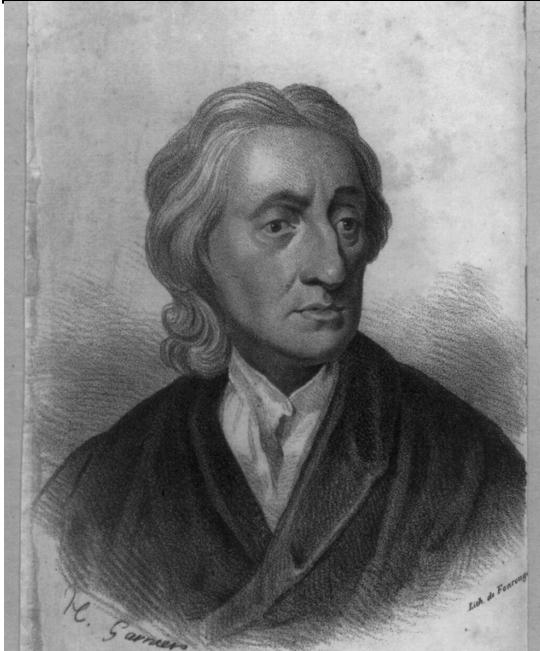


BROADSIDE

A Journal of the Wars for Independence for Students

FOREIGN FIGHTERS



John Locke, 1632-1704 (Library of Congress)

Foreign Fighters for the American Cause of Independence

In many respects the American Revolution and subsequent War for Independence was the prodigy of the Enlightenment, that 17th century intellectual movement in Europe that sparked new ideas about humanity, science, government, and reason. The most influential European philosopher on the American Revolution was Englishman, John Locke, who at the end of the 17th century expanded the notion of the social contract between those governed and those governing. Locke's philosophy of the "social contract" greatly influenced Thomas Jefferson and its strains can be found throughout the Declaration of Independence.

But Locke's philosophy and the works of other Enlightenment thinkers also influenced many noblemen and men of privilege living in Europe in 1776. These individuals, some with a military pedigree, were excited and energized at the possibilities for humankind that the new United States offered to the world.

Many of them wanted to be part of the historical moment. It helped that representing the United States abroad in foreign governments, mostly operating out of Paris, was the wily and savvy Benjamin Franklin. Franklin would be the portal through which many of these foreign fighters found their way to the new United States. To be sure the lure of a high rank in the nascent American Continental Army played a role, too, but they must not be viewed as merely bounty hunters. The zeal of freedom was firmly entrenched in their hearts and minds.

"The happiness of America is intimately connected with the happiness of all mankind; she is destined to become the safe and venerable asylum of virtue, of honesty, of tolerance, and quality and of peaceful liberty." - Marquis de Lafayette

While the young Marquis de Lafayette, was the most visible foreign presence in the American Army, particularly in the early years, men from Poland and the various German States served the American cause. Thaddeus Kosciusko and Kazimierz Pulaski, “the Father of the American Cavalry,” were from Poland, Johan DeKalb was from Bavaria, Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben was from Prussia, and Louis Lebeque DuPortail, like Lafayette was from France. These men all served within the structure of the Continental Army, made significant contributions to various aspects of the war’s efforts, and in the case of DeKalb and Pulaski, gave their lives to the cause. DeKalb was mortally wounded at the battle of Camden and Pulaski was killed during the siege of Savannah.



Thaddeus Kosciusko (Library of Congress)

In Lafayette Park stand public monuments to these foreign fighters who helped birth the new United States.

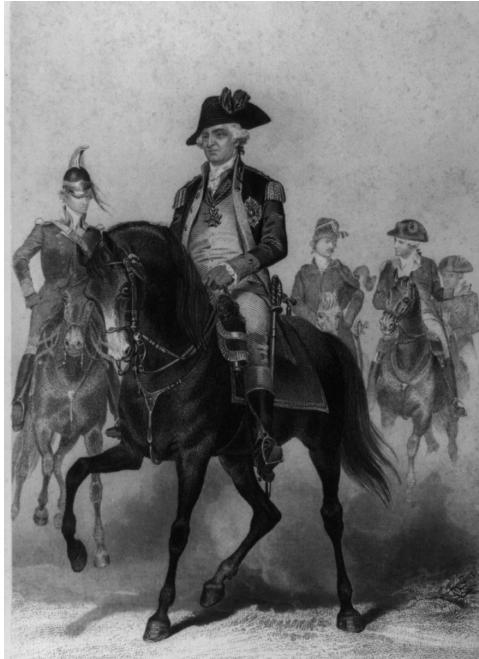


Statue of the Marquis de Lafayette in Lafayette Park, Washington, D.C. Photograph provided by H.C. White Co., 1900 (Library of Congress)

Kosciusko is best remembered for his role as an engineer and he helped to lay out the plans for the fortification sixty miles New York City on the western bluff of the Hudson River called, West Point.

DuPortail was a military engineer who worked on George Washington's staff and helped the Continental Army erect fortifications in America at various crucial locations. He was a key advisor to Washington helping Washington to craft a winning defensive strategy over the British. It was DuPortail who oversaw construction of the siege lines at Yorktown that led to the American victory in the war.

Von Steuben became known as the drillmaster of the American Revolution. He was a captain in the Prussian Army who connected with Benjamin Franklin in Paris. Franklin always had a keen eye for potential supporters of the American cause and gave von Steuben a letter of introduction to George Washington and Congress. Von Steuben's arrival in America in the early winter of 1777 was fortuitous for the American cause. While Washington's Army encamped at Valley Forge, von Steuben trained Washington's army into an effective fighting force. A drill manual was written first in German, then translated in French and finally into English. A model unit was formed so that they could train fellow soldiers in their mold. Von Steuben endeared himself to his men with his excessive use of profanity and bombast which the American soldiers found entertaining. Nevertheless, he was respected and when the Continental Army marched out of Valley Forge in the Spring of 1778 they were a much more cohesive unit and in June proved themselves at the battle of Monmouth, New Jersey.



Baron von Steuben (Library of Congress)

Activity

1. Have students conduct research into the men mentioned in this issue of BROADSIDES, and others, and create a five-minute power point on each of them to share with classmates.
2. Have students play the role of Revolutionary War Era journalists and write news stories reporting from Valley Forge.