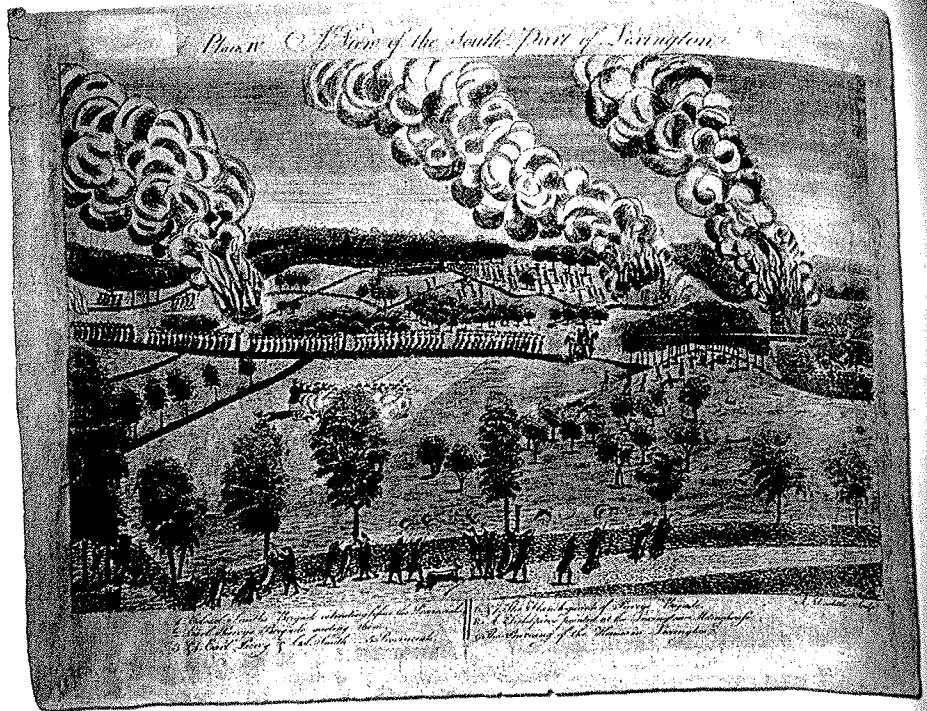


Amos Doolittle's engraving shows a small local militia attacking British soldiers. The Second Continental Congress created a large, organized army to fight the British after this battle.



## 12.2 The Second Continental Congress

On May 10, 1775, Patriot leaders began meeting in Philadelphia in the Second Continental Congress. People in the streets cheered as George Washington arrived from Virginia in his blue and gold military uniform. John Adams came by carriage from Massachusetts, and wise Benjamin Franklin sailed back from Britain to represent Pennsylvania. All together, 65 delegates took part in the Congress. Soon, these men were acting as the new government for the colonies.

**militia:** a small army made up of ordinary citizens

The Congress faced three important tasks. The most urgent task was to organize the colonies for war against the British. Just before the Congress met, British soldiers fought with members of the Patriot **militia** at the towns of Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. The colonies' small militias were made up of ordinary men who were not full-time soldiers. The Congress decided that the colonies needed a more organized army to fight the British, so it created the Continental Army.

The next task was to decide who should lead the new army. Congress quickly chose an experienced soldier and a strong leader: George Washington.

The third and most difficult task was to decide whether to declare independence from Britain. Some Patriots, such as John Adams, were ready to take this step. But most of the delegates were still loyal to King George. Even as the fighting spread throughout the colonies, they hoped the colonies could eventually make peace with Britain.