



## The French & Indian War

### In A Nutshell

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In the 1750s, the conflicting ambitions of three great empires—[France](#), [Great Britain](#), and the [Iroquois League](#)—crashed together in the backcountry of Pennsylvania. In [the resulting war](#), fought between 1755 and 1760, the future of the North American continent was largely determined.

Superior organization and strategy allowed France and its Indian allies to dominate the first two years of the war. But William Pitt, named British secretary of state in 1757, then increased Britain's financial commitment to the war, giving British soldiers and their American colonial allies the resources they needed to defeat the French in battle by 1760. In the [Treaty of Paris](#), signed in 1762, a vanquished France [surrendered Canada and all territorial claims east of the Mississippi River](#) to Britain. Britain also won control of Florida, ceded by Spain (a French ally).

Flush with success, British policymakers came to believe that [their control over the North American continent](#) was firmly established. But Native Americans who had fought in the war in alliance with Britain believed that they had won the right to [territories west of the Appalachians](#), while American colonists soon objected to [British postwar policies](#) aimed at consolidating their hold on North America.

As a result, while the French and Indian War removed one great power from the contest over America, it did not truly end the dispute over control of the Pennsylvania backcountry, nor did it guarantee Britain's control over the continent. In fact, tensions between Britain and its American colonists that grew out of the war and its aftermath led, in just a few short years, to [the American Revolution](#).

### Why Should I Care?

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The United States was not predestined to become the nation that it did—a diverse and dynamic, English-speaking, [continent-spanning power](#) on the world stage. Claims of Manifest Destiny notwithstanding, things could have easily turned out quite differently. America became the nation that it is only because its history unfolded in a particular way—because certain crucial events, large and small, occurred at specific times and places. The French and Indian War, though nearly forgotten today, was one of those large events. The war, fought when America was still little more than a rustic outpost on the far periphery of the [British Empire](#), made everything that happened after possible.

If the French and Indian War had unfolded along a slightly different path—and there were

many times when it easily could have-the United States as we know it probably wouldn't exist. If the war had unfolded differently, you might now be reading this not in English but instead in French... or Mohawk. You might now need a passport to cross from Pennsylvania into Ohio. You might now celebrate Tanaghrisson's or [Pontiac](#)'s birthday, rather than George Washington's, as a national holiday. Everything would be different.

On a fateful spring day in 1754, a young military officer named George Washington led his regiment of Virginia provincials [into battle](#) against French troops near the Forks of the Ohio River, in the wilds of western Pennsylvania. They didn't know it, but the destiny of America hung in the balance.