The Seven Years War: Crash Course World History #26

Crash Course: World History
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https://nerdfighteria.info/v/j0qbzNHmfW0

Hi, my name is John Green, this is Crash Course World History-OH MY GOSH- today we're gonna talk about war-GYAAA EXPLOSIONS EVERYWHERE!

So traditionally historians are pretty keen on wars because they feature clearly delineated beginnings and middles and ends and because they always have a fair bit of death and drama, and mortally wounded generals who have great last words like "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of those trees." Whereas the last words of plague victims were always like "uuuughhh." Sorry plague victims. As if you don't have enough troubles now you've got me teasing you about your uninspired death throes.

Wars have easy where's, when's, who's and why's: 1861 to 1865, the United States, the North Vs. the South, to end slavery and save the Union.

MFTP: Mr. Green, Mr. Green, are you gonna show us the hidden complexities behind something we already think we understand again?

John: Sorry me-from-the-past, but yes. However, to placate you, here's some more explosions. B-boom boom boom boom booooom!

The 17th and 18th centuries saw a bunch of top-notch wars, but today we're gonna focus on the Seven Years War, also called the French and Indian Wars, because it was the first truly global war.

In fact, no less a historian then Winston Churchill called it the First World War. Though we've been so euro-centric here on Crash Course that all we're going to say about the entire war in Europe is that Prussia and Great Britain fought France and Austria and that the Austrian Habsburgs wanted to win back Silesia, which they failed to do-THERE. That's all you get, Europe!

So the Seven Years War lasted for-anyone? Anyone?

MFTP: 23 years?

John: (sighs) I hate you me-from-the-past, but as it happens, by sheer coincidence, you are not necessarily wrong.

(intro music plays)

So the when. The Seven Years War began in 1756 and ended in 1763. Unless you believe, as many historians do, that the Seven Years War lasted 23 years, because it was really a continuation of the war for Austrian succession. Then you have the fact that much of the information in today's episode is taken from a book called "The Global Seven Years War 1754-1763," a 9 year period. As for the 'whos', it was mainly fought between the British and the French, seen here re-enacting the knife fight from either Beat It or West Side Story, depending on your age.

But some of the British were actually Americans and both the British and the French were supported by American Indians, and there was fighting in India between Indian-Indians, the British and the French, and as previously noted, the French were fighting the Prussians and the British were fighting the Austrians.

The where: Europe, the continental US, the Caribbean sea, off the coast of Africa, India, basically the world.

And the why? Ostensibly, land. British colonists wanted to expand into land west of the original 13 colonies. And that land was technically held by the French, who left it alone except for a bunch of trading posts and they were like "Je ne veux pas l'Anglais"!" Thank you, 4 years of high school French.

Anyway, the war wasn't really about land, it was really about our old friend 'trade'. The British wanted to expand into the American interior to allow for more colonists, because the British benefited both from the export of raw materials from the Americas, and the import of British consumer goods to the Americas. So more colonists meant more trade, which meant more wealth, which meant ever fancier hats.

And the French realized that this British Atlantic maritime trade was making Britain so rich that Britain might come for France's actually valuable colonies, which were not in the continental US, but those slave-based sugar plantations in the Caribbean. So the fighting began around here and while the British did send over actual British troops, much of the early fighting was done by colonial militias.

Probably the most famous commander of the British troops was a Virginia colonel named George Washington. In fact, he may have actually started the shooting at the Battle of Fort Necessity in May of 1754. Washington was captured in that battle but then he was immediately released because 18th century war was super weird.

Anyway, the real North American action was in New York and Canada. At the battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759 for instance, the British defeated the French and captured the city of Quebec. Both the British commander General Wolfe and the French commander General Montcalm were killed in that battle with the death of the former being immortalized in this famous painting by Benjamin West. As indicated by the picture, almost all the battles in North America featured significant participation by Native Americans.

Different native tribes sided with both the British and the French, but as a broad generalization, Native Americans were more likely to support the French.

Up to this point shrewd Indian tribes had been able to play the British and the French off each other and maintain a degree of autonomy for themselves. And as long as the French were present, the British were prevented from encroaching too much on lands Native Americans were using for hunting and agriculture.

Now we haven't talked much about American Indians, mostly because they were geographically isolated and didn't have a written language, but let's at least give them a Thought Bubble.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, most Native Americans lived in tribal groups, and they subsisted on a combination of small-scale agriculture and hunting and gathering, depending on where they were situated. There were too many tribes to generalize about specific social structures, but it's probably safe to say that in terms of gender they were much more egalitarian than the Europeans, who they met up with, which may explain why European women who were taken captive by Indians sometimes preferred to stay with the tribe, rather than be rescued, although that's somewhat controversial.

One thing we can say about the Indians: their notions of what it meant to hold property were very different from those of the Europeans. Individual Indians did not 'own' land in the European sense. They used it. And not always particularly intensively. Europeans, when they came to North America, had a hard time even recognizing that the Indians were raising crops, because their forms of farming were so different from European agriculture. So the French and especially the English just assumed that the Indians weren't improving the land, which meant that they didn't own the land, so that meant that it was okay for Europeans to take it. As you might imagine, that was problematic for the Indians.

In general, Indian tribes initially got along better with the French

than with the Dutch or English because 1. the French didn't settle in large numbers, as they were mostly traders and fur trappers, and 2. French missionaries who made the journey to the Americas were Catholic, often Jesuits, who were so intent on converting the Indians that they took the time to learn Indian languages and try to make Catholicism more amenable to Indian religion.

The end result of the war: a greatly reduced French presence on the American mainland meant that Indians could no longer easily play the British and French off each other, which opened the floodgates of British settlers. In the end, the American Indians were perhaps the biggest losers of the Seven Years War.

Thanks, Thought Bubble. So 2000 miles south, in the Caribbean, there was also quite a lot of fighting between the British and the French over sugar colonies. Most of these were naval battles and by 1761 Spain got involved because you know, they had some sugar colonies of their own.

While these battles get a lot of ink, it's interesting to know that by far the greatest threat to combatants was disease. By October of 1761 the British had lost about 1000 men to war, and 5000 to disease.

Meanwhile, in West Africa, the British and the French were fighting there too, because, you know, why not? The British attacked the French at a trading post called St. Louis- oh, Stan, don't make me say it right... fine... Saint Louís. And at a town called Goré, both in Senegal. Why? Well, trade, of course. Senegal was the main source of gum arabic, which is notable for many reasons, but most importantly it is a key ingredient in the Diet Coke and Mentos phenomenon, so of course the British wanted lots of it.

And the French were also fighting the British in India!
In the 18th century India was nominally ruled by Mughul Empire, but I'm saying that wrong, aren't I?

Computer: Moh-gul

John: Yeah, that sounds more plausible. But as throughout most of it's history, the real power in India lay with local Kings and Princes, sometimes called Nawabs. And these Princes, just like their European counterparts, were constantly vying for power and control over more territory. And to get it they often enlisted the help, especially the military help, of Europeans.

This is what happened in the most notorious event in the Seven Years War in India, The Black Hole of Calcutta. In June of 1756 the British governor of Calcutta, Roger Drake made the mistake of insulting the emissary sent by the Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah who duly besieged and captured the British garrison of 500 with his own army of 30,000.

Drake escaped to nearby ships with the towns women and children, you know the old saying, women children and governors first. But the towns defenders remained and the survivors were imprisoned in a small windowless room that came to be known as the Black Hole and 40 of 63 prisoners suffocated overnight.

This story is mostly famous, in a war that killed 1 million people because the British press exaggerated the numbers in order to build support for the war in India. Not the last time that exaggerations of enemy brutality would be used to gin up support for a war.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the military campaigns in this part of the world is that at least initially they were not undertaken by governments themselves but by corporations that had their own armies. The British East India company was the most successful of these corporations, primarily because of the military skill of its leader, Robert Clive.

Oh, it's time for the open letter? An open letter to Robert Clive. But first, let's see what's in the secret compartment today. Oh, bubbles! That makes sense, Stan. The British East India company was involved in several early market bubbles.

(John blows bubbles)

Mmmmm. Bubbles.

Dear Robert Clive, you were a complicated man, and not entirely likeable, but you did win a very important battle at Plassey in 1757. And the way you won it says a lot about the relationship between Europe and its colonies. So the key to your success was a conspiracy to overthrow the existing Nawab orchestrated by a Bengali banking family called the Seths. No, Stan. The Seths. Yes. Come on.

And in thanks for your support of their conspiracy, the new Nawab quickly signed a treaty with your company, the East India Company. And thereafter the British has effective control over trade in Bengal, and the French were excluded from it. This was an incredibly valuable region because it produced silk and inexpensive cotton cloth for export and it gave the British a decisive advantage over the French and eventually allowed them to control all of India. And you accomplished this, Robert Clive, primarily by fomenting revolution. Why does this work for you and it never works for the CIA?

Best wishes, John Green.

So by now you've probably figured out that since the French kept losing battles, they eventually lost the war. The main peace treaty signed in Paris in 1763 limited French presence in the Caribbean, in India and in North America. Although not completely otherwise they couldn't have sold Louisiana to Thomas Jefferson in 1803.

So France was obviously dramatically weakened, but overall, so was Britain. One thing rarely mentioned is the actual human cost of war. As many as 1 million combatants died in the Seven Years War, but even that doesn't tell the whole story. In the 18th century, armies usually fed themselves by foraging which really meant just pillaging the countryside. In Europe a single Prussian province lost a fifth of it's population to pillaging and in North America settlers in frontier regions lived in constant fear of raids.

And one of the perhaps lesser know outcomes of the war was the systematic deportation of French Acadians from Maine to Louisiana, where they became Cajuns. Meaning that the stars of the television shows Lobster Wars and Swamp Wars are basically the same people. What's that? There's no television show called Swamp Wars? Stan, cancel everything and get me on the phone with the Discovery Channel!

One last thing about wars, they are expensive. In 1756 the British national debt was 75 million pounds, in 1763 it was 133 million pounds. Someone had to pay for this, and the British felt it was only fair that the American colonists should foot the bill. And those taxes which helped fuel the American Revolution were a direct result of the Seven Years War. So in one way, winning the Seven Years War cost Britain it's first Empire. But when we remember that it was a global war, and especially when we think about what happened in India, then the Seven Years War also begins to look like the beginning of Britain's second and much greater empire.

Winning is losing is winning is losing. Such is life and such is history.

Thanks for watching, see you next week.

Crash Course is produced and directed by Stan Muller, our script

supervisor is Danica Johnson, the show is written by my high school history teacher Raoul Meyer and myself and the graphics team is Thought Bubble. Last week's phrase of the week was 'Your Grandpa' if you want to take a guess at this week's phrase of the week or suggest future ones, you can do so in the comments where you can also ask questions about today's video that will be answered by our team of historians. Thanks for watching Crash Course, and as we say in my home town, don't forget to be awesome.