
ALEXANDER HAMILTON

~ OUR FIRST CAPTAIN ~

Alexander Hamilton exemplified the spirit of American Democracy, proving that a common man can rise to fame in the United States. He was born on January 11, 1755, on a small island called Nevis, located in the West Indies, which are now the U.S. Virgin Islands. Hamilton always believed that he had been born in 1757, and some of his biographers fix his age at various points in his life based on the incorrect birthdate.

Hamilton's mother, Rachael Fawcette Lavien, was married to man from Denmark named John Michael Lavien, who had accused Rachael of adultery and had her jailed. A couple of years after her release, Rachael began to live with James Hamilton, a drifter from Scotland. Alexander Hamilton was one of two illegitimate children born to this couple. When Alexander was four years old, his mother obtained a divorce from John Lavien, but because she was the offending party in the divorce decree, Danish law at the time did not allow her to remarry. James Hamilton abandoned Rachael and the two children in 1765.



Alexander and his older brother, James, helped their mother operate a small shop in the town of Christiansted for three years, until she died in 1768. Alexander's older brother became a carpenter, and at age 13, Alexander began working in an accounting office for Nicholas Cruger, a businessman in the city of St. Croix. For his willingness to work and his attention to detail, Alexander was placed in charge of the office at the age of 15. In 1772, at the age of 17, Alexander Hamilton moved to the mainland of the American continent, and in 1773 entered King's College (now Columbia University)

demonstrating his intelligence and dedication once again, Alexander qualified for a Bachelor of Arts degree the next year.

As the idea of a revolution from the British became popular, Alexander began to make speeches and write pamphlets in support of the movement. He deplored what he considered to be cowardly actions of other patriots who would tar and feather people loyal to the British and loot their businesses. Instead, Hamilton began to drill in a volunteer company in New York City commanded by a major named Edward Fleming. His first action under fire occurred in August 1775, when a British warship began to fire upon colonial fortifications in New York City. That night, Alexander, his friend, Hercules Mulligan, and other patriots banded together to drag several artillery pieces to a safe position.

In January 1776, as soon as the provincial congress authorized the raising of an artillery company for the defense of the colony, Hamilton prepared himself to obtain the command. He was coached in the mathematics necessary for gunnery by one of the King's College professors, Robert Harpur. Stephen Bedlam, captain of artillery, furnished a certificate which stated that he had "examined Alexander Hamilton and judged him qualified." At that time, the 21-year-old Hamilton was 5 feet 7 inches tall, had reddish brown hair, and dark blue (almost violet) eyes.

After receiving the certificate from Captain Bedlam, the congress ordered Hamilton appointed as Captain of the Provincial Company of artillery of the colony of New York on March 14, 1776. This company was armed with two cannons that had been seized from the British. One of Hamilton's first challenges was recruiting his soldiers. On the first afternoon of recruiting, he was able to sign up 25 men, but soon thereafter found colonists reluctant to enlist in his company because he could not offer the higher pay offered to artillerymen in units belonging to the Continental Army.

Once the recruiting problems were solved, Hamilton's skill as an artillery officer attracted the attention of General Nathanael Greene. Because of this, Hamilton was introduced to [General George Washington](#), who was the commander-in-chief of the American Revolutionary forces. Washington was impressed by this young officer, and in March 1777, appointed him as his aide-de-camp with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

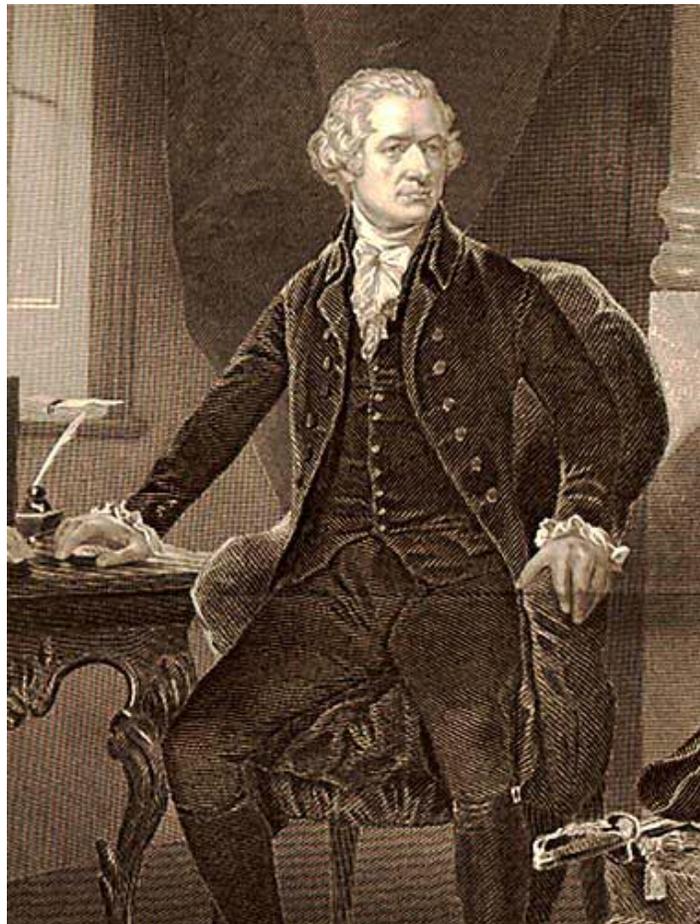
Because France's support of the American Revolution was vital to the cause, Hamilton's knowledge of the French language was valuable to General Washington. Alexander Hamilton was married to Elizabeth Schuyler, the daughter of a wealthy New York landowner, on December 4, 1780. Shortly thereafter, Hamilton grew angry with [General Washington](#) and resigned as his aide, explaining to his father-in-law, "I always disliked the office of aide-de-camp, as having in it a kind of personal dependence."

In spite of this resignation, Hamilton remained with the Continental Army. His skill as a staff officer was still invaluable in settling differences among the various regiments of

the Continental Army and their French allies. At the siege of Yorktown in 1781, General Washington permitted Alexander Hamilton to lead a small storming party of infantrymen into a British cannon position, known as "Redoubt Number Four." As the men of this party stood on the shoulders of their companions to climb up the wall, Hamilton, being too short to reach the top, commanded a nearby soldier to kneel, stepped on his back, and vaulted into the redoubt. After a bayonet fight, the British soldiers scattered, and many surrendered. This attack helped convince the British commander at Yorktown, Lord Cornwallis, to surrender.

Following the Revolutionary War, Alexander Hamilton worked in New York City as a lawyer, and became a member of the Continental Congress in 1782-83. Hamilton was a delegate at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, but did not play an important role in the sessions. His greatest contribution to the Constitution of the United States was after the ratification when he staunchly defended it in "The Federalist" papers.

At the age of 34, Alexander Hamilton accepted President Washington's offer to become the first Secretary of the Treasury. In this position he gained credit as being the founder of the [The United States Coast Guard](#), part of the [The Department of the Treasury](#). Hamilton served in this position for more than five years, resigning in January 1795. Upon leaving the Treasury, Hamilton returned to New York City to devote himself to his successful law practice and to raise his family of seven children. In 1798, President Washington recalled Alexander Hamilton to active duty at the rank of general, because of an undeclared war with France. This war remained a naval conflict, so Hamilton did not serve



in combat as a general officer.

The presidential race of 1800 was between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. Hamilton considered Jefferson "the lesser of two evils" and supported him. At that time, the candidate who received the most votes became the president and the opponent the vice-president. Throughout the following term, Hamilton frequently commented about the disreputable character of Aaron Burr in private conversations. In 1804, Vice-President Burr was informed about Hamilton's remarks by a reliable source, and demanded an explanation or a public apology.

Alexander Hamilton refused to make an apology, resulting in Aaron Burr challenging him to a duel with pistols. Hamilton accepted the challenge and the duel took place in the early morning of July 11, 1804, along the banks of the Hudson River at Weehawken, New Jersey. After taking the agreed upon number of paces, Burr wheeled and fired first, fatally wounding Hamilton, whose pistol fired as he fell to the ground. Hamilton died at the age of 49. This duel destroyed the political career of Aaron Burr, who became involved in treasonous plots to allow the American West to fall under the control of the Spanish. His hope was to become ruler of a country formed in that manner.

The Hamilton family name was carried on by Alexander's children, including his oldest son, Alexander Hamilton, Jr., who became a lawyer and represented Burr's wife in divorce court in 1839. While the family perpetuated the name, the memory of Alexander Hamilton was perpetuated by several of the organizations with which he served: Columbia University; The United States Congress; [The Department of the Treasury](#) which prints Hamilton's face on the ten dollar bill; [The United States Coast Guard](#); and of course, the artillery unit he formed, which now has the longest unbroken lineage of any active duty unit in the United States Army.

