

CLASS COPY #14

A HISTORY OF US

DO NOT WRITE ON ME!

Ms. Nay

Do you think we should make heroes of our politicians? What kinds of people might want to serve in Congress if we treated politicians like superstars? Do you think politicians get enough attention? Or too much?

A Virginian described Washington as "sensible, but speaks little." Washington spoke up when something mattered. In 1785 he wrote about slavery: "There is not a man alive who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it." He believed slavery should be ended by "legislative authority" (laws), because slave owners would not willingly give up wealth and property. Washington remained a slave owner himself. He freed his slaves in his will.

16 On the Way to the Second Continental Congress



Washington, said his friends, was serious but never stern, and always cheerful with his soldiers.

Pretend it is 1775. You are a British subject living in the American colonies in Philadelphia. At least that is the way you have been taught to describe yourself. But now you are confused. You have overheard violent arguments. Some people are calling the Bostonians "heroes"; others call them "rabble." Politics is making people angry. Your parents are no longer talking to some of their old friends.

Your parents are Patriots; some of your neighbors are Loyalists. If there is war, the Loyalists hope Britain will win. They don't see any need for independence. England is the greatest nation on earth, they say. They remember the good old days before the French and Indian War. England didn't bother the colonists with many taxes then. They expect those times to return again. Benjamin Franklin's son William is a Loyalist. He is sincere in his beliefs, but he will break his father's heart.

Being a Patriot may mean going to war. That worries you—and it should. What side will you be on? In May, when the Virginia delegation arrives in Philadelphia, you make a decision. You will stick with the American Patriots' cause.

Back in the 18th century there were no TV stars and no big sports figures, which may explain why, in 1775, everyone in Philadelphia seemed to want a glimpse of Virginia's political leaders when their carriages rolled into town. The Virginians had been in

Philadelphia the year before, when the First Continental Congress met. Now they were back for the Second Congress: heroic-looking men who rode their horses proudly, who danced with energy and grace, and who thought and spoke as well as any Americans anywhere. Even John Adams of Massachusetts said that they represented "fortunes, ability, learning, eloquence, acuteness, equal to any I ever met with in all my life."

Take George Washington, for instance. He was more than six feet tall, big-boned, muscular, lean, and very strong. Once he came upon some young men who were throwing weights as far as they could. They had their shirts off and were sweating from the effort. George Washington asked if he could try. He took a weight—didn't even take off his jacket—and out-threw them all. Does that sound as if he was a show-off? He wasn't. Everyone agreed about that. He was modest, and only spoke when he had something to say.

His adventures during the French and Indian War had made him famous, even in England. In America both men and women admired him. One friend called him "the best horseman of his age and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback." He had gray-blue eyes, auburn hair, and hands and feet so large that several people of his time remarked about them. He loved to dance and he dressed with care. He wore his military uniform to Philadelphia—bright blue with brass buttons—and they called him Colonel Washington.

When John Adams's wife, Abigail, met George Washington she found a poem to describe him:

*Mark his majestic fabric; he's a temple
Sacred by birth, and built by hands divine.*

(John Adams was always jealous of George Washington.)



Dr. Benjamin Franklin

And So to Bed

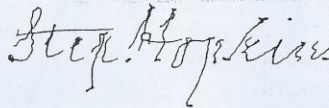
In early America, inns were often crowded, and travelers expected to share beds. It happened to Ben Franklin and John Adams one night in 1776, when "but one bed could be procured for Dr. Franklin and me in a chamber little larger than the bed." Adams, with his fussy ways, wanted to close the window. (Most physicians then thought the night air foul and dangerous.) This is what Adams wrote in his diary about Franklin's views:

Oh! says Franklin, don't shut the window. We shall be suffocated. I answered I was afraid of the evening air. Dr. Franklin replied...come! open the window...and I will convince you....

Opening the window and leaping into bed, I said I had read his letters to Dr. Cooper...but the theory was so little consistent with my experience that I thought it a paradox. However, I had so much curiosity to hear his reasons that I would run the risk of a cold. The Doctor then began a harangue upon air and cold and respiration and perspiration, with which I was so much amused that I soon fell asleep, and left him and his philosophy together.

Stephen Hopkins

of Rhode Island had "palsy," which was a vague term for many illnesses in the 18th century. Whatever his disability, it didn't keep him out of a long career in public service. It didn't limit his enthusiasm for independence, either. As he put his pen to the paper to sign the Declaration, he said proudly: "My hand trembles, but my heart does not."



Washington rode to Philadelphia with another Virginian: Richard Henry Lee. The fingers on one of Lee's hands had been shot off in a hunting accident; he kept a silk handkerchief wrapped around that hand and pointed with it when he spoke. That gives you an idea of the man's style. He was good-looking, he wore elegant clothes, and he talked smoothly.

Lee was full of surprises. He was a slave owner who hated slavery and spoke out against it. Though he was dashing and aristocratic, he got along well with rumpiled Samuel Adams. It was Richard Henry Lee (with Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson)

who organized the first Committee of Correspondence in Virginia. Lee came from a talented family. His brothers were all outspoken leaders. That means they said what they believed. So did his sister Hannah. She was furious when she was turned away from the voting polls because she was female. It was taxation without representation, said Hannah Lee.

As Lee and Washington rode toward Philadelphia, they were



Richard Henry Lee (above) and Patrick Henry were Virginia's best speakers.

Meet Some of the Delegates

Delegate PHILIP LIVINGSTON lived like a prince in New York. His family had been prominent in the colonies for five generations, but Phillip Livingston made his own fortune as a trader and privateer during the French and Indian War. In spite of his wealth, he identified with ordinary people and opposed the colony's royal governor and the Stamp Tax. Livingston believed in political and religious freedom.



JOSEPH HEWES, who came from North Carolina, was

opposed to separation from Britain—even when people in North Carolina told him to vote for it. Then, in a debate at the convention, something happened. "He started suddenly upright," reported John Adams, "and lifting up both his hands to Heaven, as if he had been in a trance, cried out, 'It is done! and I will abide by it.'" Hewes was now for independence!



STEPHEN HOPKINS, who was selected governor of Rhode Island 10 times, attended the Albany Congress in 1754 with

Benjamin Franklin, Sir William Johnson, and Hendrick. Stephen Hopkins helped Ben Franklin write a plan for a union of the colonies. Most Americans weren't ready for that in 1754. Now it seemed that they were.



Georgia's BUTTON GWINNETT had an unforgettable name and just a year to live. Gwinnett—Georgia's governor—was killed in a duel. Afterward, no one could remember what the duel was about—except honor, they said.



joined by other members of the Virginia delegation. Farmers along the way took off their hats and cheered. Then, six miles from Philadelphia, 500 soldiers on horseback appeared to escort them. By the time they entered the city, a military band was playing and infantrymen were marching—it was some parade.

The Virginians were the same seven men who had been at the first congress in 1774 (although some would leave almost immediately and others would take their place). Three were the best orators in the state, perhaps in the nation: Patrick Henry (who looked like a country boy, and seemed to want it that way), Richard Henry Lee (who asked this congress to declare for independence), and slim, graceful Edmund Pendleton (who debated with cool logic).

Virginia's Benjamin Harrison was the biggest man at the Convention. He was six feet four inches tall and was said to weigh 400 pounds. (Many of the delegates were big—it was normal to be heavy. Meals were large: soup, fish, meat, vegetables, potatoes, pie and cake, fruit and cheese—all at one sitting. John Adams, just five feet six inches tall, grew to weigh 275 pounds.) Harrison told a friend he would have come to this convention on foot, if he'd had to, rather than not come. He became governor of Virginia; his son and great-grandson became presidents of the United States.

Popular Peyton Randolph, another giant of a man, had been president of the First Continental Congress and was expected to preside again. But he did not stay long. Nor did Patrick Henry. They were needed in Williamsburg. Virginia's House of Burgesses had been called back into session. State business seemed more important to them than anything that might occur at this experimental gathering.

Peyton Randolph's cousin, who was just 33, came to take his place in Philadelphia. The cousin was a thoughtful, quiet man who was known to be a good writer. His name was Thomas Jefferson.

The Virginians were the crowd pleasers, but the congress as a whole was so extraordinary it would still inspire awe 200 years later.

The Adams cousins—Sam and John—were back from Massachusetts, along with rich John Hancock, who became president of this Second Continental Congress. John Witherspoon, a Scotsman who had needed persuading to come to America to head Princeton College, was a delegate from New Jersey. So was Francis Hopkinson, an inventor and scientist who wrote poetry, composed music, and painted.

Of Caesar Rodney, the delegate from Delaware, John Adams wrote: "[He] is the oddest looking man in the world; his face is not bigger than a large apple, yet there is a sense of fire, spirit, wit, and humor in his countenance."



Virginia's Benjamin Harrison when he was young and slim.



Thomas Jefferson was President Peyton Randolph's cousin.



Francis Hopkinson, a delegate from New Jersey.

Men of the Middle Colonies

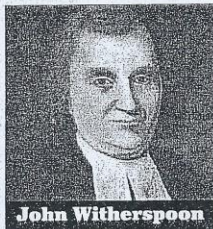


Benjamin Rush



Charles Carroll

Benjamin Rush served as an army surgeon during the Revolutionary War. He set up the first free clinic in America, and became the country's most famous medical professor. When Rush was studying medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland, he helped persuade John Witherspoon, a famous Scots clergyman, to come to America to be president of Princeton, where Rush had gone to college. Dr. Witherspoon was the



John Witherspoon

only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. Charles Carroll of Maryland was the last Signer to die (in 1832) and the only Roman Catholic.

Benjamin Rush was a doctor and a teacher. He'd learned medicine as an apprentice to a doctor and then had gone to Scotland to learn more. Rush had ideas that seemed strange to some people: he hated slavery, tobacco, and capital punishment. He thought girls and blacks should go to school and that they could learn as much as white boys. Rush was one of Pennsylvania's representatives, and remarkable. Pennsylvania's Ben Franklin was even more so.

No American was better known than Benjamin Franklin. He'd come to Philadelphia from Boston as a penniless boy and soon made his fortune as a printer and publisher. He made his fame as an inventor, scientist, philosopher, and political leader. Franklin had spent years in London as an agent for several of the colonies. No one tried harder than he to avoid a break with England. He proposed the idea of a British commonwealth of independent nations, each with its own parliament, but all with the same king. The leaders of Britain's Parliament rejected that idea and treated Franklin with contempt.

Franklin changed his thinking; he began to favor independence. He arrived home from England on May 5, 1775, just in time to attend the opening of this congress.

The following March he was off again, this time on a wild goose chase to Canada to try and convince the Canadians to join the other colonies and fight Britain. Franklin and the two Maryland delegates—Charles Carroll (said to be the wealthiest man in America) and Samuel Chase (a leader of the Sons of Liberty in Annapolis)—headed north. It was an exhausting trip, especially for 69-year-old Benjamin Franklin. (In Albany they noted that most people still spoke Dutch. In upper New York, they had to sleep in the snowy woods.) When they finally arrived at their destination, they couldn't persuade the Canadians to join the revolution. (Religion had something to do with it. Catholic Canada feared an alliance with the mostly Protestant colonies.)

In June Franklin was back at the Convention, where he was asked to serve (with John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) on a committee that was to write an important declaration. Some people say this was the most important political statement ever written. It was addressed to King George III. Hold on for a few chapters and I'll tell you all about it.

17 Naming a General



John Adams wrote, "I am determined this morning to make a direct motion that Congress should adopt the army before Boston."

At first the Continental Congress found itself in a strange situation. Americans were in fighting mood, but war had not been declared. Should they prepare for war? Should they work for peace? Could they do both?

People were calling for a Continental army. The minutemen who fought at Lexington and Concord were gathered near Boston. Others had come from the countryside with rifles and muskets. If someone didn't take charge they would all go back home.

The Continental Congress couldn't ignore the problem, especially after a letter arrived from the Boston Patriots pleading for the Congress to take over their forces.

John Adams spoke up. He called for a "Grand American Army" to be made up of volunteers from all of the colonies. The guns fired at Lexington and Concord might be heard next in Charleston, or Baltimore, or even in Philadelphia, Adams told the delegates. They must have shuddered, because they knew he spoke the truth.

In each of the colonies, citizen soldiers—militia—were ready to fight. Someone had to organize the militias and the minutemen into an army. A general was needed, said Adams.

John Hancock from Massachusetts believed he was the man for the job. He had done a bit of soldiering, and it was his money that was paying some of Congress's bills. So when John Adams stood up to nominate a general, almost everyone—especially John Hancock—thought it would be Hancock. But, as you know, John Adams

1775: Making a Revolution

April 19: The battles of Lexington and Concord.

May 10: Second Continental Congress convenes in Independence Hall, Philadelphia.

May 10: Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold capture Fort Ticonderoga.

June 15: George Washington is appointed head of the Continental army.

June 17: The battles of Bunker and Breed's Hills.

July 3: General Washington takes command of 17,000 men at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

July 26: The Continental Congress establishes a post office department and appoints Franklin postmaster general.

August 1: Tom Paine publishes an article in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* supporting women's rights.

August 23: George III declares the American colonies in rebellion.

As soon as the troubles with England were settled, the citizens of Charles Town, South Carolina, officially changed their city's name to Charleston. The capital was moved from there to Columbia.



always did what he thought was best for the nation—not what would make him popular at home.

“There is but one man in my mind for this important command,” said Adams, and Hancock looked pleased. “The gentleman I have in mind...is from Virginia.” When Adams said that, John Hancock’s face fell, and Washington, who realized he was the man from Virginia, rushed from the room.

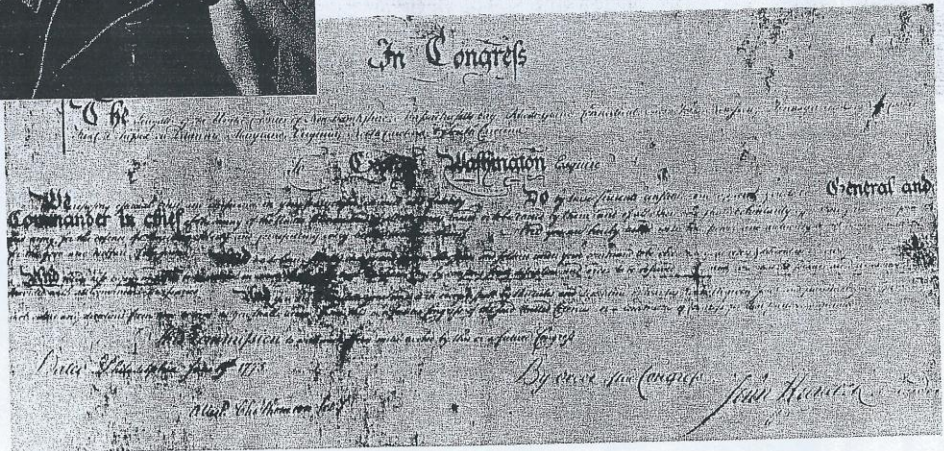
John Adams continued, “[His] skill as an officer...great talents and universal character would command the respect of America and unite...the Colonies better than any other person alive.” The congressmen agreed. George Washington was elected general unanimously.

He accepted—on one condition. He would take no salary. And that was part of Washington’s greatness. He was willing to serve without pay for a cause he thought noble.

Washington knew that the general’s job could lead to disaster. England was the greatest power in the world. Its army was well trained and supplied with the latest guns and cannons. Its navy was the finest in the world.

The American army was made up of a raggedy bunch of men—farmers, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths—who

John Hancock (left) was disappointed not to be put in charge of the army. But as president of the Second Continental Congress he signed the order naming Washington commander in chief (below).





Washington takes charge of the Continental army. He didn't have great skill as a military strategist. His experience with General Braddock in the French and Indian War was disastrous. What he did have was an ability to inspire others.

The Congress did pay Washington's expenses, though he didn't get a salary.

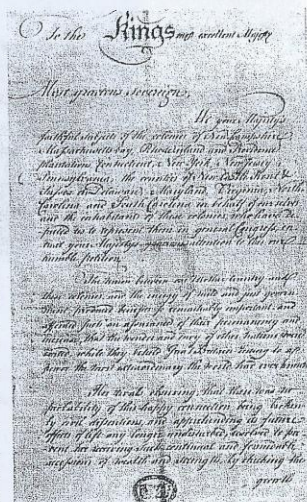
had few guns, no cannons, and no military training. George Washington knew that he had an almost impossible job. He said to Patrick Henry, "Remember, Mr. Henry, what I now tell you: from the day I enter upon the command of the American armies, I date my fall, and the ruin of my reputation."

And that, too, is part of what made Washington great. He was willing to do what he thought was right and important even if it might bring his own ruin. (Of course, we know it didn't bring his ruin. It made him famous for all time.)

George Washington set out for Boston to take charge of the soldiers gathered there. In the meantime, the Continental Congress tried once more to patch things up with England. They sent another petition to King George III. This one was called the Olive Branch Petition. An olive branch is a symbol of peace. The colonists asked the king to consider their problems. But George wouldn't even read the petition.

Now all this may seem strange. The colonists were petitioning England and at the same time they were getting ready to fight. But most members of the Congress weren't ready to break away from England. Those who were—like Washington and Adams and Jefferson—were wise enough not to rush the others. People thought of separation from England as different from revolution. They wanted a revolution. That word had a splendid sound to it. Everyone knew of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Englishmen and women were proud of that peaceful revolution and of the

George III would not read the Olive Branch Petition (below), which was the colonists' last-ditch attempt to get him to think about their problems.



The Second Continental Congress is best known for two things:

1. Naming George Washington as general of the American armies.
 2. Producing the Declaration of Independence. (It took more than a year to get that done.)
- The Congress did more than that, but those two accomplishments were enough to make any body famous. (Yes, a congress is a body—a legislative body.)

rights it gave them. For a long time many Americans thought they could have the rights of free people and still be part of the British empire. (And they might have, if the king and Parliament had been wiser.)

Here's something about the American Revolution that not many Americans know. Some English citizens were rooting for the Americans. They knew that George was not a good king, and they didn't like his ministers either. They realized that some of their own precious English rights were being threatened because the king wanted more power for himself. As it turned out, the American Revolution helped bring better government to England.

The ideas that came out of our revolution soon infected the whole world. Monarchs and despots everywhere began trembling over those ideas of freedom and equality. Some kings and queens would lose their jobs because of those ideas. In France they would lose their heads. But that's another story—and a good one, too—that you'll have to read on your own.

This book is about America. People here were getting angry and saying and doing wild things. Soon there would be no turning back.

A Society of Patriotic Ladies



A British cartoon sneered at the Edenton ladies.

If you ever happen to visit Edenton, North Carolina, you may see a big bronze teapot. It marks the place where Elizabeth King's house stood and where, in 1774, 51 women had a political meeting and agreed not to drink English tea. They said they would brew raspberry leaves for tea, and that they would also stop using English fabrics to make their clothes.

They weren't the only women drinking home brews. In Williamsburg, a dame dipped her goose quill into an inkpot and penned these lines:

*Farewell to the Tea Board, with its
gaudy Equipage,
Of Cups and Saucers, Cream
Bucket, Sugar Tongs,*

Then she went on with verses about how much she would miss drinking tea and gossiping with her friends around the tea table; but it was worth it, she concluded, because:

*LIBERTY'S the Goddess I would choose
To reign triumphant in America.*

18 The War of the Hills



A Pennsylvania infantryman in a spiffy uniform (looking handsome for the portrait painter).

England's Major John Pitcairn to the Earl of Sandwich (Boston, March 4, 1775):

I am satisfied that one active campaign, a smart action, and burning two or three of their towns, will set everything to rights. Nothing now, I am afraid, but this will ever convince those foolish bad people that England is in earnest.

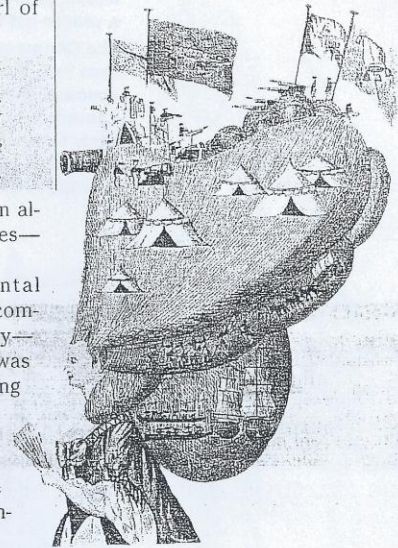
And so there was war. It seemed to begin almost by itself. Some people—on both sides—wanted to fight, and that was enough.

Two days after the Second Continental Congress appointed George Washington commander in chief of the Continental army—before anyone in Boston even knew there was a general—redcoats and Patriots were killing each other. They were fighting the first major battle of the Revolutionary War.

Two hills, Breed's and Bunker, lie just across the Charles River from Boston. Like Boston itself, they are on a peninsula connected to the mainland by a narrow neck: the Charlestown peninsula.

The British were asleep on that June night in 1775 when the Massachusetts soldiers began to dig fortifications on Breed's Hill. The Americans worked all night. They must have worked with great speed and ability, because by morning it was done. Those hills that looked out on Boston were filled with troops and trenches.

The British couldn't believe it. For months they had tried to get



A British cartoon called "Noddle Island" (a real island outside Boston) made a double joke about women's fashions and the mistakes of Bunker Hill. (*Noddle* is an old English word for head.)

Right: British naval forces in Boston harbor fire on Charlestown to back up the troops attacking the Patriots on foot.



Dr. Joseph Warren died on Breed's Hill. A Loyalist on-looker had this to say about him: "Since Adams went to Philadelphia, one Warren, a rascally patriot and apothecary of this town, has had the lead in the Provincial Congress....This fellow was happily killed, in coming out of the trenches the other day....You may judge what the herd must be like when such a one is their leader."

the colonists to work for them. They needed barracks, and there were other construction jobs to be done. But nothing got finished. Americans are lazy, the British thought. And then they saw this amazing feat, accomplished overnight. Breed's Hill was swarming with men and covered with impressive earthworks. Bunker Hill was dark with men. The British—especially the four British generals in Boston—were dumbfounded.

If they had thought a minute, they might have sent troops to capture the neck of the Charlestown peninsula—and perhaps trap the colonial soldiers. But they didn't think. They reacted.

Before long, barges filled with English soldiers were splashing their way from Boston, across the Charles River to Charlestown. Fifers played, drums pounded, and cannon blasted.

The British troops made ready to attack—head on. The Massachusetts men, dug in at the top of the hill, must have been scared—

really scared. They had no training for this; they were fighting Europe's best soldiers; and they had very little gunpowder. They knew they had to use that gunpowder carefully. They had few bayonets; the British soldiers all had bayonets. The American officers told the volunteer soldiers to wait until the British soldiers were almost on top of them before they fired. "Wait until you see the whites of their eyes," they said.

And that is what the Massachusetts men did. Can you imagine the strain? It is said that those who saw the Battle of Bunker Hill never forgot the sounds, the smells, the ferocity, and the fear of that day. Pretend you are up there with them on the top of Breed's Hill. Watch the redcoats advance toward you, bayonets pointed. Don't panic, and don't fire until you hear the order to do so.



It was eerie, they say. All those soldiers climbing and no one firing. Then, all at once, the hills seemed to explode. Bullets tore through the red coats and left the ground covered with bodies and blood. The British would not consider defeat or retreat. They landed more troops, and again the American fighters held their fire until it could hurt the most. The English soldiers kept coming, and falling, until "some had only eight or nine men a company left; some only three, four or five."

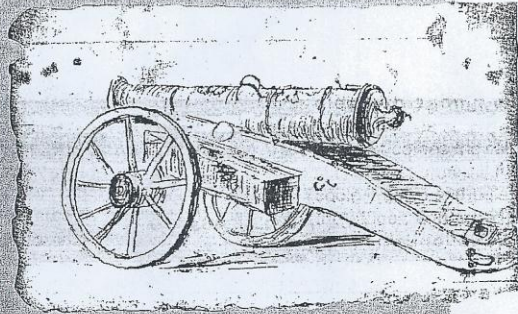
Suddenly it was quiet. This time the British made it to the top of the hill. The Americans were gone. They had run out of gunpowder. The British captured Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill, too. But what a price for two unimportant hills! More than 1,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded that day. The Americans lost 441 men.

Dr. Joseph Warren was one of those who died. He was a leader of the Boston Patriots. They say he was cool and brave under fire and that he inspired those around him. The same kinds of things are said of the handsome Major John Pitcairn, who fought for the Royal British Marines at Bunker Hill and didn't live to tell of it.

Opposite, below: an artist's impression of Bunker Hill: "a battle that should never have been fought on a hill that should never have been defended."

Firing a Revolutionary Cannon

Firing a Revolutionary War cannon isn't easy; six or seven men are needed to do the job. And it is dangerous; sometimes the monsters explode. Firing begins when the officer in charge shouts, "Worm!" A wormer—a soldier with a long, corkscrew-shaped iron worm—twists the worm and cleans out the barrel. Next comes the call "Sponge!" and a sponger sticks a wet sheepskin into the gun barrel. That cools it down and puts out sparks. "Load!" says the officer, and a bag of powder is stuffed into the barrel, followed by a big iron ball, or grapeshot (clusters of small balls that scatter with great force, killing or wounding men over a broad area). "Ram!" Now a rammer, holding a pole with a wooden disk on its end, pushes and packs the ammunition. "Pick and prime!" A gunner sticks a pick into the barrel and breaks open the ammunition sack. He adds powder in a vent hole, and puts a pinch of powder on top of the cannon barrel. "Give!" shouts the officer, and the gunner lights a slow fuse.



"Fire!" The gunner uses the fuse to light the powder on top of the barrel. The flame skips through the vent and sets off the powder inside the cannon. The ball explodes out of the gun's mouth at a speed of about 1,000 feet a second. *Watch out!*

Why Did I Go?

Captain Preston, why did you go to the Concord fight, the 19th April, 1775?" Judge Mel-len Chamberlain asked old Captain Levi Preston, years after the battle.

"Why did I go?" repeated Preston.

"Yes, my histories tell me that you men of the Revolution took up arms against intolerable oppression."

"What were they? Oppressions? I didn't feel them."

"What," said the judge, "were you not oppressed by the Stamp Act?"

L.P.: I never saw one of those stamps...

M.C.: Well, what then about the tea tax?

L.P.: Tea tax! I never drank a drop of the stuff; the boys threw it all overboard...

M.C.: Well, then, what was the matter? and what did you mean in going to fight?

L.P.: Young man, what we meant in going for those redcoats was this: we had always governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn't mean we should.

19 Fighting Palm Trees



Lord North didn't want to run a war. "On military matters," he said, "I speak ignorantly and therefore without effect."

"What is all this fuss about a little tax on tea?" said some people in England. "Those American colonists are an ungrateful bunch," said others. "Punish them! Show them Britain's power!" said still others.

Englishmen and women argued about what to do with the colonies. William Pitt said, "You cannot but respect their cause." Pitt said it was the spirit of liberty that was making the colonists protest against British taxes. It was "the same spirit which established...that no subject of England shall be taxed but by his own consent." Pitt, who had practically run the British government back during the French and Indian War, was retired and ill. But he was still a powerful speaker and a friend of America.

King George didn't much like Pitt. It was Lord North who now held power, and Lord North believed the colonies should be taught a lesson. Most English people and most members of Parliament seemed to agree with Lord North.

A Mr. Van stood up in the House of Commons (Parliament has two houses, like our Congress) and said that he was "of the opinion that the town of Boston ought to be knocked about their ears and destroyed." Then he continued, "you will never meet with that proper obedience to the laws of this country until you have destroyed that nest of hornets."

But Boston was a hornet's nest that wasn't easy to destroy. "What about Charleston?" King George's ministers asked. They had heard that some Liberty Boys in Charleston were gathering under a tree and making trouble. A few shots from British cannons and they would run, said the king's men. The mighty British navy would

scare those upstart American provincials in South Carolina, they added. And so a fleet of armed ships and seven regiments of soldiers were sent across the ocean.

An unfinished fort stood on Sullivan's Island in Charleston's harbor. It had double walls of palmetto logs placed 16 feet apart. Sand was packed between the palmetto walls. But only the front of the fort was completed, the sides were half done, and the back was open. General Charles Lee, who had been sent south by General Washington, took one look and called it a "slaughter pen." He suggested that the fort be abandoned.

South Carolina's governor, John Rutledge (whom some people were calling Dictator John because he always seemed to get his way), insisted that the fort be defended. Colonel William Moultrie, who was placed in command of the fort, believed he could do it.

The British ships sailed grandly into the harbor—and ran aground. That means that some of them got stuck on shoals (which are sandbars). Their ships' pilots didn't know the harbor and its safe passageways. Since they were stuck anyway, they decided they might as well destroy the fort, unload their men, and take Sullivan's Island.

And so they blasted their cannons—and then something unbelievable happened. Their shells stuck in the sides of the fort. The soft palmetto wood, and the thick sand walls, absorbed the shells as a sponge might. The walls just held on to the cannonballs. The British naval experts had never seen anything like this. And the soldiers who were supposed to march onto the island? Well, the British had been misinformed about the depth of the water. It was too deep, and the men couldn't get to the island. It was "unspeakable mortification," said a British general. And what about those ships, stuck on the shoals? What kind of targets did they make? You guessed it—perfect targets.

To get on with this story—when the British finally limped out of Charleston harbor, not one of their ships was undamaged. Some were



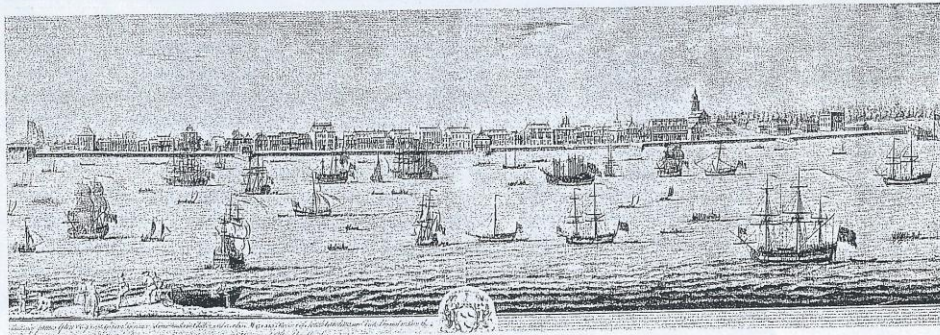
The redcoats, led by Sir Henry Clinton (left), failed to take Fort Sullivan, defended by Colonel Moultrie (below).

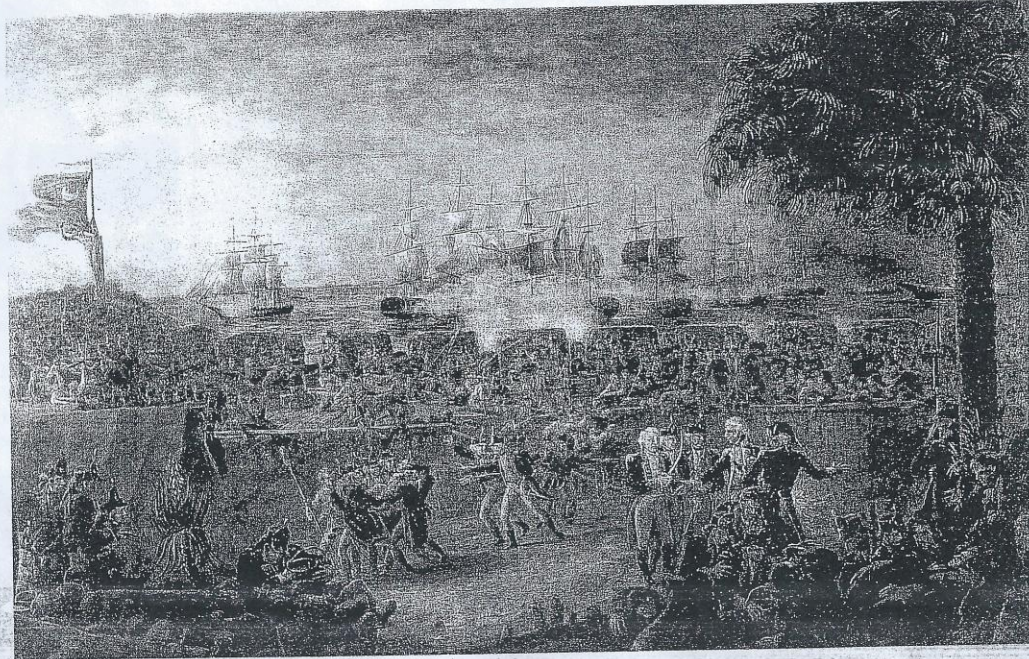


Now do you know why South Carolina's flag has a palmetto tree on it?

Mortification is distressing humiliation.

Charleston harbor (below) was full of sandbanks, which many of the British boats got stranded on when they tried to sail in.





Moultrie's guns turned the British ships into a slaughterhouse. The flagship *Bristol* was hit 70 times.

A London journal, the *Annual Register*, commented on the disaster at Sullivan's Island: "To suppose that the Generals...should have been 19 days in that small island, without ever examining until the very instant of action the nature of the only passage by which they could render service to their

destroyed. Here is a poem describing the battle, said to be written by Sir Peter Parker, who was in charge of the British fleet at Charleston. See if you think Sir Peter actually wrote it. (Before you begin, you need to know that Falstaff and Pistol were comic characters—who

talked tougher than they acted—from plays by William Shakespeare. The *Bristol* was the name of one of Sir Peter's ships.)

friends and fellows, fulfill the purpose of their landing and answer the ends for which they were embarked in the expedition would seem a great defect in military prudence and circumspection." Which was a long way of saying that the British forces in Charleston didn't have a clue about what they were doing.

*My Lords, with your leave
An account I will give
That deserves to be written in meter;
For the rebels and I
Have been pretty nigh—
Faith! almost too nigh for Sir Peter.*

