

May During the Revolution

1775

Like a stone dropped into a pond, the ripples from the Battles at Lexington and Concord continued through the month of May 1775.

Preparing for War

On May 1st the New York Committee of 100 recommended that every man procure a weapon and train himself as a soldier. To the south in Virginia, Bucks County begins forming militias on May 8th. On May 15th the Continental Congress resolves to place the colonies in a state of military preparedness. The following day the Pennsylvania legislature issues a resolution stating its every man's duty to resist British repression and form defense associations. By May 28th some 2,000 men are doing daily military exercises in Philadelphia.

On May 11th Georgia Patriots seize gunpowder from the Royal magazine in Savannah.

The Royal Governors

As the people formed their own militias and councils, the Royal Governors send grim reports to the second Earl of Dartmouth, George Legge, who was the Secretary of State for the Colonies. On May 3rd Legge instructs North Carolina Governor Martin to raise loyalist militia. Before the orders could even arrive, on May 6th the Governor of New Jersey (Ben Franklin's son) sends a letter stating the events in Massachusetts have greatly reduced the chances of reconciliation. Franklin himself then writes his son encouraging him to support independence. The New York Provincial Congress then assumes control of Colonial government from Lt Governor Colden on May 17th.

On May 18th Governor Martin responds to the Earl's orders by reporting he has little chance of stopping the people from forming their own government or raising troops. Less than two weeks later, on May 29th, Governor Martin flees North Carolina for the safety of HMS *Cruzier*.

Ticonderoga.



On May 2nd the Committee of Public safety in Cambridge appoints Benedict Arnold to a secret mission to capture Fort Ticonderoga. He left immediately, reaching the Massachusetts border by May 6th. There he learns Ethan Allen is already heading to the fort. After catching Allen on May 9th, and getting him to accept joint command, on the 10th the two patriots capture the fort in a bold night raid.

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Two days later patriot forces under the command of Seth Warner (who answered to Arnold) captured the smaller fort at Crown Point directly North of Ticonderoga. Finally on May 17th troops under the command of Arnold raided Fort St Jean (St. John Canada) capturing the largest ship on Lake Champlain the HMS Royal George.

The capture of these locations electrified the people of Quebec. Word reached the 2nd Continental Congress within days and on May 29th Congress urges Canadians to join the revolution against Britain.

Boston

Throughout the month the British work to strengthen their position in the city. On May 19th six transports full of British Marines arrived in the harbor. These additional troops required supplies and thus British foragers landed on Grape Island on May 21st. Patriot militia was waiting and the British could only seize 3 tons of Hay.

Four days later, additional reinforcements lead by generals Burgoyne, Clinton and Howe arrive in the harbor. British marines were then sent out to both Noodle and Hogg Island to protect the supplies and livestock on these islands. The Americans then moved on May 27th to remove what livestock and supplies they could and destroy what couldn't. The British responded and the Battle of Chelsea Creek was fought. The British got no supplies for their trouble and even lost a schooner to the Americans.

1776

France



On May 2nd, King Louis XVI of France agrees to loan one million livres to Hortalez & Cie. This company was a front specifically organized to provide funds and military stores to the American cause. Ten days later Louis orders a naval squadron to patrol the English Channel. In addition to documenting the type and location of British ships within the channel, they are to passively protect any American or neutral ship from British pursuers.

Unaware of this on May 18th the Committee of Secret Correspondence dispatches ships to the French West Indies to purchase 10,000 muskets. The ships are also to learn whether the French forces there would act with, or against, the colonies. Eleven days later on May 29th a sloop arrives in Charleston with 10,000 lbs of gunpowder. The ship's captain reports that French West Indies ports are open to America with French warships protecting rebel vessels from the British patrols.

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Canada

On May 2nd 1776 the American forces besieging Quebec learned that General Burgoyne and several thousand troops (including 2,000 Hessians) had arrived from Nova Scotia. Within days 3,000 troops arrived to reinforce Quebec City. The Americans, decimated by Small Pox, began withdrawing almost immediately. The invasion of Canada by America was over even if Congress was in denial.



On May 16th Congress asks George Washington to come to Philadelphia to consult with that body "upon such measures as may be necessary for the carrying on the ensuing campaign." The campaign in question was Canada. On May 22nd Congress voted to give General Schuyler authority to take any measures for supplying the troops in Canada with provisions. Two days later after conferring with Generals Washington, Gates, and Mifflin, Congress votes to inform the commanding officer in Canada to "contest every foot of the ground" and especially prevent the enemy from ascending the St. Lawrence River. Problem was Schuyler's poor health made it impossible for him to command anything.

The Carolinas

On May 3rd 1776 British Commodore Parker and General Clinton, with twenty transports, of troops arrive off Wilmington. Two days later Clinton issued a proclamation denouncing the "wicked rebellion" while offering a full pardon to all persons except General Robert Howe and Cornelius Harnett. All the time his spies were determining the strength of the troops and defenses of Wilmington.

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In Philadelphia, on May 7th Congress authorizes North Carolina to raise a sixth battalion for the continental service and to direct the appropriate committee to furnish the colony with twelve field guns, three tons of powder, and a medicine chest for each battalion.

Finally, on May 30th, Clinton decides that North Carolina was not a good choice for a military post and instead decides to attack Charleston. The next day expresses sent from Christ Church Parish in South Carolina warned authorities in Charleston that a large British fleet has been observed off Dewee's Island, then about twenty miles north of the city.



Congress



Throughout the month of May Congress grappled with the issue of Independence. On May 15th The Virginia Convention instructs its delegates to the Continental Congress to propose "to that respectable body to declare the United Colonies free and independent states, absolved from all allegiance to, or dependence upon, the crown or parliament of Great Britain. Four days later the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly orders its delegation in Congress to desist from voting for independence. Then on May 20th Lyman Hall and Button Gwinnett of Georgia take their seats in the Continental Congress with instructions to use their own judgment in voting on any measures.

On May 21st The Maryland Convention instructs its recently reelected delegation to Congress, to abstain from any measures leading to independence without the

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express authority of the Convention. On May 25th The Massachusetts General Assembly send instructions to its delegation in Congress that the colony will support a declaration of independence "with their lives and the remnant of their fortunes."

As if all these conflicting orders from the colonies weren't enough to occupy Congress, on May 27th Indian deputies of the Six Nations hold an audience with Congress. The tribal delegates stage a military parade with Continental troops and soldiers from the local Association.

1777

Diplomacy

On May 1st Arthur Lee replaces Benjamin Franklin as the US representative to the Spanish court. On May 7th Ralph Izard replaces Franklin as the commissioner to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. And on May 9th William Lee is appointed US Representative to Vienna and Berlin. These changes give Franklin the time to more effectively serve as the head of the US delegation to France.

Spanish Support

On May 2nd, Lieutenant William Linn arrives at Fort Henry in Western Virginia with 98 barrels of gunpowder. The gunpowder was part of aid supervised by Bernardo de Gálvez, Spanish governor of New Orleans.

Clinton, Howe and Burgoyne



After defeating the American forces in Canada, on May 6th General Burgoyne (depicted) returns to Quebec after meeting Lord Germain in London. He carries orders placing the troops in Canada under his command for the purpose of invading New York. The goal is a link up with General Howe's forces in New York City, isolating New England from the other colonies.

Howe in turn had been feeling out Washington's forces in New Jersey. Howe believed Philadelphia was vulnerable to capture, as long as he kept Washington at Morristown. The various skirmishes and feints Howe set up eventually caused Washington to move his troops in late May to Middlebrook Valley where he could engage any land assault Howe might mount towards Philadelphia. Unknown to Washington Howe was finishing plans to move his troops by ship to the Chesapeake Bay and approach Philadelphia from the west.

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Creek Indians

Following several raids into Georgia from Florida by Thomas Brown, an expedition was formed to attack St Augustine. One part of the Patriot force was some 109 Georgia cavalry under the command of Colonel John Baker. As the cavalry moved towards St. Augustine, on May 14th, Brown sent some Creek Indians to steal Baker's horses. The following day Baker's men recovered the horses, but the lost time now made him vulnerable to an approaching British force. Baker tried to move his men to Thomas Creek to await his own reinforcements. Instead he fell into an ambush set by the Indians and loyalist rangers on May 17th. A third of his men were captured or killed, disrupting the planned attack on St. Augustine.

1778

May 1, 1778: Engagement at Crooked Billet, Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania militia in Bucks county had been a thorn to the British ever since the capture of Philadelphia the previous year. If General Howe could clear the militia out, then loyalist farmers would be safe to bring their produce into Philadelphia. It would also cut supplies from Washington's units as well.

On learning the militia was concentrated at Crooked Billet, a British force of over 700 men under the command of John Graves Simcoe was sent out. The Continentals were caught by surprise, losing 36 casualties to nine for the British. But they were able to withdraw insuring that the British did not take control of Bucks County. This failure added to the reasons for the British withdraw from the city in June.



In the days following Washington became even more convinced the British would soon abandon Philadelphia. On May 18th Washington sent out Lafayette (depicted) with a force of 2,000 men to recon British positions. On May 19th Lafayette deployed his troops at Barren Hill, unaware that a force of 5,000 troops had been sent from Philadelphia to take his command.

The British believed they could entrap Lafayette against the Schuylkill River. Lafayette however was informed of their movements and also knew of another road back to Matson's ford. Through a series of delaying attacks, Lafayette foiled the British plans and escaped across the river with only

three casualties.

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May-September, 1779

Sullivan's Expedition



Major General John Sullivan receives orders from George Washington for the “total destruction and devastation” of the lands of the Six Nations in upstate New York. For the previous two years the Mohawks had been raiding and massacring settler communities in New York. The worst was the Cherry Valley Massacre in Nov 1778.

Sullivan completely ravages the lands of the Iroquois to such an extent that they never recover. With their food supplies destroyed, the Indians are forced to winter outside Ft. Niagara, where many perish from scurvy.

At the same time Sullivan is attacking the Iroquois, another force is attacking the Shawnee town of Chillicothe Ohio. This action significantly reduced Indian attacks

into Kentucky for the remainder of the revolution.

May 9 to the 11th 1779

British forces led by Major General Edward Matthew and Commodore George Collier attacked targets all across the Chesapeake Bay beginning with Fort Nelson and Norfolk. At Norfolk they capture large quantities of both war materiel and tobacco while destroying numerous coastal vessels and two French merchantmen. They then set fire to the port rendering it useless to the Patriots for the rest of the war.

May 10, 1779

Embittered because the Continental Congress was slow in recognizing his achievements between 1775-1777 and charged with abusing his authority while in command of Philadelphia, Benedict Arnold secretly opens negotiations with Sir Henry Clinton, the British commander in New York. Initially Clinton did not trust him, but on May 23rd Arnold sends intelligence on Washington's Continental Army. The information proves useful convincing Clinton that Arnold sincerely wanted to change sides.



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1780

South Carolina

By May 1st Charleston had been under siege for over two weeks. The hopes for salvation rested on Patriot units outside the city opening one of the land routes. On May 6th a company of Virginia Dragoons crossed the Santee River at Lenud's Ferry. After taking some British prisoners they were about to return across the Ferry when Tarleton's legion intercepted them. 41 Patriots were killed or wounded to Tarleton's two.



Charleston surrendered six days later, on May 12, 1780. The British captured in excess of 3,000 Patriots while losing 250 killed and wounded. As word of the defeat spread, American units at Camden and Ninety-Six surrendered without a fight. Soon there was only one organized Patriot unit within the colony, the 3rd Virginia, commanded by Col Abraham Buford.

On May 29th British Colonel Banastre Tarleton catches up with the 3rd Virginia at the Waxhaws. As his cavalry charge breaks the Continental line, Tarleton's horse is killed and he is pinned under it. Thus when a flag of surrender is raised his men don't recognize it and continue the killing. This brings about the term "Tarleton's Quarter," which in the eyes of the Patriots is no quarter at all. The Continentals lose 113 killed and 203 captured, the great majority of these prisoners being wounded. British losses total 19 men and 31 horses killed or wounded. Though a military defeat, the Waxhaws becomes a propaganda victory for the Continentals as they exploit the "massacre" that ensued.

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The Mississippi

As South Carolina fell to the British, a mixed loyalist and Native force approached the town of St. Louis and its fort San Carlos. The Spanish commander had been told well in advance that the British force was coming and had constructed a strong defense tower surrounded by trenches. He had also been able to procure additional cannons and 150 trained “French” militiamen from Valles Mines.



When the fighting began on May 25th many of the warriors faltered and withdrew. Those that stayed, only stayed until American forces under George Rogers Clark arrived at nearby Cahokia.

1781

Florida



After a two month siege Bernardo Gálvez takes Pensacola Florida from the British on May 8th 1781. There are now no British ports on the Gulf of Mexico, which tremendously hampers British naval operations in the Caribbean.

Galvez reinforces the entrance to the harbor to insure the British cannot easily retake the port and then takes his prisoners back to Havana. These he then exchanges for Spanish prisoners held in New York City. This marks the high point in direct Spanish military assistance to the Revolution.

South Carolina

As Pensacola falls to Galvez, troops under the command of Light Horse Henry Lee and Francis Marion arrive at the confluence of the Congaree and the Wateree Rivers in S. Carolina. There, on the Mount Joseph Plantation they besiege what the British call Fort

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Motte, the large mansion of the widow Rebecca Motte. The British had dug trenches and erected palisades around the mansion, turning it into a fort. Lady Motte in turn was evicted by the Loyalists and was living out of the plantation's Overseers house.



On arrival Lee and Marion demanded the British commander surrender. The British commander in turn believed a relief column from Charleston would soon arrive and thus rejected the offer. The next day Rebecca Motte (depicted) demanded to speak with Lee and Marion. Both men expected her to plead for the sparing of her home. Instead she brought instructions on how the Generals could set fire to the mansion roof: she even provided the incendiary arrows. Thus on May 12th the Patriots launched their attack. As the arrows set the roof on fire the British found they could not fight the fire and repulse the Americans. They surrendered quickly allowing the Americans the chance to then save Rebecca Motte's home. The following day she gave a banquet for the officers: of both sides.

After eating well at Rebecca Motte's table, General Henry Lee liberated one of the fort cannons and rode to nearby Orangeburg where Thomas Sumter waited. There they laid siege to Fort Granby, which was guarded by some 350 loyalist and Hessian troops. The commander, Major Andrew Maxwell, however was more interested in extorting plunder from the populace than winning military honor. During a truce he offers to surrender the fort to General Lee if he, Maxwell, is allowed to leave with his plunder. After some haggling, Lee agrees to the proposition and Maxwell departs the fort with two wagonloads of personal loot. A valuable position, with ammunition and provisions, thus falls to the Continentals without the loss of a man. Even the Hessians are valuable: General Lee exchanges them for Patriots held in a prison ship in Charleston harbor.