

Witnesses to War: Waldeck, de Gálvez, and the Battle for Pensacola

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Design Level: High School (adaptable)

Overview: Students explore the global dimensions of the American Revolution through the intersecting experiences of Philipp Waldeck, Bernardo de Gálvez, and the Siege of Pensacola, using primary sources and maps to uncover how German soldiers, Spanish commanders, and Gulf Coast geography shaped the course of the war.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Analyze primary sources to understand the experiences of Waldeck soldiers.
- Interpret historical maps to contextualize military movements and geography.
- Develop historical empathy by writing from the perspective of a soldier.
- Understand the role of foreign troops in the American Revolution.

Materials:

- Baker, Maury (1977) "Bernardo de Galvez's Combat Diary for the Battle of Pensacola, 1781," Florida Historical Quarterly: Vol. 56: No. 2, Article 7. Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol56/iss2/7>
- Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Suite du Théâtre de la Guerre clans l'Amérique Septentrionale. Michel Capitaine du Chesnoy, after 1779. Accessed July 24, 2025. <https://emuseum.colonialwilliamsburg.org/objects/102403/suite-du-theatre-de-la-guerre-clans-lamerique-septentrional>
- Delarochette, L. Map of the empire of Germany. [S.l., 1782] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00556409/>.
- Library of Congress. Sauthier, Claude Joseph. A topographical map of the northn. part of New York Island, exhibiting the plan of Fort Washington, now Fort Knyphausen, with the rebels lines to the southward, which were forced by the troops under the command of the Rt. Honble. Earl Percy on the 16th. Novr. , and survey'd immediately after by order of His Lordship. London, W. Faden, 1777. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/74692191/>.
- [Muster Sheet.HEIC](#) "Muster Roll of the Vacant Company of the 3d Regiment of Waldeck, for 182 Days, from the 25th of Decbr 1781 to the 24th of June 1782, both Days included," New Town, Long Island, June 12, 1782, The Society of the Cincinnati [MSS L1995F153] *This shows Waldeck being listed as the Chaplain. The fact the company is "vacant" refers to their being leaderless at the time*

- Steuernagel, Carl Philipp. “Memoir of Carl Philipp Steuernagel, 3rd Waldeck Regiment.” *Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* 6, no. 1 (1997): 48–49.
- Waldeck, Philipp. *Eighteenth Century America: A Hessian Report on the People, the Land, the War as Noted in the Diary of Chaplain Philipp Waldeck (1776–1780)*. Translated by Bruce E. Burgoyne. Reprint edition. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1995.

Recommended Time

Two 50-minute class periods.

Lesson Activities:

1. Ask students: What do German soldiers, Spanish sailors, and western Florida have to do with the American Revolution? Although we do not usually associate them with the American Revolution, all three played a significant role. Through diary entries and maps we are able to understand the significance of each.
2. Give each student (or set of partners) one excerpt to read. These have been divided and formatted on [Student Copy of Sources and Footnotes](#) for ease of use. The [Teacher Copy of Sources and Footnotes](#) is a condensed version so the teacher may help students accurately place each source in its historical context, with background details and extra facts in italics to support deeper understanding of why the information matters.
3. Ask students to identify who has the first chronological entry. This may take some time at first. One suggestion is to have students identify the year, then month, then date. (Note: if pressed for time, skip the Battle of Fort Washington November 11-16 and A topographical map of the northn. part of New York Island)
 - The entry of May 30th 1776 documents Waldeck’s arrival at the departure point in Germany. As students locate the mouth of the Weser on [The Delarochette Map](#) of the empire of Germany (located south of the A in “German Ocean”) encourage them to compare this map of Germany with our understanding of Germany today. The various German states and principalities within the Holy Roman Empire are outlined.
 - The 20th of October 1776 marks the day Waldeck’s regiment landed in New York. It is worth noting they spent some time along the coast of England so their trip was not 5 months long.
 - Beginning with November 22nd 1778 use the map *Suite du Théâtre de la Guerre clans l’Amérique Septentrionale* to track the movements of Waldeck and deGalvez.
4. As students continue to share their diary entries in chronological order, they should answer teacher selected guiding questions. (Examples have been provided for you in the [Student Guiding Questions](#). It is suggested students not be given the entire list but enough to ensure they remain engaged)
5. Although Waldeck's diary past December 31st did not survive we know Waldeck did. How? Ask students to brainstorm possible sources. Answers could include later diaries,

other people's letters or memoirs, or military documents. In Waldeck's case, we have a primary source from 1782 "Muster Roll of the Vacant Company of the 3d Regiment of Waldeck"[Muster Sheet](#).[HEIC](#) Have students scan the first sheet for Waldeck's name. He is listed as the Chaplain under "On Duty in New York". Waldeck would remain in New York until the signing of the Treaty of Paris when Chaplain Waldeck and the Waldeck regiment returned to Germany with 418 men and women and 13 children, departing from New York July 15th 1783.

Culminating Activity

What do the personal accounts of Spanish and German soldiers reveal about the multinational dimensions of the Battle of Pensacola and their roles in the broader American Revolutionary War?

Students will work in small groups to create a mock diplomatic report, infographic, or presentation that addresses the following:

- Why Spain and German Principalities Got Involved.
 - What were Spain's political and strategic interests in joining the war?
 - Why did German soldiers (like Waldeck) fight for Britain?
 - What alliances or treaties influenced their participation?
- What Each Hoped to Gain
 - What territorial, economic, or diplomatic goals did Spain pursue?
 - What did German states (like Waldeck's) gain from leasing troops to Britain?
 - How did these goals align or conflict with those of Britain and the American colonies?
- How Their Involvement Shaped the Outcome
 - What impact did Gálvez's campaign have on British control in the Gulf?
 - How did Waldeck's regiment contribute to the defense of Pensacola?
 - What does their presence reveal about the global scope of the war?

Presentation Formats (Student Choice):

- Diplomatic Briefing Report: A formal document written as if for a European government, summarizing findings and offering recommendations.
- Infographic: A visual summary with maps, timelines, quotes, and statistics.
- Mock Press Conference: Students role-play as historians presenting their findings to a public audience.
- Podcast or Video Segment: A scripted conversation between "Waldeck" and "de Gálvez" reflecting on their roles.

Extensions

Create a Historical Newspaper

Students design a front page of a fictional 1781 newspaper reporting on the Siege of Pensacola.

Sections could include:

- A headline article from the Spanish or British perspective
- A soldier's letter home
- A political cartoon
- A map or diagram of the siege

Debate: "Was the American Revolution Truly a Global War?"

Students prepare arguments using evidence from the lesson and other sources. They debate whether the American Revolution should be considered a global conflict or a colonial rebellion with international support.

Creative Writing or Art

- Write a fictional letter from Waldeck or de Gálvez to a family member, describing the siege and their thoughts on fighting in a foreign war.
- Create a visual timeline or illustrated journal page inspired by one of the diary entries.

Standards Addressed

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1](#) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.3](#) Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6](#) Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Writing (W)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.1](#) Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information clearly.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.9](#) Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Speaking & Listening (SL)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-10.1](#) Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-10.4](#) Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and descriptive details.

Additional Resources:

- Allison, David, and Larrie D. Ferreiro, eds. *The American Revolution: A World War*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2018.
- American Battlefield Trust. "Siege of Pensacola." *Battlefields.org*. Accessed July 24, 2025. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/revolutionary-war/battles/siege-pensacola>.
- American Revolution Institute. *Spanish and American Diplomacy and Partnership in the Time of the Revolution: A Celebration of Trans-Atlantic Friendship*. Video, 1:12:59. April 18, 2023. <https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/video/spanish-and-american-diplomacy-and-partnership-in-the-time-of-the-revolution-a-celebration-of-trans-atlantic-friendship/>.
- American Revolution Institute. *Waging War in America: Operational Challenges of Armies During the American Revolution*. Video, 1:18:02. August 1, 2024. <https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/video/waging-war-in-america-operational-challenges-of-armies-during-the-american-revolution/>.
- Ferreiro, Larrie. *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It*. New York: Knopf, 2016.