

# **The Beginning of the War**

by James Baldwin

All that winter the people of the colonies were anxious and fearful. Would the king pay any heed to their petition? Or would he force them to obey his unjust laws?

Then, in the spring, news came from Boston that matters were growing worse and worse. The soldiers who were quartered in that city were daily becoming more insolent and overbearing.

"These people ought to have their town knocked about their ears and destroyed," said one of the king's officers.

On the 19th of April a company of the king's soldiers started to Concord, a few miles from Boston, to seize some powder which had been stored there. Some of the colonists met them at Lexington, and there was a battle.

This was the first battle in that long war commonly called the Revolution.

Washington was now on his way to the North again. The Second Continental Congress was to meet in Philadelphia in May, and he was again a delegate from Virginia.

In the first days of the Congress no man was busier than he. No man seemed to understand the situation of things better than he. No man was listened to with greater respect; and yet he said but little.

Every day, he came into the hall wearing the blue and buff uniform which belonged to him as a Virginia colonel. It was as much as to say: "The time for fighting has come, and I am ready."

The Congress thought it best to send another humble petition to the king, asking him not to deprive the people of their just rights.

In the meantime brave men were flocking towards Boston to help the people defend themselves from the violence of the king's soldiers. The war had begun, and no mistake.

The men of Congress saw now the necessity of providing for this war.

They asked, "Who shall be the commander-in-chief of our colonial army?"

It was hardly worth while to ask such a question; for there could be but one answer. Who, but George Washington?

No other person in America knew so much about war as he. No other person was so well fitted to command.

On the 15th of June, on motion of John Adams of Massachusetts, he was appointed to that responsible place. On the next day he made a modest but noble little speech before Congress.

He told the members of that body that he would serve his country willingly and as well as he could—but not for money. They might provide for his necessary expenses, but he would never take any pay for his services.

And so, leaving all his own interests out of sight, he undertook at once the great work that had been entrusted to him. He undertook it, not for profit nor for honor, but because of a feeling of duty to his fellow-men. For eight weary years he forgot himself in the service of his country.

Two weeks after his appointment General Washington rode into Cambridge, near Boston, and took formal command of his army.

It was but a small force, poorly clothed, poorly armed; but every man had the love of country in his heart. It was the first American army.

But so well did Washington manage matters that soon his raw troops were in good shape for service. And so hard did he press the king's soldiers in Boston that, before another summer, they were glad to take ship and sail away from the town which they had so long infested and annoyed.

# Independence

by James Baldwin

On the fourth day of the following July there was a great stir in the town of Philadelphia. Congress was sitting in the Hall of the State House. The streets were full of people; everybody seemed anxious; everybody was in suspense.

Men were crowding around the State House and listening.

"Who is speaking now?" asked one.

"John Adams," was the answer.

"And who is speaking now?"

"Doctor Franklin."

"Good! Let them follow his advice, for he knows what is best."

Then there was a lull outside, for everybody wanted to hear what the great Dr. Franklin had to say.

After a while the same question was asked again: "Who is speaking now?"

And the answer was: "Thomas Jefferson of Virginia. It was he and Franklin who wrote it."

"Wrote what?"

"Why, the Declaration of Independence, of course."

A little later some one said: "They will be ready to sign it soon."

"But will they dare to sign it?"

"Dare? They dare not do otherwise."

Inside the hall grave men were discussing the acts of the King of England.

"He has cut off our trade with all parts of the world," said one.

"He has forced us to pay taxes without our consent," said another.

"He has sent his soldiers among us to burn our towns and kill our people," said a third.

"He has tried to make the Indians our enemies," said a fourth.

"He is a tyrant and unfit to be the ruler of a free people," agreed they all.

And then everybody was silent while one read: "We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, solemnly publish and declare that the united colonies are, and of right ought to be, *free and independent states*"

Soon afterward the bell in the high tower above the hall began to ring.

"It is done!" cried the people. "They have signed the Declaration of Independence."

"Yes, every colony has voted for it," said those nearest the door. "The King of England shall no longer rule over us."

And that was the way in which the United States came into being. The thirteen colonies were now thirteen states.

Up to this time Washington and his army had been fighting for the rights of the people as colonists. They had been fighting in order to oblige the king to do away with the unjust laws which he had made. But now they were to fight for freedom and for the independence of the United States.

By and by you will read in your histories how wisely and bravely Washington conducted the war. You will learn how he held out against the king's soldiers on Long Island and at White Plains; how he crossed the Delaware amid floating ice and drove the English from Trenton; how he wintered at Morristown; how he suffered at Valley Forge; how he fought at Germantown and Monmouth and Yorktown.

There were six years of fighting, of marching here and there, of directing and planning, of struggling in the face of every discouragement.

Eight years passed, and then peace came, for independence had been won, and this our country was made forever free.

On the 2d of November, 1783, Washington bade farewell to his army. On the 23d of December he resigned his commission as commander-in-chief.

There were some who suggested that Washington should make himself king of this country; and indeed this he might have done, so great was the people's love and gratitude.

But the great man spurned such suggestions. He said, "If you have any regard for your country or respect for me, banish those thoughts and never again speak of them."

Sources:

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