

THE FRENCH & INDIAN WAR

The French and Indian War, also called the Seven Years War by the English, was part of a major struggle between European powers. It took place both across the continents of Europe and North America and involved France, England, Russia, Prussia, Spain, and others. The war began because Britain felt they needed to prevent the French from gaining control over trade and territories that the British thought were rightfully theirs. In North America, combat took place over a large span of land and included battles in Canada, through Western Pennsylvania, and all the way to the Mississippi River. This war included the first major military experience of George Washington and the first use of colonial militia (An army or other fighting force that is made up of non-professional citizen fighters). It ended with the British control of North America. However, the French and Indian War was also very expensive and contributed to the conflict between the British and their American colonies.

The War, which began in 1754, was the fourth colonial conflict between England and France. Unlike the three previous conflicts, this one began in America. French and British soldiers butted heads over control of the Ohio Valley. The Ohio Valley was important because it provided fur traders access to cities and ports on the East Coast. This business was very profitable. Another desired territory was the Mississippi River Valley, the entry point to the frontier in the west.

Troops were sent out to protect valuable territories from French control. Early on, a squadron of British and American soldiers, led by a bold but unknown twenty-two year old named George Washington, attacked the French at Fort Duquesne (Du-cane). Soon after the attack, though, Washington's troops surrendered to the French. The French also defeated a second British military force squadron. When this news reached England, a war was officially declared. Americans would call this the French and Indian War.

The first phase of this war was very unsuccessful for Britain. When their troops attempted attacks on the French, they ended in defeat over and over again. The British were afraid of the French and their Indian allies because their attacks were brutal and they burned and destroyed settlements in their path. Eventually, the French destroyed a settlement within sixty miles of Philadelphia, a central city in the American colonies. Americans were disheartened. They believed that Britain was not making the proper commitment to protect them or the North American territory.

The turning point in the war came when the British asked Secretary of State William Pitt to take over wartime operations. Pitt believed control of North America was critical to England as a world power. In other words, he felt they could not afford to lose the war. Pitt committed more troops to the war and replaced old leaders with young ones. He also gave control of recruitment and supplies to local authorities in the colonies and promised to pay them for their work.

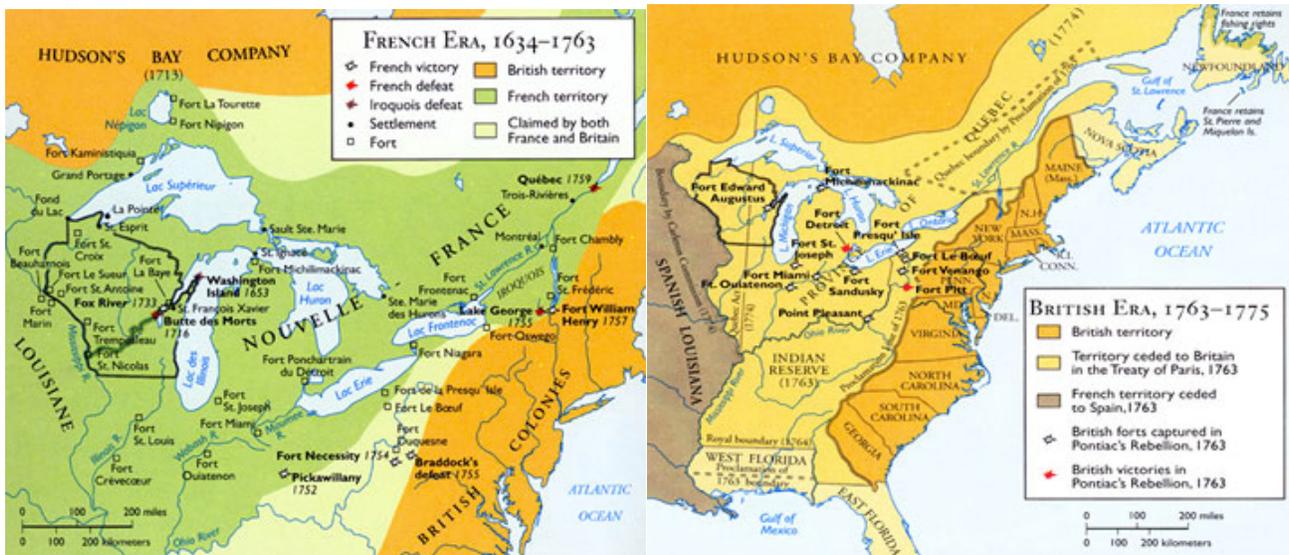
British luck started changing with their capture of the city of Louisbourg in Canada. They blocked the St. Lawrence Seaway, which stopped all French trade to inland towns and the frontier. Then, the British struck a final blow to the French cause in Quebec in 1759. British Commander James Wolfe bravely sent his forces up a rocky hill to surprise the French. In the battle that followed on the Plains of Abraham, both Wolfe and the French commander were killed. The British gained control over this important territory. They continued to be successful in battle after that, conquering Montreal as well. Ultimately the British gained control of the territories at stake, and thus the French chapter in North American history was over.

The War's over! As a colonist, how do you feel about the British, the French, and then Indians? Why?

Consequences of the French & Indian War

The French and Indian or Seven Years War left Britain with pressing financial problems. Victory in the War had given Britain Canada, Spanish Florida and the Native American lands east of the Mississippi. In addition to these lands, the British had twenty-two smaller colonies ruled by Royal Governors in the West Indies and elsewhere. British national debt almost doubled to pay for the war and there still were 10,000 British troops in the colonies. Money was needed to pay for their expense. Britain had to re-think how it was going to govern and pay for its far-flung possessions. The colonists had already contributed both soldiers and materials to the war effort, but the British government felt that now they should also contribute to paying for the cost of continued defense and greater administration of the colonies. Many British leaders felt that there was no other way to pay for these expenses than to tax the colonists. The colonists did not object to contributing to the cost of their defense, but, with the French no longer present, they did not see the need for British troops to remain in the colonies. They maintained (and paid for) colonial militias to defend themselves from Indian attack. They also felt, if they were going to be taxed by Parliament, they should be represented in it.

Even though they fought on the same side, the French and Indian War did not bring the British and Americans closer together. British troops remained in the colonies, which the colonists resented. British troops looked down their noses at the colonials. They regarded them as crude and lacking culture. The pious New Englanders found the British redcoats to be profane and the presence and attitude of the aristocratic British officers disturbed the colonists. The colonists also saw their presence as a threat to the liberties they had enjoyed since their first settlements. Americans blamed Britain for many of their problems and felt their own governments were better suited to both govern and defend the colonies. With the War behind it, Parliament intended to show colonists that they ruled the colonies. In 1765, the colonists still considered themselves as loyal subjects of Britain, with the same historic rights and obligations as Englishmen. But 160 years after the founding of Jamestown and a practice of “salutary neglect”, tension between the colonies and Britain was going to rapidly increase.



What were the consequences to the British, the French and the colonists at the end of the war?

