

THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

With the declaration by the First Continental Congress to start storing ammunitions for defending themselves against the possible use of force by the British, the tensions between the throne and the colonies was beginning to rise again. For obvious reasons the King could not allow the colonies to build up a force against him.

LEXINGTON AND CONCORD:

The Congress approved preparations for defense and the people of Massachusetts collected ammunition and started training minutemen to meet British aggression. British General Thomas Gage dispatched 1,000 troops on the night of April 15, 1775 to march out from Boston to Concord to seize a store of gunpowder collected by the rebels. Word got out to the colonists about the British plans and a group of Minutemen met the troops on their way to Concord and Lexington. Shots were exchanged (it is not known who fired first) and eight militiamen were killed. The redcoats marched on to Concord to find most of the powder had been removed. On their return to Boston the British lost 273 men as they were fired upon continually by the farmers in ambush. Word of the bloodshed quickly spread throughout the colonies and the armed resistance to British authority in the colonies had begun.

THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

Congress met, as previously planned, on May 10, 1775. Talk of independence had started among the delegates. However, the moderates in the Congress delayed this movement. They did agree to make plans to raise an army to defend them and they placed the well liked George Washington as the Commander-in-Chief of the army. The Congress hoped to make peace with the King and restore the relationship to its pre-1763 days. However, King George III denied any requests of the Congress until the resistance was stopped.

THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR

After Lexington and Concord the British withdrew to Boston. The Americans suffered heavy initial losses at Bunker Hill in Boston (June, 1775) but the next year Washington forced the British to abandon Boston in April 1776.

CAUSES OF A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

It began to be apparent to the delegates of Congress that the British would not give in to their demands and declaration of separation from the King was needed. Reasons: 1) British military actions indicated the intention of dealing with the colonies only after they had surrendered to force. The victory in Boston in April 1776 gave the colonists confidence in defeating the British, and 2) The Prohibitory Act of Parliament closing all colonial ports until the colonists abandoned resistance seemed to leave no alternative but a declaration of independence which would enable the colonists to seek foreign assistance.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Congress appointed a committee headed by Thomas Jefferson to draft a formal declaration of independence. A resolution of Independence was adopted on July 2 and the Declaration of Independence itself, giving reasons for the break, was approved on July 4. The preamble of the document stated the compact theory of John Locke as the philosophical basis of the revolution. The second part enumerated the grievances against the King. The final statement declared the existence of independence.

RESOURCES OF THE OPPOSING FORCES

Estimates of the number of people who remained loyal to the throne and those who joined the armed revolt are difficult to measure. However, many people did join the cause of the fighting. Writings such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* gave many people within the colonies the justification of blaming all of their problems on the British government. However, some people remained loyal to the throne. They did not receive good treatment. Several states confiscated property of the loyalists. Those who left, possibly as many as 100,000, found refuge in other British colonies, especially Canada.

COMPARISON OF MILITARY STRENGTH

1) In numbers the British had a much larger population to draw upon for troops. The patriot army never numbered much more than 18,000 at any given time. 2) In discipline, training and experience the British forces were definitely superior but this advantage could not be exploited in the wilderness conditions in America. 3) Long distances worked against the British troops. Troops had to be shipped across the Atlantic and shifted along exterior lines in the colonies. The patriots, fighting on home grounds, shifted along interior lines, and could be assembled quickly in times of crisis. Also, distance from England aggravated supply problems for the British.

OTHER ADVANTAGES FOR BOTH SIDES

1) Great Britain, a mature and wealthy nation, enjoyed a greater line of credit and economic resources. The patriots faced a difficult problem of financing and raising supplies. Loans for the patriots were received from France, Holland, Spain and wealthy leaders of the Revolution. 2) The Americans were convinced of the justice of their cause fought harder and had more moral advantage of defending their homes. 3) The war in England was not popular enough to secure enlistments or raise funds readily. 4) The Americans fought on familiar land. The British were not as used to the weather and land of the colonies. 5) The loosely united states lacked a center of political and economic power, i.e. a real capital.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE STRUGGLE

The confidence of the victory in Boston in April was short lived. After being forced to abandon Boston in April, the British recovered and moved the center of their operation to New York. Washington followed but was defeated in Long Island and Washington Heights (Fall, 1776) and was forced to retreat to New Jersey. The British planned to combine their forces in America and begin a march to the South in 1777. However, with some brilliant maneuvering, the Americans were able to split the British Army and defeat them at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777 under the leadership of General Gates. Despite this victory, Washington was defeated at Brandywine just outside Philadelphia and was forced to spend the winter at Valley Forge.

THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

The American victory at Saratoga had another important outcome. It convinced the French to sign a formal treaty of alliance and enter the war openly and vigorously on the side of the Americas. Ben Franklin, sent to France to negotiate the terms of a treaty of alliance, urged the French minister Vergennes to enter the war. The victory at Saratoga convinced Vergennes that the Americans could win victories. In 1778 France signed a treaty of military alliance under which the war would continue until both sides were ready for peace. A second treaty was signed providing for mutual trade. The generous French supplies and military aid were indispensable to American victory. Also, as terms of the treaty, the French attacked British outposts other parts of the world to divert attention away from the colonies.

THE LAST YEARS OF THE WAR, 1778-81

In 1778 the British decided to invade the South to take advantage of the greater loyalist sentiment there. They captured Savannah, Georgia (1778), Camden, South Carolina (1780), and Charleston, South Carolina

(1780) with little casualties. General Cornwallis tried to move into the frontier of the Carolinas but was unable to because of the farmer resistance. Things were looking bleak for Washington, especially after Benedict Arnold attempted to deliver West Point to the British. Despite his failure, Arnold's expedition hurt the morale of the American troops. Washington received a boost in early 1781 when the French sent troops and its navy to help the American cause. With French help, Washington was able to corner Cornwallis on the Yorktown peninsula in the summer of 1781. With the capture of the leader of the British Army, the British were forced into surrender.

THE TREATY OF PARIS

After Yorktown, the British public opinion was against further expeditions in America. Ben Franklin, already in Paris, was later joined by John Adams and John Jay. The Americans were ready to negotiate peace with Britain. However, France was not. France's ally, Spain, wanted to continue the war until Britain turned over Gibraltar to the Spanish. Because of the terms of the treaty of alliance, the Americans were unable to negotiate the treaty with Britain. Soon, however, American leaders realized that they were being sacrificed so that France and Spain could continue their feud with Britain, the Americans negotiated a separate peace with Britain. Because of the strong presence of the American position, Franklin was able to get Britain to give Gibraltar to Spain. With everything settled to their liking, the treaty was signed in 1783.

TERMS OF THE TREATY

1) Britain recognized the independence of the Americans. 2) the northern boundary was fixed on the Canadian border and along the Great Lakes. The Mississippi River became the western boundary. In the south, American territory extended to Florida. 3) the United States agreed to make "no lawful impediment" to prevent British creditors from collecting debts owed by Americans. 4) Freedom of navigation of the Mississippi by both American and British nationals was provided.

THE INTERNAL REVOLUTION

POLITICAL CHANGES IN THE STATES

Upon separation from the mother country it was necessary for the thirteen states to establish new government. By 1777, eleven states had already adopted new constitutions. Each of the constitutions was unique, however, they did have many common characteristics. Among them are: 1) some guarantees of popular rights were included in each constitution, with trial by jury in serious cases, prohibition of unreasonable bail or punishment and unjustifiable searches, and some guarantees of religious freedoms and of the presses. 2) The privilege of voting was based on property requirements and in some cases religious tests. 3) Annual or frequent elections of legislative bodies was designed to keep them responsive to the people. 4) The governor's office was restricted in power as a result of the colonists' problems with the royal governors.

THE NEED FOR A CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The colonists also saw a limited need for a central government so that they would have some resemblance of a national identity. John Dickinson, the father of the Articles of Confederation, was one of the most influential people to get the states to send delegates to the convention to write the articles. The states feared a strong central government like Britain's and worked to keep it weak in order to preserve the sovereignty of the state and the freedom of all individuals. Certain necessary powers were given to the central government. It could build a navy and raise an army, declare war, make treaties and manage foreign relations. It could regulate the value of coins and borrow, spend and issue money. It could not levy taxes. It could not draft troops or regulate trade within the states. Generally it can be said the Confederation Congress possessed many powers, but no powers to execute them.

RATIFICATION OF THE ARTICLES

Late in 1777, the Articles of Confederation were submitted to the states for ratification; they were to go into effect when all 13 state legislatures ratified them. Most of the states ratified them within the following year, except for Maryland. She refused to do so until the states gave up their claims to the Western territories; Maryland felt that the Western lands would enable some states to dwarf other states. In 1781 New York was the first to give into this demand and dropped all of its claim to land west of the Appalachians. Virginia also gave up its claims because of the influence of land speculators who felt they could get the land from the central government cheaper than they could from the various state governments. Also it was felt by many that the only way the central government could have any influence over the states was through the western lands. After Virginia dropped its claims, Maryland ratified the Articles.

WEAKNESSES OF THE ARTICLES

Soon after their adoption, serious weaknesses within the Articles showed up. Among the weaknesses were: 1) It required the affirmative vote of nine of the thirteen states to pass any important legislation. 2) A unanimous vote was needed to amend the Articles. 3) There was no single elected executive, only committees in Congress. 4) No ordinary system of courts was provided. 5) No export or import duties could be collected. Without this authority the Confederation was deprived of an effective lever to use in bargaining with foreign powers for trade privileges.