

17 Naming a General



John Adams wrote, "I am determined this morning to make a direct motion that Congress should adopt the army before Boston."

The Continental Congress couldn't ignore the problem, especially after a letter arrived from the Boston Patriots pleading for the Congress to take over their forces.

John Adams spoke up. He called for a "Grand American Army" to be made up of volunteers from all of the colonies. The guns fired at Lexington and Concord might be heard next in Charleston, or Baltimore, or even in Philadelphia, Adams told the delegates. They must have shuddered, because they knew he spoke the truth.

In each of the colonies, citizen soldiers—militia—were ready to fight. Someone had to organize the militias and the minutemen into an army. A general was needed, said Adams.

John Hancock from Massachusetts believed he was the man for the job. He had done a bit of soldiering, and it was his money that was paying some of Congress's bills. So when John Adams stood up to nominate a general, almost everyone—especially John Hancock—thought it would be Hancock. But, as you know, John Adams

At first the Continental Congress found itself in a strange situation. Americans were in fighting mood, but war had not been declared. Should they prepare for war? Should they work for peace? Could they do both?

People were calling for a Continental army. The minutemen who fought at Lexington and Concord were gathered near Boston. Others had come from the countryside with rifles and muskets. If someone didn't take charge they would all go back home.

1775: Making a Revolution

April 19: The battles of Lexington and Concord.

May 10: Second Continental Congress convenes in Independence Hall, Philadelphia.

May 10: Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold capture Fort Ticonderoga.

June 15: George Washington is appointed head of the Continental army.

June 17: The battles of Bunker and Breed's Hills.

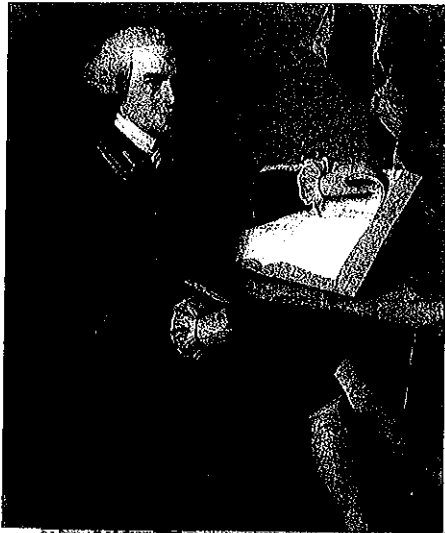
July 3: General Washington takes command of 17,000 men at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

July 26: The Continental Congress establishes a post office department and appoints Franklin postmaster general.

August 1: Tom Paine publishes an article in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* supporting women's rights.

August 23: George III declares the American colonies in rebellion.

As soon as the troubles with England were settled, the citizens of Charles Town, South Carolina, officially changed their city's name to Charleston. The capital was moved from there to Columbia.



always did what he thought was best for the nation—not what would make him popular at home.

“There is but one man in my mind for this important command,” said Adams, and Hancock looked pleased. “The gentleman I have in mind...is from Virginia.” When Adams said that, John Hancock’s face fell, and Washington, who realized he was the man from Virginia, rushed from the room.

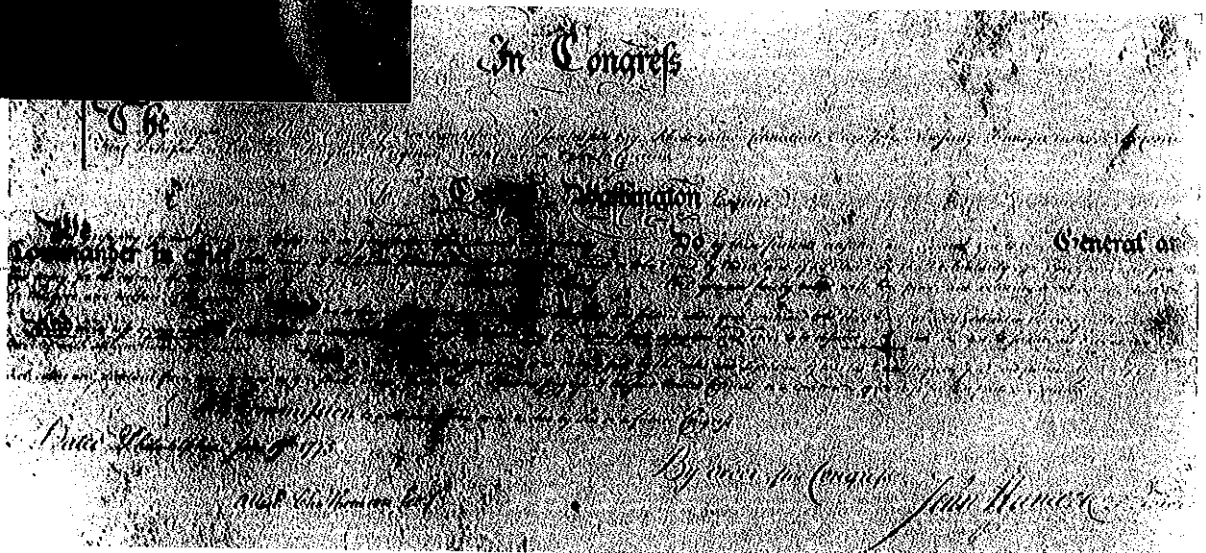
John Adams continued, “[His] skill as an officer...great talents and universal character would command the respect of America and unite...the Colonies better than any other person alive.” The congressmen agreed. George Washington was elected general unanimously.

He accepted—on one condition. He would take no salary. And that was part of Washington’s greatness. He was willing to serve without pay for a cause he thought noble.

Washington knew that the general’s job could lead to disaster. England was the greatest power in the world. Its army was well trained and supplied with the latest guns and cannons. Its navy was the finest in the world.

The American army was made up of a raggedy bunch of men—farmers, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths—who

John Hancock (left) was disappointed not to be put in charge of the army. But as president of the Second Continental Congress he signed the order naming Washington commander in chief (below).



FROM COLONIES TO COUNTRY



Washington takes charge of the Continental army. He didn't have great skill as a military strategist. His experience with General Braddock in the French and Indian War was disastrous. What he did have was an ability to inspire others.

The Congress did pay Washington's expenses, though he didn't get a salary.

had few guns, no cannons, and no military training. George Washington knew that he had an almost impossible job. He said to Patrick Henry, "Remember, Mr. Henry, what I now tell you: from the day I enter upon the command of the American armies, I date my fall, and the ruin of my reputation."

And that, too, is part of what made Washington great. He was willing to do what he thought was right and important even if it might bring his own ruin. (Of course, we know it didn't bring his ruin. It made him famous for all time.)

George Washington set out for Boston to take charge of the soldiers gathered there. In the meantime, the Continental Congress tried once more to patch things up with England. They sent another petition to King George III. This one was called the Olive Branch Petition. An olive branch is a symbol of peace. The colonists asked the king to consider their problems. But George wouldn't even read the petition.

Now all this may seem strange. The colonists were petitioning England and at the same time they were getting ready to fight. But most members of the Congress weren't ready to break away from England. Those who were—like Washington and Adams and Jefferson—were wise enough not to rush the others. People thought of separation from England as different from revolution. They wanted a revolution. That word had a splendid sound to it. Everyone knew of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Englishmen and women were proud of that peaceful revolution and of the

George III would not read the Olive Branch Petition (below), which was the colonists' last-ditch attempt to get him to think about their problems.

To His Majesty King George the Third

Most gracious Sovereign,

We your Majesty's faithful subjects of the colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the counties of New Castle, Kent & Sussex in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina in behalf of ourselves and the inhabitants of those colonies who have deputed us to represent them in general Congress, entreat your Majesty's most excellent wisdom to graciously receive

the same known as these colonies and their colonies and the energy of mind and just government, freedom, justice, peace, tranquillity and prosperity, which are so necessary and so dear to the happiness and welfare of the colonies, and that the honor and duty of your Majesty's crown should be so represented in general Congress, and that your Majesty's wisdom should be so represented in general Congress.

We would shew that there was no possibility of this happy connection being broken by civil dissensions, and appealing in future years of life any longer, unshaken, united to prevent the necessary and just demands of justice, and the preservation of health and strength, by shewing the



The Second Continental Congress is best known for two things:

1. Naming George Washington as general of the American armies.
 2. Producing the Declaration of Independence. (It took more than a year to get that done.)
- The Congress did more than that, but those two accomplishments were enough to make any body famous. (Yes, a congress is a body—a legislative body.)

rights it gave them. For a long time many Americans thought they could have the rights of free people and still be part of the British empire. (And they might have, if the king and Parliament had been wiser.)

Here's something about the American Revolution that not many Americans know. Some English citizens were rooting for the Americans. They knew that George was not a good king, and they didn't like his ministers either. They realized that some of their own precious English rights were being threatened because the king wanted more power for himself. As it turned out, the American Revolution helped bring better government to England.

The ideas that came out of our revolution soon infected the whole world. Monarchs and despots everywhere began trembling over those ideas of freedom and equality. Some kings and queens would lose their jobs because of those ideas. In France they would lose their heads. But that's another story—and a good one, too—that you'll have to read on your own.

This book is about America. People here were getting angry and saying and doing wild things. Soon there would be no turning back.

A Society of Patriotic Ladies



A British cartoon sneered at the Edenton ladies.

If you ever happen to visit Edenton, North Carolina, you may see a big bronze teapot. It marks the place where Elizabeth King's house stood and where, in 1774, 51 women had a political meeting and agreed not to drink English tea. They said they would brew raspberry leaves for tea, and that they would also stop using English fabrics to make their clothes.

They weren't the only women drinking home brews. In Williamsburg, a dame dipped her goose quill into an inkpot and penned these lines:

*Farewell to the Tea Board, with its
gaudy Equipage,
Of Cups and Saucers, Cream
Bucket, Sugar Tongs,*

Then she went on with verses about how much she would miss drinking tea and gossiping with her friends around the tea table; but it was worth it, she concluded, because:

*LIBERTY'S the Goddess I would choose
To reign triumphant in America.*



A Pennsylvania Line uniform portrait

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