18th Century Warfare: Crash Course European History #20

Crash Course: European History
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Hi I'm John Green and this is Crash Course European History.

Last time, we looked at how the monarchs did--and didn't--incorporate the ideas of the Enlightenment into their domestic policies. Today, we'll look outward to how the 18th century European powers engaged with each other and beyond Europe--which is to say that warfare is coming.

Or, continuing, I suppose, because it never really left town. [Intro] So, population was rising in 18th century Europe and despite an extremely uneven distribution of wealth and lots of wartime casualties, many people were leading better lives. For example, inventories of French people's possessions show that in 1700 women owned an average of two garments generally in solid black or brown; in 1800 that number was five garments of more varied, even bright colors. Now, this may seem like minor progress, but here's another way of thinking about it: The average number of garments owned by people living in France rose by more in a hundred years than it had in the previous hundred thousand.

By the way, did that dress look gold to you, or blue? And do you even remember that meme? Probably not.

Oh god, I'm so old. I grow old, I grow old, I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. That's an even older meme.

At any rate, we associate these and many other improving conditions in Europe with what is called "modernity"—an idea combining improvement and novelty that we will examine later in the series. But when it came to warfare, Europeans were still battling it out among themselves on the continent and on the seas--and always at great cost. The 18th century opened with wars of the Spanish, Polish, and Austrian successions, all of which were just what their names suggest: fights over who was going to become king or queen amidst a dispute over rulership—disputes not unlike the one at the heart of the Hundred Years War.

And so in that sense, progress had been . . . minimal. As far as wars between states, the dominant idea in foreign relations was still to grab as much territory as possible from foreign kingdoms. Because only by making your kingdom bigger could you also make it richer.

So for instance as Austria fought with itself during its war of succession over whether a woman, Maria Theresa, should be allowed to ascend to the Habsburg throne, Frederick the Great of neighboring Prussia quickly mobilized his army and seized Silesia from the Habsburgs. When I read the phrase, "seized Silesia" it rolled right off the tongue of my mind, but man. Saying it is a completely different matter.

At any rate, Maria Theresa's rulership survived, but Habsburg control of Silesia did not. Because of economic globalization, still other wars aimed at controlling trade routes and productive territory around the world. For that reason sometimes a cluster of wars in the middle of the eighteenth century has been called a "world war" or the Great War for Empire.

Like, it was a world war, but unfortunately we already have a World War I, so we're in a bit of a tight spot, name-wise. But these wars did occur across truly global battlefields and oceans. They included wars between the British and local Native American peoples (sometimes called the first and second Anglo-Indian Wars), and also the French and Indian War in North America. and there was also the Seven Years War, which was fought partly within Europe, but there were also battles between Britain and its rivals—most notably France and Spain—in the Caribbean, the Philippines, and India.

In this complicated and many-tentacled set of wars—or arguably a single war in many different theaters—the French and British were ultimately fighting over who would be the dominant European force in the wider world. Spain was a somewhat smaller player, fighting to protect its holdings in the Caribbean and the Philippines. Native people around the world were enlisted in these struggles, and local peoples changed sides often as their interests shifted, and in the end trusted none of the Europeans, who pitted native peoples against each other and also were not known for keeping their promises.

Simultaneously the Russians were waging war against the Ottomans in eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. In Russia, like in the other European kingdoms, the wars' costs were passed on mostly to ordinary people, who faced more efficient and demanding tax collection. Additionally, central governments were disrupting local traditions and practices--for instance, local traditions related to the consumption of alcohol were disrupted in Russia by HUGE increases in taxes on alcohol.

Did the center of the world just open? Is my favorite book, The Bear and the Dragon in there? Ah, The Bear and the Dragon by Tom Clancy.

I've never actually read it, but inside my copy of the bear and the dragon is this. So in 18th century Russia, this huge tax on alcohol eventually funded 22% of the empire's total budget. And there were other disruptions as well, arguably more important ones, including the conversion of some free peasants into serfs.

Local people fought back in a variety of ways. The first of the extensive uprisings against the efficient and "enlightened" taxation to pay for warfare was the Pugachev Rebellion. It was led by former Cossack and Russian army deserter Emile Pugachev.

He managed to persuade rural Russians that he was in fact Peter III, husband of Catherine II. Now, Peter had been assassinated in 1762 within months of his accession to power, most likely at Catherine's command (and possibly by her lover). So given that Russian history really was playing out like a soap opera, it didn't seem impossible that the murdered Czar had been hiding out all along as a Russian army deserter named Emile.

Pugachev claimed to have wandered poor and alone like Jesus until he could become the "Tsar Redeemer." And as Peter III, Pugachev created quite the following. He had Russian clergy and officials—both high and low—issue a series of measures relieving serfs of their burdens. Pugachev also roused the Cossacks, who were fearful of being forced into the army and losing their freedom.

He confirmed their rights and liberties and he granted everyone permission to sport beards, which, as you may recall, Peter I had outlawed. And some three million Russians followed Pugachev until he was captured in 1774, then gruesomely tortured and executed in January 1775. After that, Catherine again tightened the nobility's grip on serfs.

Hard on the heels of Pugachev's uprising, the American Revolution erupted over a series of taxes Britain imposed on its thirteen colonies in North America—again to pay the costs of imperial warfare. Now, the British government felt that the expense it had incurred in defeating the French and Native Americans in the French and Indian War should be paid by the colonists who'd profited from the protection. But in America, we don't stand for that kind of reasoning!

There were some other things going on. The royal government had also closed off westward expansion at the Allegheny Mountains,

which in effect eradicated the property rights of people like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington who claimed land there. And King George agreed with his advisors that the Americans were rough, stupid, and ineffective, especially as military people.

So to keep the Native Americans under control, a standing army of British soldiers should be stationed on the North American continent and financed by the colonists. So if history is all about shifting perspectives, we're gonna shift perspectives quickly here. From the British perspective, American colonists were taxed 1 shilling for every 26 paid by a homeland Briton, and that seemed like a pretty good deal.

But from the perspective of the North American colonists, they did not have the rights of other Englishmen, including the right not to be taxed without representation. Colonists created a Declaration of Independence, which was issued in 1776. The British the sent additional troops, and soon war erupted.

Those who wanted independence harassed, beat up, murdered and destroyed the property of the loyalists, who responded in kind. The rebels were greatly aided by the Spanish and French who sent decisive aid in the form of ships and military personnel. And besides, the British had other concerns, including preserving their far more lucrative sugar islands in the Caribbean, as well as their holdings in India, and in Canada.

Although comparatively insignificant at the time, the newly independent colonies that became the United States established a representative form of government with a written constitution that featured many Enlightenment principles. Now, it was hardly a true democracy, as only a minority had any legal say or rights and the Constitution itself enshrined slavery. But it also definitely wasn't a monarchy.

Anyway, this little country would eventually grow big enough for us to make an entire Crash Course about it. Meanwhile, the defeated loyalists, including slaves who had been promised their freedom in return for fighting for the crown, fled to Canada and other parts of the world. And for the record, they rarely received the financial support that the British had promised them for their faithful assistance.

Spain also saw uprisings against the reforms of the enlightened monarchs, though grievances had been piling up even before efficient and tax-heavy policies were put in place. Also, Spain lost Manila in the Philippines to the British, and they lost Florida, which, you know, not exactly a tragedy. I am a Floridan so I am allowed to make that joke.

And, that's not fair. Florida is lovely. It really is the best place in the United States to run from your past mistakes, straight into new ones.

But back to Spain. So, across the occupied Spanish lands in the Western Hemisphere, local people found ways to express their discontent with colonial oppression, at times violently protesting injustices by imperial officials or overbearing behavior by priests. Religious activists claimed that the Spanish were false gods; in the former Incan lands, several Incans actively opposed the Spanish government in a concerted uprising that began in 1742, but was soon defeated.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble. 1. In 1780, another uprising battling Spanish rule broke out in the Andes. 2. Inca Tupac Ameru led a powerful rebellion against Spanish authorities in an attempt to restore the former Incan empire 3. and to liberate local people from the increased Spanish demands for labor and taxes. 4. His wife Michaela Bastidas, who was part Incan, 5. was operational manager and chief enforcer of loyalty to her husband's uprising. 6. In that role she was especially brutal. 7. She threatened slackers, even her husband, whom she chastised for following losing strategies. 8.

And she ensured that the revolt's soldiers were supplied with arms and food and that they were paid 9. —concerns that Tupac Ameru seemed to forget sometimes. 10. Alongside Bastidas, who mostly directed military activity, 11. entire units of women soldiers took to the battlefields in several parts of the empire, building on traditions of active resistance. 12. Spanish soldiers noticed them for their intense commitment to victory in battle, 13. calling them "supermasculine" and one fighter in particular "as bloody a butcher as her brother." 14.

The rebellion was put down with focused determination and its leaders were eventually captured. 15. In 1781, the Spanish colonial government (in present day Peru) had Michaela Bastidas dragged bound hand and foot to her execution, garroted, then hanged; 16. finally they cut her body to pieces with her head posted on a pike for all to see. 17. Which, unfortunately is not the last time we're going to be talking about heads on pikes in Crash Course European History. 18.

Her husband's execution and mutilation followed shortly thereafter. Thanks Thought Bubble. Some 100,000 people died in the uprisings in the Spanish empire—that is, around ten percent of the native population in all of Spain's South American holdings.

The Spanish imperial government prevailed whereas the British did not for a number of reasons. For one, the Spanish administration was less dispersed in its efforts and had seen how Britain suffered because it was fighting all around the world. Also, Spain had also begun the process of integrating creoles—people of Spanish descent born in the colonies—into the officer corps of the Spanish imperial armies.

Professional training, access to military schools and military privileges all served to build loyalty to Spain. And that was essentially the opposite of British treatment and attitudes towards North American colonials. Britain saw its North American colonials as, like, useless at fighting and hopeless as officers. and so the Spanish Empire in the Americas survived for now.

Still, some saw a different outcome. Francisco de Miranda, a creole official in the Spanish army, helped achieved the victory for the American Revolutionaries at Yorktown. He watched the Spanish dealings with the rebels in Peru, observing "how astute and perfidious the Spanish agents had proved. . . ." But Miranda predicted, "the Anglo-American colonies. . . independence. . .was bound to be . . . the infallible preliminary to our own." And indeed, people of South America had greater battles to come as they continued to fight for their freedom from Spain.

So, these eighteenth century wars had many long-term outcomes. First, as the Seven Years War unwound and the Prussian army built itself up, Frederick the Great saw a chance to cut up Poland-Lithuania, proposing to divide a good chunk of it among Austria, Russia, and Prussia itself. This was the First Partition of Poland; so-called because further partitions would follow.

Meanwhile, while Britain lost what it thought of as a less lucrative part of its empire, it kept its domination of the Caribbean sugar islands and turned its attention to extracting the wealth of India. Finally, after providing the crucial aide that allowed the birth of the United States of America, France was in dire financial straits and badly in need of reform. As the French watched, and supported, the emergence of a nation without a monarch across the Atlantic, few of

them could have imagined that a great revolution was just one episode away that would see the French monarchy beheaded--both literally and figuratively.

Thanks for watching. I'll see you then.