

The Conflict Spreads

KEY QUESTION Why were the British forced to leave Boston?

In their coffee houses, inns, and taverns, colonists discussed the deepening crisis. Most colonists still hoped for peace. Even some Patriot leaders still considered themselves loyal subjects of the king. They blamed Parliament for the terrible events taking place.

The Olive Branch Petition In July 1775, moderates in Congress drafted the Olive Branch Petition and sent it to London. This document asked the king to restore harmony between Britain and the colonies. Some members opposed the petition but signed it anyway as a last hope.

The king rejected the petition, however, and announced new measures to punish the colonies. He would use the British navy to block American ships from leaving their ports. He would send thousands of hired German soldiers to fight in America. "When once these rebels have felt a smart blow, they will submit," he declared.

The colonial forces were not going to back down, though. They thought they were equal to the British troops. George Washington knew otherwise. The British soldiers were professionals, while the colonial troops had little training and were poorly equipped. The Massachusetts militia barely had enough gunpowder to fight one battle.

Washington Arrives During the summer of 1775, Washington arrived at the militia camp near Boston. He immediately began to gather supplies and train the army. In the fall, Washington approved a bold plan. Continental Army troops would invade Quebec, in eastern Canada. They hoped to defeat British forces there and draw Canadians into the Patriot cause. One of the leaders of this expedition was Benedict Arnold. He was an officer who had played a role in the victory at Fort Ticonderoga.

After a grueling march across Maine, Arnold arrived at Quebec in November 1775. Under harsh winter conditions, the Americans launched their attack but failed. After several months, they limped home in defeat.

The British Retreat from Boston In Massachusetts, the Continental Army continued its siege of Boston. The British lay trapped in the town, which stood like an island protected by the surrounding waters of the bays. They gazed nervously across the bays to the opposite shores, where thousands of American forces waited on the hills.

Neither side was able or willing to break the standoff. However, help for Washington was on the way. Cannon were being hauled from Fort Ticonderoga. This was a difficult job, since there were no roads across the snow-covered mountains. It took soldiers, under the leadership of American General Henry Knox, two months to drag the 59 heavy weapons to Boston, where they arrived in January 1776.

Washington positioned these cannon on Dorchester Heights, overlooking Boston. The Americans, now in a position of power, threatened to bombard the city. General Howe, who was in charge of

(below) This statue, which stands in the Boston Public Garden, commemorates the day General Washington drove the British from the city.

