

The background is a historical painting depicting a battle scene, likely the Battle of the Clouds. It shows a large group of soldiers in 18th-century attire engaged in combat on a battlefield. In the foreground, there is a wooden building with a chimney, and the ground is littered with fallen soldiers and equipment. The sky is filled with smoke and clouds, suggesting a fierce battle.

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

SEPTEMBER 1776

A month that tested a fledgling nation — on the battlefield, at the negotiating table, and in the streets of New York.

P

Political

M

Military

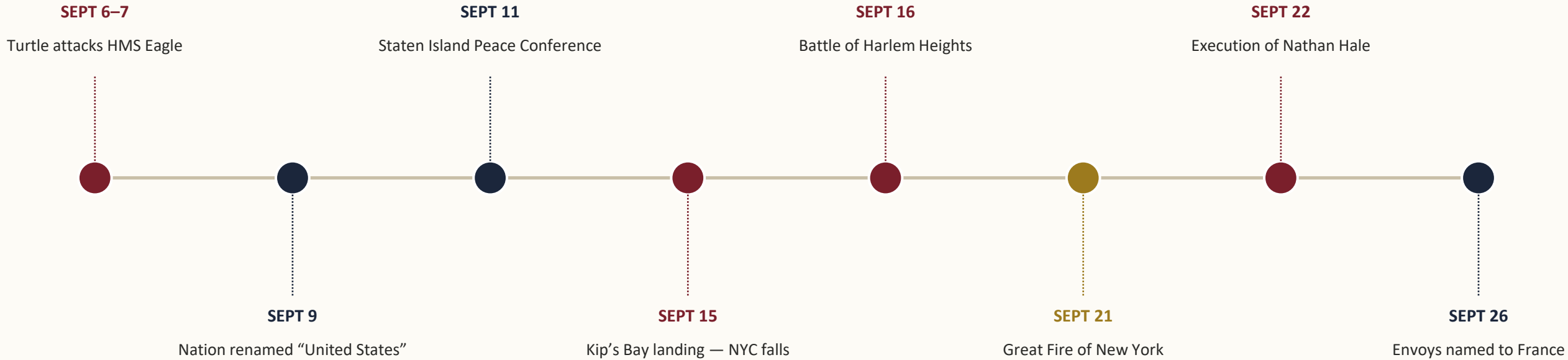
C

Public & Civic

Eight turning points, six-to-twenty-six September, 1776

Albuquerque Genealogical Society
Military Research Group

September 1776 at a Glance



**M****MILITARY****SEPTEMBER 6–7,
1776****INVENTOR**David Bushnell, Yale-
trained engineer**PILOT**

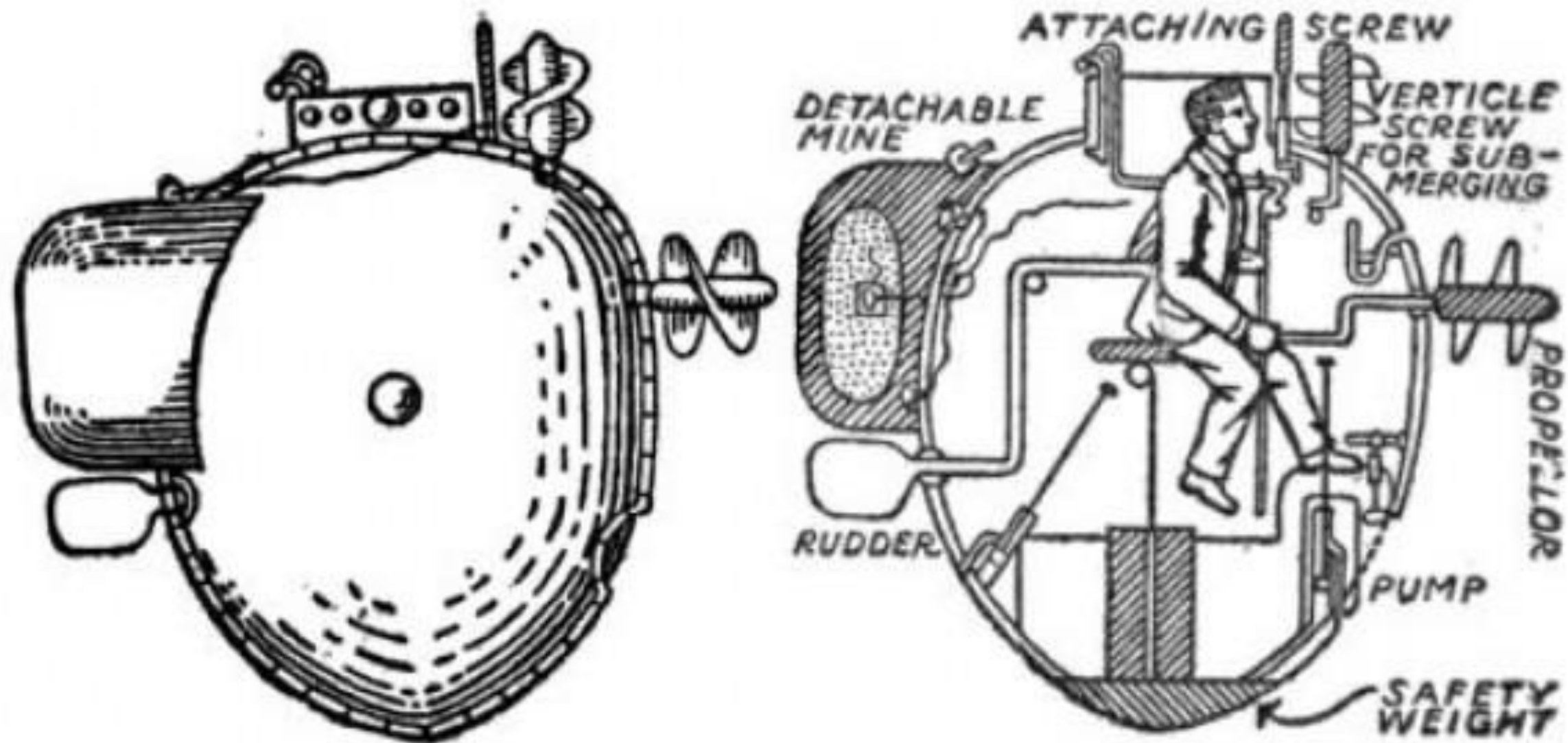
Sergeant Ezra Lee

TARGETHMS Eagle, 64-gun British
flagship**NEW YORK HARBOR — FIRST SUBMARINE ATTACK IN NAVAL HISTORY**

The Turtle Strikes the HMS Eagle

Under cover of darkness on the night of September 6, Sergeant Ezra Lee climbed into Bushnell's hand-cranked, egg-shaped submersible and paddled through New York Harbor toward Lord Howe's flagship. Lee reached the Eagle undetected, but his boring auger could not penetrate the ship's reinforced hull. As dawn broke he abandoned the attempt, releasing his powder charge, which exploded harmlessly in the East River.

Though the mission failed to sink a single ship, it proved that a submerged vessel could approach an enemy fleet unseen — a milestone that still opens every history of underwater warfare.



BUSHNELL'S TURTLE

P

POLITICAL

SEPTEMBER 9, 1776

BODY

Second Continental Congress

EFFECT

Official style of the new nation

PRECEDENT

Echoed language already used
in July's Declaration

*That in all continental
commissions... the stile be
altered for the future to the
'United States.'*

— Resolution of Congress, Sept. 9, 1776

PHILADELPHIA — SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

“United Colonies” Becomes “United States”

Meeting in Philadelphia, Congress resolved that every future commission, treaty, and official paper would drop the old term “United Colonies” in favor of a new one: the “United States.”

The change made formal what the Declaration of Independence had already implied two months earlier — that the thirteen colonies were no longer subordinate territories, but a sovereign confederation of states.

A single administrative resolution, largely unnoticed at the time, permanently fixed the name by which the nation would be known.

P

POLITICAL

SEPTEMBER 11, 1776

BRITISH ENVOY

Admiral Lord Richard Howe

AMERICAN DELEGATION

Benjamin Franklin, John
Adams, Edward Rutledge

OUTCOME

Talks collapsed within hours

BILLOP HOUSE, STATEN ISLAND — DIPLOMACY AMID WAR

The Staten Island Peace Conference

Fresh from routing Washington on Long Island, Admiral Howe invited a congressional delegation to discuss reconciliation. Franklin, Adams, and Rutledge crossed enemy lines to meet him at the Billop House.

Howe could offer clemency only if the colonies renounced independence and resubmitted to the Crown — terms the delegation would not accept. The conference ended in a single afternoon with no agreement.

It was the last serious attempt at a negotiated peace before years of further war; afterward, both sides settled in for a long, armed conflict.

P

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BILLOP HOUSE, STATEN ISLAND — DIPLOMACY AMID WAR

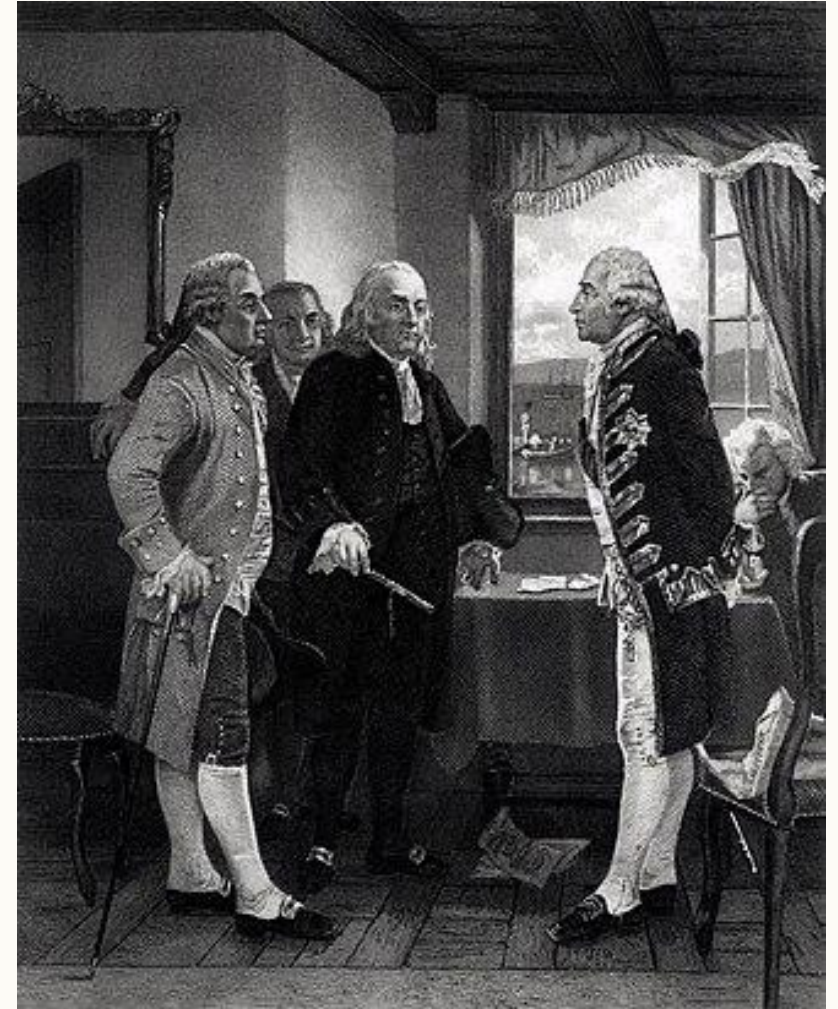
The Staten Island Peace Conference - More

"Some think it will occasion a delay of military operations; which we much want. I am not of that mind. Some think it will clearly throw the odium of continuing this war on his Lordship and his master. I wish it may. Others think it will silence the Tories and establish the timid Whigs. I wish this also, but do not expect it. All these arguments, and twenty others as mighty, would not have convinced me of the necessity, propriety, or utility, if Congress had not determined on it. I was against it from first to last. All sides agreed in sending me. You will hear more of this embassy. It will be famous enough."

— John Adams to [James Warren](#),
September 8, 1776^[7]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staten_Island_Peace_Conference

September 1776 • The Road to Revolution



Engraving by [Alonzo Chappel](#) depicting the conference.

M

MILITARY

SEPTEMBER 15, 1776

BRITISH FORCE

~4,000 troops under Gen.
William Howe

NAVAL SUPPORT

Royal Navy warships
bombarding the shore

RESULT

Manhattan occupied for the
rest of the war

MANHATTAN ISLAND — BRITISH LANDING

Kip's Bay Falls, New York City Follows

After a heavy naval bombardment, British and Hessian troops stormed ashore at Kip's Bay on Manhattan's east side. The green Connecticut militia guarding the beach broke and fled.

Washington, riding up in fury at the collapse, narrowly avoided capture himself. His army abandoned New York City and regrouped on the high ground to the north at Harlem Heights.

The British would hold New York City for the remainder of the Revolutionary War, making it their principal base in North America.



The British landing at Kip's Bay, New York Island, 15 September 1776

[Artist: Robert Cleveley](#), 1777

M

MILITARY

SEPTEMBER 16, 1776

AMERICAN COMMANDER
George Washington, with
Thomas Knowlton

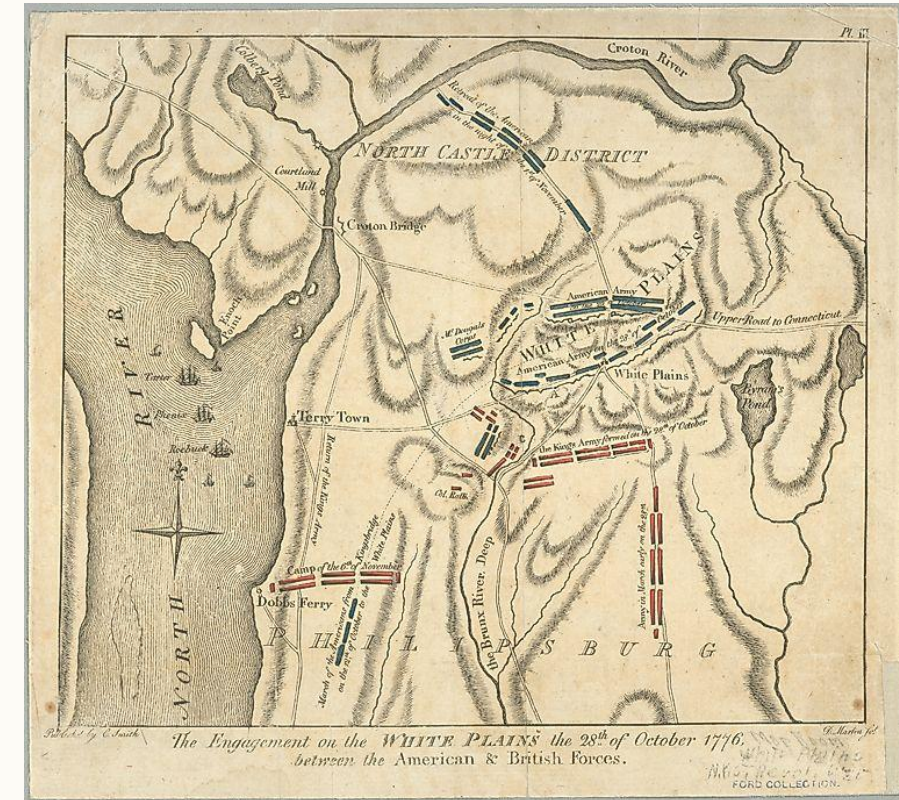
AMERICAN FORCE
Under 1,800 troops

SIGNIFICANCE
First field victory of the New
York campaign

UPPER MANHATTAN — A MUCH-NEEDED VICTORY

The Battle of Harlem Heights

A day after the rout at Kip's Bay, Knowlton's Rangers skirmished with British light infantry probing Washington's new lines. Washington sent troops around the British flank to cut off their retreat. The maneuver did not fully encircle the British, but it forced their overextended companies to fall back after a sharp two-hour fight, at real cost to both sides, including the death of Colonel Knowlton. The victory, though small, restored morale to an army that had been retreating since Long Island — Washington praised his soldiers' conduct in his general orders the next day.

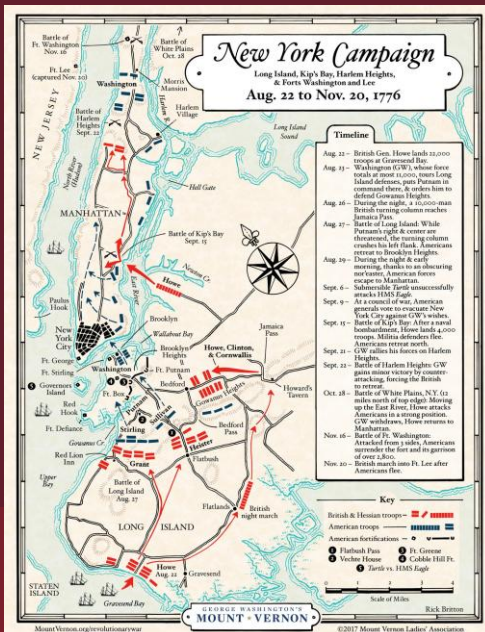


<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-battle-of-harlem-heights-the-american-revolutionary-war.html>



SEPTEMBER 16, 1776

British General Howe Tries Flanking Maneuver



After The Battle of Harlem Heights

Key Details of the Movement

- **Initial Stay:** After the battle on September 16, 1776, the Continental Army stayed in upper Manhattan for several weeks.
- **British Maneuver:** British General William Howe landed troops at Throgs Neck and Pell's Point in October to trap the Americans.
- **The Retreat:** Washington recognized the danger of being cornered on the island and marched his main force off Manhattan.
- **The Battle of White Plains:** The army repositioned near White Plains, where a subsequent engagement occurred on October 28, 1776.

C

PUBLIC & CIVIC

SEPTEMBER 21, 1776

BUILDINGS LOST

Roughly a quarter of the city, 400–500 structures

LANDMARK DESTROYED

Trinity Church

CAUSE

Never conclusively determined

LOWER MANHATTAN — A CITY IN ASHES

The Great Fire of New York

Six days after British troops occupied New York, fire broke out near Whitehall Slip late at night and driven by strong winds, swept north through the city's wooden buildings.

Firefighting was hampered by wartime chaos: bells had been silenced or removed, fire equipment was scarce, and much of the population had already fled. The blaze burned for hours before it was contained.



September 1776 • *The Road to Revolution*

C

PUBLIC & CIVIC

SEPTEMBER 21, 1776

Benjamin Carp (Author)

https://youtu.be/iEuNLBiYInE?si=OR5_eiJPMRi_nbWt

1: From *The Great New York Fire of 1776: A Lost Story of the American Revolution* by Benjamin L. Carp. Published by Yale University Press in 2023.

LOWER MANHATTAN — A CITY IN ASHES

The Great Fire of New York

For months before the fire, many people had predicted that New York City was doomed, because it was too important to British success, but too difficult for the rebels to defend. The rumors sounded certain that the rebels would sooner burn New York than leave it for the British. When the redcoats arrived on September 15, they found combustible materials, which they assumed had been prepared to set fire to the city. That day, the troops extinguished a small blaze and found a trail of gunpowder leading away from it. John Baltus Dash, the fire chief, buried his valuables to keep them safe from a conflagration he knew was coming. He wasn't the only one. ¹

British officers suspected patriot arson and arrested several civilians, though no one was ever convicted. The disaster left thousands of occupied New Yorkers homeless for the rest of the war.

<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2024/01/16/the-mystery-of-the-great-fire-of-1776/>

M

MILITARY

SEPTEMBER 22, 1776

RANK

Captain, Continental Army

MISSION

Intelligence-gathering behind
British lines

FATE

Hanged without formal trial, age 21

*I only regret that I have
but one life to lose for
my country.*

— Attributed to Capt. Nathan Hale, Sept. 22, 1776

BRITISH-OCCUPIED NEW YORK — AN AMERICAN SPY IS CAUGHT

The Execution of Nathan Hale

Volunteering for a dangerous intelligence mission after the fall of New York, Captain Nathan Hale slipped behind British lines on Long Island disguised as a Dutch schoolmaster.

He was captured with incriminating drawings and notes hidden in his shoes and brought before General Howe, who ordered his immediate execution as a spy.

Hale was hanged the next morning in Manhattan. His reported last words became one of the Revolution's most enduring statements of sacrifice.



A romanticized depiction of the execution of Nathan Hale on September 22, 1776 [Public domain via Wikimedia Commons](#)

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/nathan-hale-doomed-patriot-spy-probably-never-said-i-only-regret-that-i-have-but-one-life-to-lose-for-my-country-before-his-execution-180987353/>

P

POLITICAL

SEPTEMBER 26, 1776

COMMISSIONERS NAMED

Silas Deane, Benjamin Franklin,
Thomas Jefferson

JEFFERSON'S ROLE

Declined; replaced by Arthur
Lee

GOAL

Secure French recognition,
money, and arms

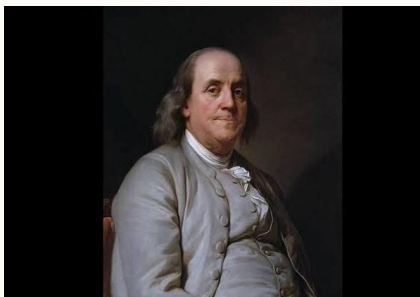
PHILADELPHIA — SEEKING A EUROPEAN ALLY

Congress Sends Envoys to France

In 1776, the Continental Congress sent key envoys—including Silas Deane early in the year and later Benjamin Franklin and Arthur Lee in late 1776—to France to secure covert military aid, financial support, and a formal military alliance.



Silas Deane: Sent in early 1776 on a secret mission to Paris. He worked with French foreign ministers and covert networks like Roderigue Hortalez and Co. to ship arms, gunpowder, and uniforms to the Continental Army. He also recruited European volunteers like the Marquis de Lafayette.



Benjamin Franklin: Appointed as a commissioner and dispatched to France on October 26, 1776, setting sail from Philadelphia. His charm and fame won over French high society, setting the stage for the formal Franco-American alliance in 1778.

P

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Silas Deane, Benjamin Franklin,
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JEFFERSON'S ROLE

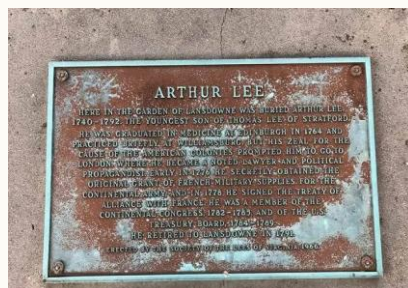
Declined; replaced by Arthur Lee

GOAL

Secure French recognition, money, and arms

PHILADELPHIA — SEEKING A EUROPEAN ALLY

Congress Sends Envoys to France – More



Arthur Lee: Sent in late 1776 to join Deane and Franklin in Paris to help push for full French recognition of American independence.

Before the formal 1778 alliance, France used the fake trading firm **Roderigue Hortalez and Company**—set up by French playwright and spy Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais—to secretly purchase surplus military gear directly from French royal arsenals and ship it to the Continental Army.

These secret shipments completely sustained the American rebellion through 1776 and 1777, making up **over 90% of the gunpowder and artillery** used by the Americans during the pivotal [Saratoga campaign](#).

P

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PHILADELPHIA — SEEKING A EUROPEAN ALLY

The Secret French Cargo Lists (1776–1777)

- **Gunpowder:** Over **300,000 pounds** of high-grade military gunpowder. This was the single most critical supply, as the colonies had almost no domestic manufacturing capacity.
- **Muskets:** Roughly **30,000 French infantry muskets** (mostly the dependable [Charleville musket](#) model), which standardizes the mismatched, civilian firearms previously used by Washington's troops.
- **Artillery:** More than **200 heavy brass cannons** and mortars, complete with ammunition, cannonballs, and necessary engineering tools.
- **Uniforms & Textiles:** Complete clothing sets, boots, and fabric to outfit **30,000 soldiers**, which dramatically reduced the threat of hypothermia and disease in Continental camps.
- **Camp Equipment:** Upwards of **3,000 large military tents** along with thousands of cooking utensils, canteens, and blankets.

P

POLITICAL

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PHILADELPHIA — SEEKING A EUROPEAN ALLY

How the Smuggling Network Operated

1. **Government Funding:** King Louis XVI of France and King Carlos III of Spain secretly gave Beaumarchais **2 million livres** in seed money to start the shell company.
2. **The Caribbean Route:** French merchant ships left ports like Havre and Nantes, sailing to neutral islands in the West Indies (such as [Saint-Domingue](#)).
3. **The Hand-off:** In Caribbean ports, the weapons transferred to smaller, faster American vessels that slipped past the British Royal Navy blockade.
4. **The Tobacco Barter:** To keep up appearances as a "private business," American agent Silas Deane agreed that Congress would pay France back by shipping cargo holds of **Virginia tobacco, indigo, rice, and timber** back to Europe.

M

MILITARY

SEPTEMBER, 1776

Southern Campaign
Continuing military actions
against the Cherokee Nation

Further West
Spanish Expansion in Alta
California

— Attributed to Capt. Nathan Hale, Sept. 22, 1776

Other Continuing Military Actions

Meanwhile - The Southern Frontier: The Cherokee Expedition

- **Scorched-Earth Campaign:** Throughout September 1776, colonial militias from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia launched a massive coordinated offensive against Cherokee towns aligned with the British.
- **Rutherford's Expedition:** Beginning September 1, North Carolina Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford led roughly 2,400 to 2,500 men across the Blue Ridge Mountains to destroy Cherokee Middle and Valley towns, burning dozens of villages and food supplies.
- **Battle of Coweecho River:** On September 19, 1776, South Carolina Patriot forces led by Colonel Andrew Williamson were ambushed by Cherokee and Loyalist militia in a steep gorge in North Carolina known as the "Black Hole," fighting their way through with a bayonet charge.

Western Expansion and Exploration

- **Founding of the Presidio:** On September 17, 1776, Spanish forces formally established the Presidio of San Francisco in Alta California, expanding Spain's military footprint in the West while the British and Americans fought on the East Coast.

P

POLITICAL

SEPTEMBER, 1776

Continental Congress
continued their work
during the month.

PHILADELPHIA — Continental Congress Work Continues

Continental Congress

Foreign Diplomacy and Alliances

- Congress adopted the **Model Treaty** in September 1776 to serve as a guide for commercial and military treaties with European powers.
- Commissioners were selected to travel to France to secure a formal alliance and much-needed financial and military aid.

Managing the War

- Delegates scrambled to support General George Washington's army after difficult defeats in the New York campaign, including the loss of Manhattan mid-month.
- They debated structural improvements for the Continental Army, struggling with low enlistment periods and a lack of reliable funding

SEPTEMBER 1776 IN RETROSPECT

One Month, Three Battlefronts

P

POLITICAL

Congress fixed the nation's name, tested — and closed — the door on reconciliation, and reached out to France for the alliance that would help win the war.

M

MILITARY

New York City was lost, but Harlem Heights showed the Continental Army could still fight — and both the Turtle and Nathan Hale pioneered new forms of warfare and sacrifice.

C

PUBLIC & CIVIC

The Great Fire left a quarter of New York in ashes, a civilian catastrophe that fell on a city already reeling from occupation and military defeat.

By month's end, the United States had a fixed name, a rejected peace offer, a burned and occupied capital city, and a fledgling army that had learned it could still stand and fight.

Resources

National Archives:

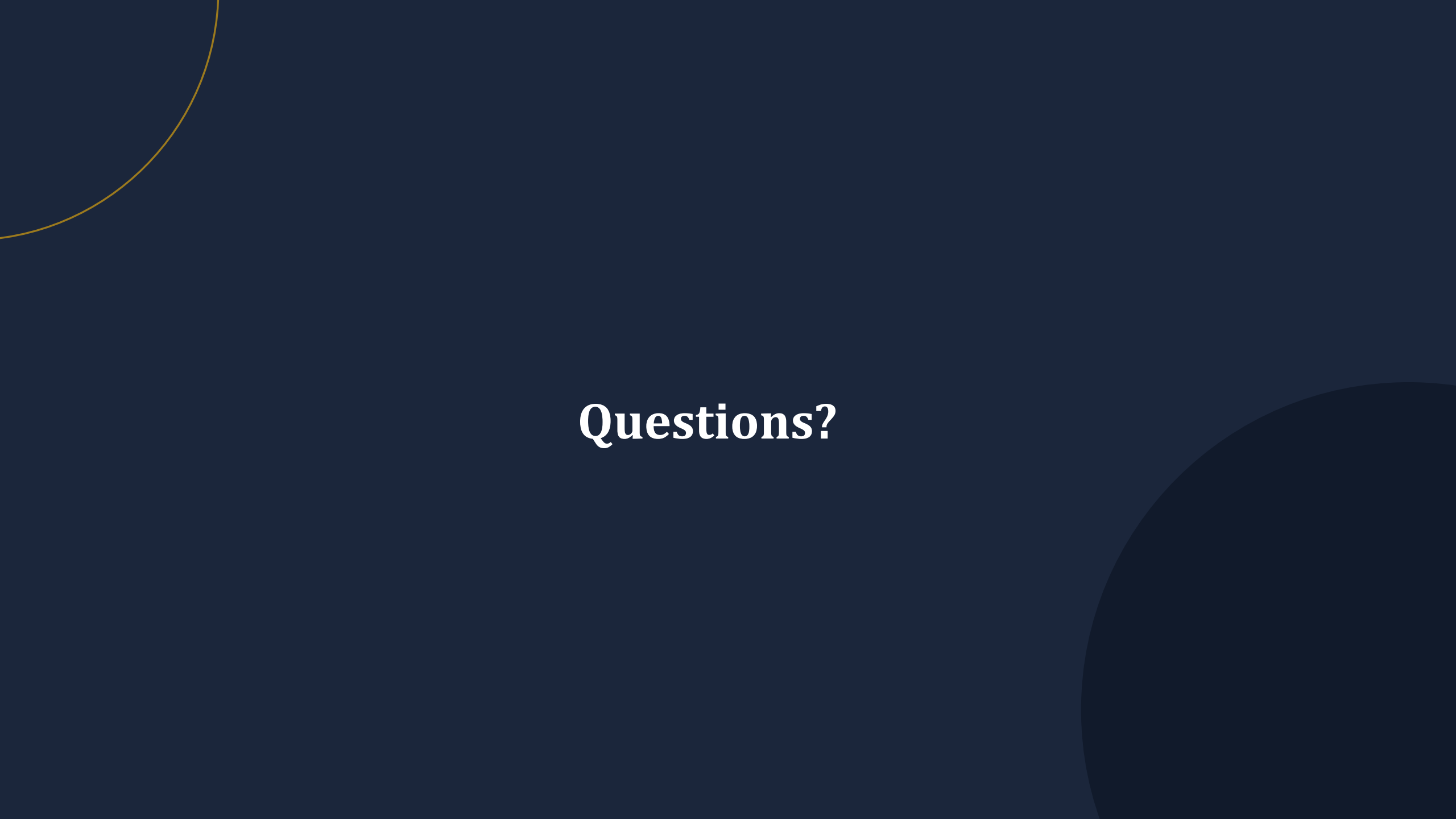
<https://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/state-archives.html>

Ancestry.com: <https://www.ancestry.com/c/military-records/revolutionary-war-records>

DAR: https://services.dar.org/public/dar_research/search/

Archive.org: Search for "New York 1776" under "Media Type: Texts"

Suggestion: The campaign of 1776 around New York and Brooklyn by Johnston, Henry Phelps, 1842-1923 (Check out the index for names)



Questions?