**This Means War**

The British won the French and Indian War (thanks in part to George) but it cost them…big. Sending all those supplies and troops from England was expensive. England had gone into massive debt for a war over a place most British people would never even see. And they were still paying. England maintained a huge army of redcoats in America just in case the French got any ideas of trying to take back their forts.

In 1760, there was a political change in England when George III (the grandson of King George II, who pushed for the French and Indian War) became king. The new monarch came up with a plan that the English liked: the colonies should pay back the money for the war themselves, through taxes.

The colonies, on the other hand, didn’t like that idea at all.

After the English parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765 without any input from the colonies, Americans were forced to pay a tax on every single piece of printed paper they used. That could be anything from newspapers to legal documents to playing cards? The cost of these stamps was as small as a half penny, but it set off a huge reaction. People worried what England would charge them for next if they put up with these stamps.

Americans were okay with paying taxes to their local governments (although the colonies were under British rule, each had its own form of government). But they were not okay sending money to England when they didn’t have a say in Parliament. This idea popularized the slogan, “No taxation without representation.”

The British were surprised by the violent reaction to the tax. American colonists not only refused to pay it but also stopped buying British goods and eventually resorted to harassing British officials.

A year after passing it, the British Parliament put an end to the Stamp Act- not because they felt bad about what they had done, but because they needed people in America to buy their stuff. In fact, just in case the Americans got the wrong idea about their intentions, on the same day Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, it also passed the Declaratory Act, which stated it could make laws enforceable in the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.”

As if to prove the point, Parliament soon passed a new law that the colonies had to pay taxes on any paper, glass lead, paint, and tea imported from England. The same thing happened all over again. The colonialists protested and Parliament took back the taxes on everything-except for tea.

The tax on tea went too far. Even George Washington, who loved tea just as much as the next colonial American, started drinking coffee instead. Because of the boycott, the amount of tea consumed in the colonies fell from 900,000 pounds in 1769 to 237,000 pounds only three years later.

While George quietly sipped his coffee, others were taking more drastic measures to let their feeling about the tea tax be known. On December 16, 1773, over fifty men, who called themselves the Sons of Liberty, dressed up like Mohawk Indians and sneaked onto three British ships docked in Boston Harbor. Under the darkness of night, they dumped 342 chests of Darjeeling tea into the water. The famous event later became known as the Boston Tea Party.

England took action by shutting down Boston Harbor and the local government. Redcoats streamed into the city, while town meetings were outlawed. Parliament passed a law that British soldiers could live in anyone’s home they chose. With no boats in or out of the city, businesses came to a standstill and many people found themselves with nothing to eat.

The other colonies were angry about what was happening in Boston and resolved to do something about it. They pitched in to help its starving residents. Virginia sent corn and wheat. Connecticut sent sheep for milk, wool, and meat. That helped with the immediate problem. But what about the future?

America needed to do some hard thinking about its relationship to England and what it should be going forward. To debate this issue, the First Continental Congress was created. Twelve of the thirteen colonies (all except Georgia) sent representatives to Philadelphia in 1774 to discuss America’s destiny and show a unified force to England.

From early September through the end of October, the delegates debated about what the colonies should do. Not everyone agreed. Some thought America should seek independence. Others just wanted a better relationship with England. George, who was a delegate from Virginia, wanted to stand up for the people of Boston, but wasn’t sure about making a complete break from England.

However, by the Second Continental Congress, in May 1775, George and the rest of the delegates were more resolved that action must be taken against England and readied themselves for war.

The primary reasons were the battles at Lexington and Concord earlier that spring. When British soldiers were ordered to capture and destroy military supplies, the Massachusetts militia fought back. The combat marked the first open fighting between British troops and colonial soldiers on American soil.

George heard the news about the fighting and wrote to a friend, “The once happy and peaceful plains of America are either to be drenched in blood, or inhabited by slaves. Sad alternative! But can a virtuous man hesitate in his choice?”