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July 1776

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On the fourth of July 1776 came the official adoption and formality of signing the Declaration.

John Hancock as President of the Congress signed with his oversized signature, assuring the King and anyone else of his, Hancock's, outstanding approval of the United States "Declaration of Independence."

On July 8th, the "Declaration" was read to the assembled populace in Philadelphia. And, on the ninth the "Declaration" was read to every brigade in the Continental Army to rousing cheers. The soldiers were then read an inspiring speech written by Washington for the troops. Essentially, he said "They were now free of any loyalty to the King, but that freedom was tenuous and could only be maintained by a victorious Continental Army." The message was well received, but would the army be able to uphold the freedom gained by the Declaration of Independence, especially against a professional British military?

How did all of this come about? For years the colonists had looked on the King as a father figure and they as his children. In the beginning, there was reluctance by the states and the people to overthrow the yoke that bound them. Also, at least in the early days of revolt short of war, Parliament was blamed for all the hated acts imposed on the Colonies but as time passed it became clear that this was not only Parliament's will, but also the King's. The breaking point seems to have come when Hessians were hired by the King to do the dirty work of suppressing Americans by any means possible. Probably no less was the work of the Royal Navy and the King's Colonial Governors in their burning of entire towns because of the actions of a few or simply to impress occupants and the colonists in general, that it did not pay to disagree with the King's will, or that of his minions.

Militarily, there were minor engagements during the month but nothing to compare with the events that would begin with the arrival of General Howe on July 2nd and the unloading of troops on Staten Island. Several days later, his elder brother Admiral Lord Howe arrived with a battle fleet and transports loaded with supplies and troop reinforcements.

July was noted for its political events. August returns to the military scene as the source of outstanding events during the month.

References: Edmund S. Morgan's "Birth of the Republic"; Don Higginbotham's "The War of American Independence"; A. J. Langguth's "Patriots, The men who started the American Revolution"; Robert Leckie's "George Washington's War" .

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