In 1773, the colonists dumped British tea into Boston Harbor. From that time on, the fight between the British and colonists grew fiercer. Battles were won and lost on both sides. Many English and Americans lost their lives. Eight years of fighting were hard on both sides. It was particularly hard on the British. This was a strange land to them. The commanders of the army were thousands of miles from the battle. The cost of the war was draining the treasury.

Sir William Howe resigned as commander of the British troops in the colonies. He was tired of the criticism he was receiving for his leadership. General Henry Clinton replaced him. Clinton believed he would be able to inflict a final defeat on the colonists by moving his troops south. He thought he would find more colonists loyal to the British cause in the southern colonies. If he were to take control of the southern colonies, he would be able to crush the entire rebellion. He appointed Lord Charles Cornwallis to lead his troops in the southern colonies. He remained in New York with a small force and put the rest of the British soldiers aboard ships sailing to Georgia.

Lord Cornwallis and his troops first took over Savannah, Georgia. He declared all of Georgia to be in British hands. They then headed to Camden, South Carolina. It was a fierce battle, but the British were victorious. Believing that the war was finally going in their favor, the British headed for Virginia. They made camp in Yorktown. Yorktown was on the York River near the very important Chesapeake Bay. They sent word to General Clinton, who promised to send more troops by ship to meet them there.

While Cornwallis was fighting his way north, General George Washington was making plans with his French allies. General Rochambeau and Washington discussed the possibility of attacking Yorktown. They decided that that would not be a wise move at the time. During their discussions they got word from General Lafayette that made their decision easier. Lafayette told them that another French officer, Admiral de Grasse, was sailing from the West Indies to Chesapeake Bay with a fleet of twenty-eight ships. A plan to stop the British in their tracks was soon created.

Admiral de Grasse was told to take his fleet and position them in Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the York River. From this point they would be able to keep new British troops from joining Cornwallis. It would also keep Cornwallis from leaving the area by ship. In the meantime, Washington, Rochambeau, and a combined French and American force of over 14,000 men marched toward Yorktown. When they reached their destination, they fanned out and formed a semi-circle around Yorktown. They were joined by 3,000 of de Grasse's men. On October 14, 1781, the British troops awoke to the sight of over 17,000 forces surrounding them. Cornwallis tried everything he could think of to get out of this situation. He even sent men infected with smallpox from his camp into the lines of colonial soldiers. He hoped that they would infect the soldiers with the deadly disease and give him a chance. He tried to escape by taking his soldiers across the York River in boats. A storm put a stop to this attempt.

On October 17, Cornwallis had had enough. He sent a drummer boy and a soldier with a white flag to Washington offering to surrender. On October 19, the official papers of surrender were signed. The colonial soldiers and the French soldiers stood in lines facing each other as the defeated British soldiers solemnly walked between the lines. They deposited their weapons in a pile as a colonial band played an old British tune called, "The World Turned Upside Down." To the British, the world had turned upside down. Who would have ever believed that a group of ragged, untrained farmers would be able, after eight long years of war, to defeat the most powerful army in the world?

After much negotiation among the British, Americans, and the French, the formal Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783. The war was officially over. The Americans had forged a new country with their blood and sweat.
The Final Battle - Yorktown 1781

Questions

1. Who was the commander of the British forces in America in 1781?
   A. General Howe
   B. General Rochambeau
   C. General Cornwallis
   D. General Clinton

2. The colonial army took control of New York City.
   A. false
   B. true

3. Why do you think the British chose to attack the southern colonies?

4. Who was an American ally?
   A. England
   B. Germany
   C. Canada
   D. France

5. What conclusion did Cornwallis reach when he found himself surrounded at Yorktown?

6. How did the French navy help the Americans?

7. What officially ended the war?
   A. the Treaty of Paris
   B. the white flag
   C. Cornwallis's surrender
   D. Yorktown

8. Cornwallis sent men with chickenpox into the American lines to make them sick.
   A. true
   B. false

How does it feel to be beaten in a game or contest?
A war usually begins with one side shooting at the other side. How does a war end?