that, although the colonists were not trained soldiers, they could fight with determination.

Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys

The British held **Fort Ticonderoga**, which was located on the main road between Canada and New York. This fort was important to the British because of its location, and it also contained supplies of guns, cannons, and ammunition which the colonists so badly needed.

In the land that is now Vermont lived **Ethan Allen** and a group of patriots who called themselves the “**Green Mountain Boys**.” They decided that they would take Fort Ticonderoga from the British.

In the early morning hours while the unsuspecting British slept, the Green

Mountain Boys surrounded Fort Ticonderoga. When this was done, Ethan Allen knocked on the British Commander's door. The sleepy commander opened the door, and Ethan Allen demanded that he surrender the fort. The stunned commander looked outside. When he saw that the fort was already surrounded, he knew he had no choice. He surrendered the fort to the daring Ethan Allen.

The supplies inside the fort were most valuable to the Continental Army, for the colonists had few guns and little gunpowder to fight a war with the British. It was the cannons taken from Fort Ticonderoga that finally drove the British army out of Boston.

Ethan Allen roused the British commander and demanded that he surrender Fort Ticonderoga to the Green Mountain Boys.



More Decisions

Meanwhile the Second Continental Congress continued meeting in Philadelphia. It was now 1776. Many of the representatives still hoped that King George would change his mind. Then the Americans could become peaceful colonists of England once again. These hopes were soon crushed when the colonists received the cruel news that King George had hired German soldiers called **Hessians** to help fight against the Americans.

The king had a hard time finding Englishmen who were willing to fight against the American colonists. Many English believed that the colonists were right and just in their demands. Many people of England themselves did not agree with King George or some of the men in the English government. That is why the king was forced to hire soldiers from another country. This news destroyed most of the colonists' remaining loyalty to England. From now on, the king was their cruel enemy. They realized they must fight for their independence from England.

Although the great evangelist John Wesley was a loyal Englishman, he felt that the English would have real problems if they kept fighting the Americans. He knew that the colonists were fierce lovers of liberty and that they

would be united in their fight for it. He wrote to the English leader, Lord North, about the colonists:

These men will not be frightened, and it seems they will not be conquered as easily as was at first imagined. They will probably dispute every inch of ground, and, if they die, die with sword in hand . . . They are as strong men as you; they are as valiant as you if not abundantly more valiant, for they are one and all enthusiasts, enthusiasts for liberty.

Someone had told Lord North that the colonists were divided among themselves. Wesley wrote to tell him that this was not true. "My lord," he wrote, "they are terribly united." And united they were, because of their beliefs about human freedom.

The representatives of the Second Continental Congress now asked that a *Declaration of Independence* be written, stating the reasons why the colonists wanted their independence.