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Web brings War of Independence to life

The Fourth of July is celebrated as our nation's birthday because that is the day in 1776 when the Continental Congress officially adopted the Declaration of Independence. In fact, the Congress had actually declared independence on July 2 as the document was still being revised, and the declaration wasn't read in public until July 8.

But the birth of our nation was much more than simply declaring independence from Great Britain. Actual independence was a long, violent and complicated series of events that started many years before the Declaration, and wasn't official until the Treaty of Paris in September of 1783. America won its freedom, with lots of help from the French, in a series of bloody battles that raged for over eight years.

There are many websites that detail the history of the Revolutionary War. Most of them don't take advantage of the multimedia capabilities of the web, and are not much different than reading a book on the subject. While they have links to other sources and related materials that you won't find in a book, they are basically pages of text and images.

Bloody birth

RevolutionaryWarAnimated.com is a site that takes advantage of the medium. It tells the story of the revolution via a series of animated maps depicting the major

battles of the war. The maps are interactive so you can advance, stop or replay the battles at your own speed. American, British and French troop positions are color coded to distinguish who's who on the battlefield.

A column running down the left side of the site lists all of the major battles of the war. Clicking on a battle brings up a page with a short description of the conflict and a selection of recommended books on the subject. There's also a button to view an animation of the event.

Revolutionary presentation

Clicking on the button opens a page with illustrated instructions explaining how to navigate through the animations. Most of the animations start off with a large map of the original 13 colonies. At the top of the map is the date and an introductory statement setting the stage for the battle. An animated starburst locates the battle on the map, and there are navigation buttons at the bottom of the page.

The battles are broken down into scenes. Pressing the Play button when it turns red causes a scene to play. The button turns red again when the scene is completed, allowing the next scene to be played.

As the scenes progress the map zooms in closer to the action, often getting down to street level. Sound effects, such as troops marching and gunfire, alert you to when the armies are moving and when they're shooting. Arrows, flags and other symbols are used to represent troop movements, countries, ships, artillery and the other components of warfare. The last scene gives an analysis of the battle from

both sides and a description of the aftermath.

The animations are schematic in nature, as opposed to showing images of soldiers fighting it out in a virtual battle. Text and legends are used to explain the action. Roll-over boxes are used to give more information on important figures, such as generals or admirals.

Teaching tool

Revolutionary War Animated is part of **HistoryAnimated.com**, a larger site that also covers the Civil War and World War II. The site was created to be used as an aid for educators teaching history, but any war history buffs will find it useful and engaging. The site is free, but there is a button to accept donations.

The website is fun and interesting, but there's room for improvement. The navigation is functional and intuitive, and the organization of the content is logical. Where the site needs some help is with aesthetics, especially typography. The main pages are fine, but when you enter the animations the type gets weak. The animation instruction page needs better organization. Most of the type in the animations is a white italics font, which doesn't promote good readability. A decorative, wood-grain border around the screen is also a bit distracting.

If you want to learn more about the birth of our nation, or the history of war (which is the history of civilization), this is a good place to do it.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.



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