



At the beginning of the war, American soldiers were poorly trained and poorly equipped. They lacked gunpowder, rifles, food, and clothing. Some men had only spears or axes for weapons.

American Revolution the struggle of the colonies in North America to gain their independence from Great Britain

Continental army the American army during the American Revolution

7.2 American Strengths and Weaknesses

The Patriots were in a weak position when the **American Revolution** began. They had a hastily organized, untrained army and a small navy. Their weaknesses were far more obvious than their strengths.

American Weaknesses The **Continental army** was always short of men. General George Washington never had more than 20,000 troops at one time and place. Many soldiers enlisted for six months or a year. Just when they were learning how to fight, they would pick up their muskets and go home to take care of their farms and families.

Few Americans were trained for battle. Some were hunters and could shoot well enough from behind a tree. But when facing a mass of well-disciplined redcoats, they were likely to turn and run.

The army was plagued by shortages. Guns and gunpowder were so scarce that Benjamin Franklin suggested arming the troops with bows and arrows. Food shortages forced soldiers to beg for handouts. Uniforms were scarce as well. In winter, one could track shoeless soldiers by their bloody footprints in the snow.

Such shortages outraged Washington. But when he complained to the Second Continental Congress, nothing changed. Congress, the new nation's only government, lacked the power to raise money for supplies by taxing the colonies—now the new nation's states.

In desperation, Congress printed paper money to pay for the war. But the value of this money dropped so low that merchants demanded to be paid in gold instead. Like everything else, gold was scarce.

American Strengths Still, the Americans did have strengths. One was the patriotism of people like Joseph Martin, who willingly gave their lives to defend the ideal of a country based on liberty and **democracy**. Without them, the war would have been quickly lost.

The Americans also received help from overseas. Motivated by their old hatred of the English, the French secretly aided the Americans. During the first two years of the war, 90 percent of the Americans' gunpowder came from Europe, mostly from France. In addition, a Polish Jew named Haym Salomon, who immigrated to New York in 1775, helped to finance the war effort.

The Americans' other great strength was their commander. General Washington was more than an experienced military leader. He was also a man who inspired courage and confidence. In the dark days to come, it was Washington who would keep the ragtag Continental army together.

7.3 British Strengths and Weaknesses

In contrast to the American colonies, Great Britain entered the war from a position of strength. Yet, despite both their real and their perceived advantages, the British forces encountered many problems.

British Strengths With a professional army of about 42,000 troops at the beginning of the war, British forces greatly outnumbered the Continental army. In addition, George III hired 30,000 mercenaries from Germany. These hired soldiers were known as Hessians (HEH-shenz) because they came from a part of Germany called Hesse-Cassel. The British were also able to recruit many Loyalists, African Americans, and American Indians to fight on their side.

British and Hessian troops were well trained in European military tactics. They excelled in large battles fought by a mass of troops on open ground. They also had far more experience firing artillery than Americans had.

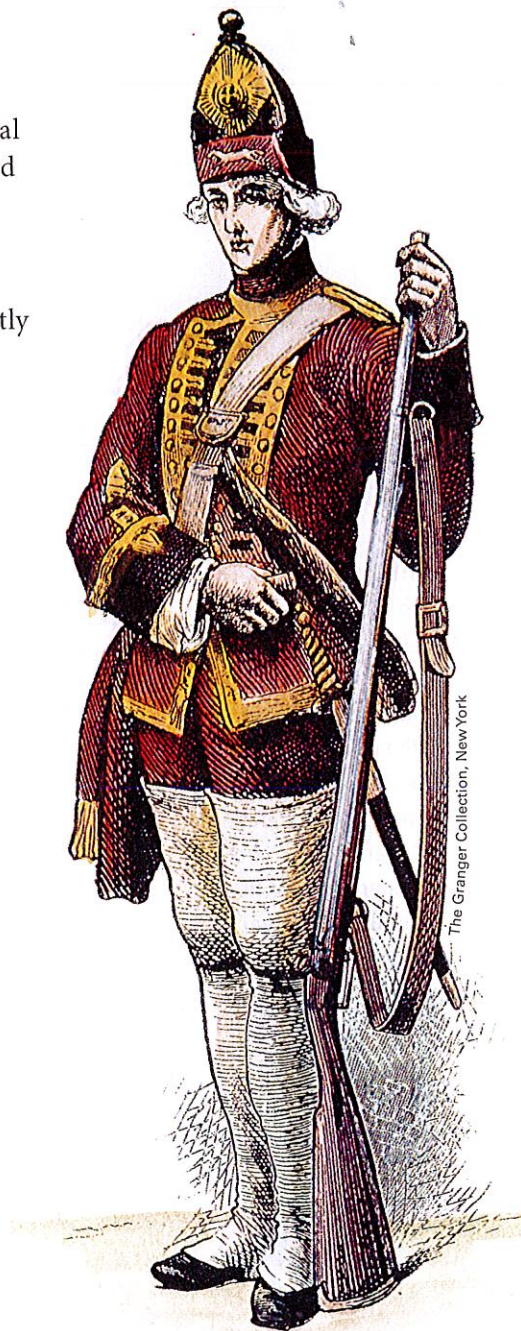
The British forces were well supplied, as well. Unlike the pitifully equipped Continental army, they seldom lacked for food, uniforms, weapons, or ammunition.

British Weaknesses Even so, the war presented Great Britain with huge problems. One was the distance between Great Britain and America. Sending troops and supplies across the Atlantic was slow and costly. News of battles arrived in England long after they had occurred, making it difficult for British leaders to plan a course of action.

A second problem was that King George and his ministers were never able to convince the British people that defeating the rebels was vital to the future of Great Britain. The longer the war dragged on, the less happy the British taxpayers became about paying its heavy costs.

A third problem was poor leadership. Lord George Germain, the man chosen to direct the British troops, had no real sense of how to defeat the rebels. How could he? He had never set foot in North America. Nor did it occur to him to go see for himself what his army was up against. If he had, Germain might have realized that this was not a war that could be won by conquering a city or two.

To end the revolution, Germain's forces would have to crush the Patriots' will to fight, state by state. Instead, Germain kept changing plans and generals, hoping that some combination of the two would bring him an easy victory.



British soldiers were trained professionals. They were well equipped with plenty of ammunition, good muskets, adequate food, and uniforms.