

began the collection of military supplies and the mobilization of troops; and fanned public opinion into revolutionary ardor.

Many of those opposed to British encroachment on American rights nonetheless favored discussion and compromise as the proper solution. This group included Crown-appointed officers, Quakers, and members of other religious sects opposed to the use of violence, numerous merchants (especially in the middle colonies), and some discontented farmers and frontiersmen in the Southern colonies.

The king might well have effected an alliance with these moderates and, by timely concessions, so strengthened their position that the revolutionaries would have found it difficult to proceed with hostilities. But George III had no intention of making concessions. In September 1774, scorning a petition by Philadelphia Quakers, he wrote, "The die is now cast, the Colonies must either submit or triumph." This action isolated Loyalists who were appalled and frightened by the course of events following the Coercive Acts.

THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

General Thomas Gage, an amiable English gentleman with an American-born wife, commanded the garrison at Boston, where political activity had almost wholly replaced trade. Gage's main duty in the colonies had been to enforce the Coercive Acts. When news reached him

that the Massachusetts colonists were collecting powder and military stores at the town of Concord, 32 kilometers away, Gage sent a strong detail to confiscate these munitions.

After a night of marching, the British troops reached the village of Lexington on April 19, 1775, and saw a grim band of 77 Minutemen — so named because they were said to be ready to fight in a minute — through the early morning mist. The Minutemen intended only a silent protest, but Marine Major John Pitcairn, the leader of the British troops, yelled, "Disperse, you damned rebels! You dogs, run!" The leader of the Minutemen, Captain John Parker, told his troops not to fire unless fired at first. The Americans were withdrawing when someone fired a shot, which led the British troops to fire at the Minutemen. The British then charged with bayonets, leaving eight dead and 10 wounded. In the often-quoted phrase of 19th century poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, this was "the shot heard round the world."

The British pushed on to Concord. The Americans had taken away most of the munitions, but they destroyed whatever was left. In the meantime, American forces in the countryside had mobilized to harass the British on their long return to Boston. All along the road, behind stone walls, hillocks, and houses, militiamen from "every Middlesex village and farm" made targets of the bright red coats of the British soldiers. By the time Gage's weary detachment stumbled into Boston,

it had suffered more than 250 killed and wounded. The Americans lost 93 men.

The Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 10. The Congress voted to go to war, inducting the colonial militias into continental service. It appointed Colonel George Washington of Virginia as their commander-in-chief on June 15. Within two days, the Americans had incurred high casualties at Bunker Hill just outside Boston. Congress also ordered American expeditions to march northward into Canada by fall. Capturing Montreal, they failed in a winter assault on Quebec, and eventually retreated to New York.

Despite the outbreak of armed conflict, the idea of complete separation from England was still repugnant to many members of the Continental Congress. In July, it adopted the Olive Branch Petition, begging the king to prevent further hostile actions until some sort of agreement could be worked out. King George rejected it; instead, on August 23, 1775, he issued a proclamation declaring the colonies to be in a state of rebellion.

Britain had expected the Southern colonies to remain loyal, in part because of their reliance on slavery. Many in the Southern colonies feared that a rebellion against the mother country would also trigger a slave uprising. In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the governor of Virginia, tried to capitalize on that fear by offering freedom to all slaves who

would fight for the British. Instead, his proclamation drove to the rebel side many Virginians who would otherwise have remained Loyalist.

The governor of North Carolina, Josiah Martin, also urged North Carolinians to remain loyal to the Crown. When 1,500 men answered Martin's call, they were defeated by revolutionary armies before British troops could arrive to help.

British warships continued down the coast to Charleston, South Carolina, and opened fire on the city in early June 1776. But South Carolinians had time to prepare, and repulsed the British by the end of the month. They would not return South for more than two years.

COMMON SENSE AND INDEPENDENCE

In January 1776, Thomas Paine, a radical political theorist and writer who had come to America from England in 1774, published a 50-page pamphlet, *Common Sense*. Within three months, it sold 100,000 copies. Paine attacked the idea of a hereditary monarchy, declaring that one honest man was worth more to society than "all the crowned ruffians that ever lived." He presented the alternatives — continued submission to a tyrannical king and an outworn government, or liberty and happiness as a self-sufficient, independent republic. Circulated throughout the colonies, *Common Sense* helped to crystallize a decision for separation.

There still remained the task, however, of gaining each colony's approval of a formal declaration. On June 7, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution in the Second Continental Congress, declaring, "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states. ..." Immediately, a committee of five, headed by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, was appointed to draft a document for a vote.

Largely Jefferson's work, the Declaration of Independence, adopted July 4, 1776, not only announced the birth of a new nation, but also set forth a philosophy of human freedom that would become a dynamic force throughout the entire world. The Declaration drew upon French and English Enlightenment political philosophy, but one influence in particular stands out: John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*. Locke took conceptions of the traditional rights of Englishmen and universalized them into the natural rights of all humankind. The Declaration's familiar opening passage echoes Locke's social-contract theory of government:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from

the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Jefferson linked Locke's principles directly to the situation in the colonies. To fight for American independence was to fight for a government based on popular consent in place of a government by a king who had "combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws. ..." Only a government based on popular consent could secure natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thus, to fight for American independence was to fight on behalf of one's own natural rights.

DEFEATS AND VICTORIES

Although the Americans suffered severe setbacks for months after independence was declared, their tenacity and perseverance eventually paid off. During August 1776, in the Battle of Long Island in New York, Washington's position became untenable, and he executed a masterly retreat in small boats from Brooklyn to the Manhattan shore. British General William Howe twice hesitated and allowed the Americans

to escape. By November, however, Howe had captured Fort Washington on Manhattan Island. New York City would remain under British control until the end of the war.

That December, Washington's forces were near collapse, as supplies and promised aid failed to materialize. Howe again missed his chance to crush the Americans by deciding to wait until spring to resume fighting. On Christmas Day, December 25, 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware River, north of Trenton, New Jersey. In the early-morning hours of December 26, his troops surprised the British garrison there, taking more than 900 prisoners. A week later, on January 3, 1777, Washington attacked the British at Princeton, regaining most of the territory formally occupied by the British. The victories at Trenton and Princeton revived flagging American spirits.

In September 1777, however, Howe defeated the American army at Brandywine in Pennsylvania and occupied Philadelphia, forcing the Continental Congress to flee. Washington had to endure the bitterly cold winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, lacking adequate food, clothing, and supplies. Farmers and merchants exchanged their goods for British gold and silver rather than for dubious paper money issued by the Continental Congress and the states.

Valley Forge was the lowest ebb for Washington's Continental Army, but elsewhere 1777 proved to be

the turning point in the war. British General John Burgoyne, moving south from Canada, attempted to invade New York and New England via Lake Champlain and the Hudson River. He had too much heavy equipment to negotiate the wooded and marshy terrain. On August 6, at Oriskany, New York, a band of Loyalists and Native Americans under Burgoyne's command ran into a mobile and seasoned American force that managed to halt their advance. A few days later at Bennington, Vermont, more of Burgoyne's forces, seeking much-needed supplies, were pushed back by American troops.

Moving to the west side of the Hudson River, Burgoyne's army advanced on Albany. The Americans were waiting for him. Led by Benedict Arnold — who would later betray the Americans at West Point, New York — the colonials twice repulsed the British. Having by this time incurred heavy losses, Burgoyne fell back to Saratoga, New York, where a vastly superior American force under General Horatio Gates surrounded the British troops. On October 17, 1777, Burgoyne surrendered his entire army — six generals, 300 other officers, and 5,500 enlisted personnel.

FRANCO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

In France, enthusiasm for the American cause was high: The French intellectual world was itself stirring against feudalism and

privilege. However, the Crown lent its support to the colonies for geopolitical rather than ideological reasons: The French government had been eager for reprisal against Britain ever since France's defeat in 1763. To further the American cause, Benjamin Franklin was sent to Paris in 1776. His wit, guile, and intellect soon made their presence felt in the French capital, and played a major role in winning French assistance.

France began providing aid to the colonies in May 1776, when it sent 14 ships with war supplies to America. In fact, most of the gunpowder used by the American armies came from France. After Britain's defeat at Saratoga, France saw an opportunity to seriously weaken its ancient enemy and restore the balance of power that had been upset by the Seven Years' War (called the French and Indian War in the American colonies). On February 6, 1778, the colonies and France signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce, in which France recognized the United States and offered trade concessions. They also signed a Treaty of Alliance, which stipulated that if France entered the war, neither country would lay down its arms until the colonies won their independence, that neither would conclude peace with Britain without the consent of the other, and that each guaranteed the other's possessions in America. This was the only bilateral defense treaty signed by the United States or its predecessors until 1949.

The Franco-American alliance

soon broadened the conflict. In June 1778 British ships fired on French vessels, and the two countries went to war. In 1779 Spain, hoping to reacquire territories taken by Britain in the Seven Years' War, entered the conflict on the side of France, but not as an ally of the Americans. In 1780 Britain declared war on the Dutch, who had continued to trade with the Americans. The combination of these European powers, with France in the lead, was a far greater threat to Britain than the American colonies standing alone.

THE BRITISH MOVE SOUTH

With the French now involved, the British, still believing that most Southerners were Loyalists, stepped up their efforts in the Southern colonies. A campaign began in late 1778, with the capture of Savannah, Georgia. Shortly thereafter, British troops and naval forces converged on Charleston, South Carolina, the principal Southern port. They managed to bottle up American forces on the Charleston peninsula. On May 12, 1780, General Benjamin Lincoln surrendered the city and its 5,000 troops, in the greatest American defeat of the war.

But the reversal in fortune only emboldened the American rebels. South Carolinians began roaming the countryside, attacking British supply lines. In July, American General Horatio Gates, who had assembled a replacement force of untrained militiamen, rushed to Camden,

South Carolina, to confront British forces led by General Charles Cornwallis. But Gates's makeshift army panicked and ran when confronted by the British regulars. Cornwallis's troops met the Americans several more times, but the most significant battle took place at Cowpens, South Carolina, in early 1781, where the Americans soundly defeated the British. After an exhausting but unproductive chase through North Carolina, Cornwallis set his sights on Virginia.

VICTORY AND INDEPENDENCE

In July 1780 France's King Louis XVI had sent to America an expeditionary force of 6,000 men under the Comte Jean de Rochambeau. In addition, the French fleet harassed British shipping and blocked reinforcement and resupply of British forces in Virginia. French and American armies and navies, totaling 18,000 men, parried with Cornwallis all through the summer and into the fall. Finally, on October 19,

1781, after being trapped at Yorktown near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, Cornwallis surrendered his army of 8,000 British soldiers.

Although Cornwallis's defeat did not immediately end the war — which would drag on inconclusively for almost two more years — a new British government decided to pursue peace negotiations in Paris in early 1782, with the American side represented by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay. On April 15, 1783, Congress approved the final treaty. Signed on September 3, the Treaty of Paris acknowledged the independence, freedom, and sovereignty of the 13 former colonies, now states. The new United States stretched west to the Mississippi River, north to Canada, and south to Florida, which was returned to Spain. The fledgling colonies that Richard Henry Lee had spoken of more than seven years before had finally become “free and independent states.”

The task of knitting together a nation remained. ◇