

Who Fought the French and Indian War?

And no, it was not the French against the Indians.



At the end of the seventeenth century, North America was an extremely valuable piece of real estate, with the French, Spanish, and British all trying to claim as much land as possible (regardless of the Native people that were already living there.) The people living in Canada and America were pawns in a larger chess game. Between 1689 and the War for Independence, the major European powers engaged in a series of wars that were basically wars of colonial expansion, in which these countries fought for territory, raw materials and new markets for exports.

By the time the first three wars had been played out, England and France were left standing as the two major contenders, and England had acquired a good portion of Canada from France. In the last of the four wars, however, these two rivals fought for absolute dominion over North America. And it was the French and Indian War that most shaped America's destiny.

European Wars Fought in the Colonies

Date	European Name	Colonial Name
1689-97	War of the League of Augsburg	King Williams War
1702-13	War of Spanish Succession	Queen Anne's War
1740-48	War of the Austrian Succession	King George's War
1756-63	Seven Years War	French and Indian War

The French and Indian War, fought between England and France, began in 1754. Unlike the three previous conflicts, this war began in America. Increase in population and trade caused both France and Britain to seek new territories and markets. Since the end of King George's War in 1748, both France and England desired to expand into the rich Ohio River Valley, which was formally unclaimed by either side. To secure any new claim, communities, fortresses, missions and trading posts were usually established. Native Indians were used by both the French and the British to secure their hold on their claims. However, serious land disputes started to take place. For instance, the British established the **Ohio Company** to develop trade in the area. In 1750 a group of Virginian businessmen secured for themselves about 500,000 acres of the Ohio valley for settlement purposes. The same portion however, had earlier been claimed by **Joseph Celeron** for France. The French, in a precautionary move to keep the British from expanding into French colonies, began the construction of a fortresses in the Ohio valley. With a lucrative fur trade, access to the all-important Mississippi River, and the massive amount of land offered in the western frontier, French and British soldiers continued to butt heads over control of the Ohio Valley.

The conflict escalated when a young Virginian, **George Washington**, was dispatched by Virginia's **Governor Dinwiddie** to the Pennsylvania backwoods in 1753 to tell the French that they were trespassing on Virginia's territory. On this mission, Washington learned that the French had no intentions of leaving the territory. With this important intelligence, the young Virginian spent a few difficult weeks returning to Virginia where he delivered his report.

Soon after, this inexperienced twenty-two-year-old was made an officer and sent back with a militia force of 150 men and orders to build a fort. To his dismay, Washington found the French already occupying a fort they called **Duquesne** (on the site of today's Pittsburgh). Though outnumbered, the young George Washington and his men attacked a French work party, took some prisoners, and hastily constructed a fort that was aptly

named **Necessity**. However, surrounded by French forces, he had to surrender and return to Virginia. Even though defeated however, Washington was still hailed a hero for taking on the sworn enemies of England. When news of the growing conflict reached London, war was declared, and the **Seven Years War** had officially begun (referred to as the **French and Indian War** by Americans.) Without realizing it, George Washington had ordered the shots that began a worldwide conflict.

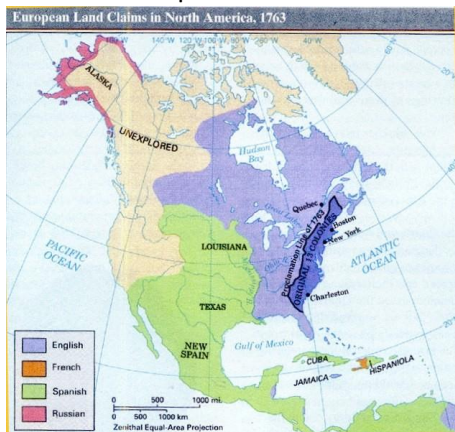
News of the fighting spread like wildfire and Governor Dinwiddie requested help from North Carolina and other neighboring colonies. The British ordered troops to set sail for America and in 1754, the North Carolina General Assembly answered Governor Dinwiddie's request for reinforcements. Members agreed to send troops to Virginia and to levy a special tax for defense of the frontier. North Carolina chose **Colonel James Innes** to lead approximately 450 North Carolina militias to meet with Washington and assist. The two leaders agreed to build a fort at the head of the Potomac River, called **Fort Cumberland**, which Innes then took command of.

The first phase of this war was a disaster for Britain and the English colonies. The 90,000 French in America, vastly outnumbered by 1.5 million English colonials, were better organized, more experienced fighters and had the most Indian allies. To the Indians, the French were the lesser of two evils; there were fewer French than English, and they seemed more interested in trading for beaver pelts than did the English, who were pushing the Indians off their lands. For many Indians, the war also provided an opportunity to repay years of mistreatment by the English. The Indians' rage exploded in the viciousness of their attacks, which were met with equal savagery by the British. Scalp taking was a popular Native American and British tactic, and the British commander, **General Edward Braddock**, offered his Indian allies five pounds sterling for the scalp of a French soldier. For the English side, the great disaster of this war came in 1755, when 1,400 redcoats, under British General Braddock, marched on Fort Duquesne in a poorly planned mission. Joining him was **General Edward Brice Dobbs**, who led around 84 North Carolinians into battle, including a band of North Carolina Rangers headed by **Major Hugh Waddell**. However, a much smaller force of French slaughtered the English, leaving only 500 survivors.

Things had gone badly everywhere for the English until there was a change of leadership in London, with **William Pitt** taking over the war effort in 1758. Pitt believed North America was critical for England's global domination. His strategy emphasized naval warfare and the conquest of North America, which Pitt viewed as the key to overall victory. He poured in troops and found talented new commanders in **James Wolfe** and **Jeffrey Amherst**. One of Amherst's novel tactics, when negotiating with some attacking Indians, was to give them blankets from the smallpox hospital. A string of victories between 1758 and 1760 gave the English control over the American colonies.

The death blow to the French cause was struck in Quebec in 1759. Commander Wolfe bravely sent his forces up a rocky embankment to surprise the French. The battle that followed on the Plains of Abraham killed Wolfe and the French commander, as the crucial stronghold was transferred to British hands. It would only be a matter of time before Montreal suffered the same fate in 1760, leading to the English ownership of Canada.

The French chapter of North American history had ended in a bloody finale



In 1763, the **Treaty of Paris** brought peace and, with it, a complete British triumph. The English now owned all of Canada, America east of the Mississippi Valley, Florida, and a number of Caribbean islands. France lost its American colonies, except for a few islands in the French West Indies, and France's overseas trade had been crippled by the British navy.

Colonial Americans, now fully blooded in a major armed conflict, took pride and rejoiced at the victory they had helped win for their new king, George III, who had taken the throne in 1760. George Washington, who played no small part in the fighting, rode back to Williamsburg, Virginia, to resign his command. A career as a professional soldier no longer interested him.