

# Glorious Cause: Colonies Revolt

**James H. Hillestad** musters nine battle dioramas to illustrate key milestones of the American Revolution.

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JAMES H. HILLESTAD



The action at Concord's North Bridge was memorialized by Ralph Waldo Emerson as 'the shot heard round the world.'

Among the countless sources I consulted for this article, Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, published in 2007, stood out. Its title captures the ideal of government by consent of the governed. This article summarizes the events of the 'Glorious Cause' that led to the creation of the United States.

## The Background

The 1763 Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War. In accordance with terms of the treaty, France was forced to relinquish its colonial assets in North America to Britain. For the American subjects of the British monarch, resolution of the war brought an end to decades of intermittent warfare with the French in Canada. The defeat of the French had made the Thirteen Colonies independent in all but the official sense of the word. It is conceivable that Americans might have been content to continue as subjects within an imperial

system. But under that system, the colonists had been largely ignored by the government in London.

However, in 1763, the British government found itself with a tremendous debt of about £130 million

– the equivalent of about £26 billion today. Some £70 million of the total represented the cost of the French war effort. Added to this was the expense of garrisoning and administering the newly expanded British Empire. In an attempt



The 'Spirit of '76'.

to recoup this outlay, new taxes were levied on the American Colonies. First came the Sugar Act in 1764, followed by the Stamp Act the following year, the Townshend Acts in 1767, the Tea Act in 1773 and at last the Coercive Acts in 1774.

Enough was enough. Many colonists believed that the British government had no right to tax Americans who were not represented in Parliament. "No taxation without representation!" became the hue and cry. Both sides drifted inexorably toward war, and America advanced to the threshold of a revolution.

## Lexington and Concord 1775

Frustrated by rebellious acts by colonists in America, King George III directed General Thomas Gage to suppress rebels in Massachusetts. On 18 April 1775, 700 British troops set out from Boston to Lexington, a distance of sixteen miles. Their mission included trying to arrest rebel leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams. When the

## Washington Takes Command

In June 1775, George Washington was appointed commanding general of the Continental Army. Born in Virginia in 1732, he came to prominence as an American hero during the 1754-1763 French and Indian War – though he lost every major battle.

Redcoats reached Lexington, they were confronted by seventy Minutemen. Shots were exchanged. Eight militiamen lay dead and ten were wounded. Only one British soldier was injured.

The British force then proceeded to Concord, six miles distant, to confiscate a cache of hidden weapons. At Concord's North Bridge, they were met by almost 500 Massachusetts militiamen. The British suffered losses and began the long walk back to Boston. By now, the militia force numbered 1,000 men. They deployed in the woods and behind stone walls on either side of what would become known as Battle Road. The action along the road became a gauntlet, which is depicted in one of several American Revolutionary War dioramas

General George Washington went on to become the first US president.

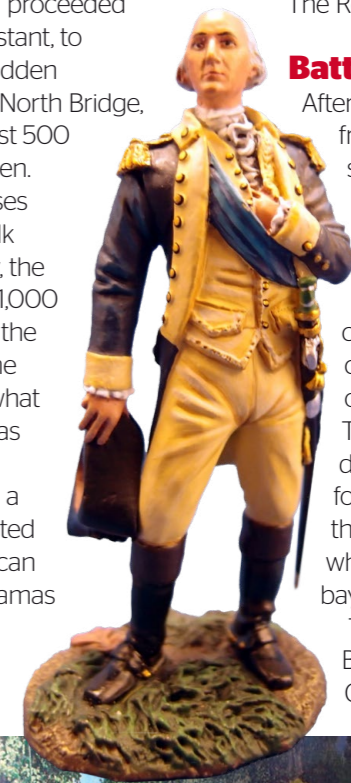
that I have created using 54mm painted metal figures produced by W. Britain. By the time the British troops returned to Boston, they had suffered a staggering 273 casualties.

The Revolution had begun.

## Battle of Boston 1775

After the humiliating retreat from Concord, the British settled down in Boston. They became besieged by Colonial forces positioned in Cambridge and Charlestown. The rebels cut off all supplies from the countryside. Under the overall command of General Thomas Gage, the British decided to break out. The focus of their attack would be the Charlestown Peninsula, which lay 550 yards across the bay from Boston.

The peninsula had three hills: Bunker, Breed's and Morton's. Colonel William Prescott was →



Colonial Minutemen harry British forces retreating to Boston along what became known as Battle Road.

→ instructed to lead 1,400 Colonials to dig in and fortify Bunker Hill. But at the last minute, it was decided to amend the orders and march onto Breed's Hill. On the afternoon of 17 June, the British landed 2,000 troops on the peninsula and began an assault on Breed's Hill, as depicted in another one of my dioramas. Their scarlet uniforms made them easy targets for the Colonials. Prescott ordered his men, "Don't fire 'til you see the whites of their eyes!" But nothing could save their outnumbered defence, and they were overrun. The British, however, lost more than 1,000 men, the cream of their army. Colonial losses amounted to 400 men. Gage withdrew his troops and subsequently evacuated Boston. There was no turning back now for the Patriots. The notion of an independent American nation was no longer just a dream.

**Independence Declared 1776**

In drafting the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson



A Continental Congress committee works on drafting the Declaration of Independence on 2 July 1776.

offered this characterisation of the situation that the rebels faced: 'Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.' That was Jefferson's description of the quite remarkable feat of making an explosion happen in slow motion.

Embarking on the Revolution was a calculated decision which evolved over many months. This measured, creative act of statesmanship was key to helping the new United States avoid the worst of the bloody, chaotic havoc caused by subsequent revolutionary movements in France, Russia and China.

The document was adopted in



Redcoats assault Colonial forces entrenched on Breed's Hill.

Philadelphia on 4 July 1776. The Declaration was a formal explanation – to the colonists themselves and to the world – of why the Continental Congress had voted to declare independence from Great Britain.

**Washington Crosses the Delaware 1776**

The winter of 1776 was a bleak one for the Continental Army. The troops under the command of General George Washington had experienced a series of defeats. Morale dropped to a discouraging low. Washington formulated a plan to cross the Delaware River and advance on Trenton in New

Jersey. On the night of 25-26 December 1776, some 2,400 troops navigated the ice-choked river and achieved a decisive victory. Their Christmas-time capture of nearly 1,000 Hessian mercenaries stunned the British public and government and rejuvenated the American cause.

**Brandywine Creek 1777**

The largest battle of the war took place at Brandywine Creek in Pennsylvania on 11 September 1777. About 33,000 soldiers were engaged in combat from sunrise until after dark. British General Sir William Howe was intent on occupying Philadelphia, the rebel capital. Washington was intent on stopping him. He chose to make his stand along the Brandywine Creek, 25 miles southwest of the city.

Howe skilfully outflanked American forces concentrated at Chadd's Ford, then attacked upstream at Jefferis Ford. Fighting centred on a hill, where the Quaker Birmingham Meetinghouse stood. It is the focus of one of my dioramas. The outflanked Americans were unable to withstand the British assault and retreated in disarray. Washington and his army spent that winter at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania. The British occupied Philadelphia.

Though Washington's army withdrew, it remained unconquered and full of fight.

**Saratoga 1777**

After suffering defeats in 1776 at the New Jersey battles of Trenton and Princeton, the British embarked on a plan to vanquish the Northern Department of the American Army. The plan called for three British armies headed by General John Burgoyne to advance along major waterways to converge on Albany, New York. They would then go on to invade New England and reoccupy Boston. However, all three forces failed to reach Albany.

American troops commanded by General Horatio Gates entrenched on Bemis Heights, just south of Old Saratoga. Thus Burgoyne, now with only one of his three armies, faced 9,000



American and British forces clash at Freeman's Farm in the opening phase of the Battle of Saratoga.



W. Britain figure of Thomas Jefferson.

Colonials, including 500 riflemen led by the legendary Colonel Daniel Morgan, during September and October 1777. The British initially ran into Continental infantry and Morgan's riflemen, who were concealed in woods near a clearing known as Freeman's Farm, the focus of a diorama. The overall fighting raged for almost a month. The British were routed. Burgoyne surrendered his command of 5,791 officers and men, along with 35 cannons, on 17 October.

The outcome of the Battle of Saratoga was to have repercussions far beyond being the first substantial victory of the war for the American cause. The French threw off their cloak of neutrality. Soon

the greater part of Europe, including Spain and Holland, declared war against the British. Saratoga became known as the 'Turning Point of the Revolution'. Historians rank it among the most important fifteen battles fought throughout world history.

**Clash at Newtown 1779**

In early 1779, the Continental Congress instructed Washington to send one-third of his army into north-eastern Pennsylvania and lower New York. Its purpose was to chastise unfriendly tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy, whose warriors had been attacking frontier settlements for the past two years.

On 18 June 1779, under the command of Major General John Sullivan, the American expedition set off over the



Continental Army Major General John Sullivan exacts retribution from the Iroquois at Newtown.

There was no turning back now for the Patriots. The notion of an independent American nation was no longer just a dream.



Washington crosses the icy Delaware River to launch a Christmas-time attack on Trenton.



**American assault troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton try to capture the British-held Redoubt #10 at Yorktown.**

→ Pocono Mountains and headed for the Wyoming Valley, five miles north of Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. Their mission was the total destruction and devastation of Iroquois villages. Sullivan's expedition travelled up the Chemung River into New York's Southern Tier, where they approached the Indian settlement Newtown. A vicious battle erupted with the Iroquois, who were supported by British regulars and rangers. They were routed by the triumphant Americans. By nightfall, only smoke and ashes marked the site of Newtown.

**Yorktown 1781**

In May 1781, Washington and French General Comte de Rochambeau met to formulate their common campaign against the British. They originally planned to attack General Henry Clinton in New York City. But when his deputy, General Lord Cornwallis, moved south into Yorktown, Virginia, they changed their focus. If the French fleet could defeat the British Royal Navy in Chesapeake Bay, Cornwallis and his 7,000-man army would become isolated in Yorktown.

On 21 August, French Admiral François

Joseph Paul de Grasse defeated the British fleet under Admiral Thomas Graves outside the bay. American and French troops arrived to lay siege to Yorktown on 28 September. The town was surrounded by earthen defences with redoubts festooned with bristling obstacles. The focus of my related diorama is Redoubt #10, manned by British troops, including Scottish Highlanders.

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton led an American assault force that stormed the fortifications. The Americans and their French allies, who also captured nearby Redoubt #9, were then positioned to deploy artillery to bombard the British troops in Yorktown. Cornwallis surrendered on 19 October 1781. Britain sued for peace soon thereafter.

It was a clear victory for the Patriots after years of setbacks and defeats. Just two years later, in 1783, the war was concluded. The Americans had realized the dream of independence — and were on the way toward achieving an entirely new form of government, based on the will of the governed. **END**



**British troops advance to defeat Washington's army in the Battle of Brandywine.**

**ABOUT THE WRITER**

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