

## The Path to War

No taxation without representation! This is the catch phrase that is commonly taught as the impetus for independence. A colony, devoid of parliamentary representation, buckling under the yoke of excessive taxes and a King indifferent to the will of the colonies. But what taxes were being levied? Why did Great Britain need to tax the colonies in the first place?

It is no exaggeration to say that the path to independence began with the successful conclusion of the Seven Years' War, or the French and Indian War as it is more commonly referred to in the United States. This war took place all over the globe, with Red Coats fighting in North America, Europe, Africa, and India. Fighting the war was expensive. The Army grew to a size unprecedented in English history. Financing the war was accomplished through bonds, additional taxes, and the assumption of enormous debt. England had to finance over £122,000,000 of debt, oversee a drawdown of the military, and police the enlarged Empire secured by victory.

To accomplish this task, the government of Great Britain adopted politically expedient measures based upon a series of, perhaps, not entirely unreasonable assumptions. First, the removal from military service of thousands of enlisted men was no great task, however, the officers of those units was another issue entirely. Officers, who were acquainted with or were related to important members of the House of Lords would be demanding half-pay stipends for retirement with no appreciable gain for what, in essence, looked like welfare for the wealthy gentleman. Great Britain elected to keep these extra officers in staff positions of purposefully understrength units. In an emergency, through enlistments and, perhaps, impressments, these units could be returned to full strength with an experienced officer corps already in place.

Patrolling the newly acquired territories, however, would be an additional financial burden that no one relished. The political calculation made in London, however, was that the colonies themselves should be able to support the soldiers necessary to protect the frontiers of Empire. Thus the stage was set for what would become one of the points of debate between the Thirteen Colonies and Great Britain.

For while Great Britain saw a need to protect the colonies, and the new Indian subjects from sometimes unscrupulous colonists. The colonists saw things very differently. Many of them served in the war, and with the removal of the French threat, no longer felt the need to be protected by British regulars. Militias could protect them from native attacks. Many in the Colonies viewed the presence of armed soldiers as detrimental to liberty. Furthermore, when discussions of new or additional taxes were raised, many colonists believed that Colonial Assemblies had to affirm those taxes to be legal. Parliament did not agree.

In any case, the beginnings of simmering discontent would erupt suddenly in 1763 from an unexpected direction. Stay tuned for our next installment.