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RE: Celebrating Caesar Rodney's Birthday

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Yesterday marked the 284th anniversary of the birth of Caesar Rodney, the great patriot whose famous ride on July 1, 1776 provided the Delaware Delegation the decisive vote for independence from Great Britain. But Caesar Rodney was not always pro-revolution.

Caesar Rodney was always disturbed by the King's actions towards the colonies, but at first during the 1750s and early 1760s, he was still willing to stay loyal, although uneasily, to the British Crown. In one of his writings to the king of England:

"If our fellow-subjects of Great Britain, who derive no authority from us, who cannot in our humble opinion represent us, and to whom we will not yield in loyalty and affection to your majesty, can at their will and pleasure, of right, give and grant away our property; if they enforce an implicit obedience to every order or act of theirs for that purpose, and deprive all, or any of the assemblies on this continent, of the power of legislation, for differing with them in opinion in matters which intimately affect their rights and interests, and everything that is dear and valuable to Englishmen, we cannot imagine a case more miserable; we cannot think that we shall have even the shadow of liberty left."

The Stamp Act of 1765 was the ultimate factor in pushing Caesar Rodney towards the independence movement. He turned against the Crown once it was evident the British were not going to change their demeanor towards the colonies, and for the first time in his life, travelled far away from the Dover area to meet with other colonialists who wanted independence. Originally, Caesar Rodney was a political moderate; not willing to rock the boat and stir for independence, especially since the majority of the residents of Kent County did not support his beliefs. He became a leading patriot in Delaware, and was a member of the Stamp Act Congress in 1765. He became a leader in the colonial militia as well. In the time preceding the vote in 1776, Caesar Rodney led an effort to suppress a Loyalist riot in Sussex County. Delaware was split between Sussex and most of Kent Counties, who were either Loyalists or who thought the war could not be won, and New Castle County, who was dominated by religious leaders who wanted independence.

One interesting note: Delaware as a whole was not considered one of the strongest pro-revolution states. In 1780 John Adams wrote, "There are in this little state of Delaware...more Tories in proportion than in any other." Tory sentiment was so high in Delaware many actively traded with the British, even during the Revolutionary War. Thus, Caesar Rodney's decision to make haste to Philadelphia was not only to ensure Delaware's voice in supporting the Declaration of Independence would be noted, but also to lead the pro-revolution fight against the majority of downstate Delawareans who did not want war.



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One theory why Caesar Rodney was in Dover, and not Philadelphia on July 1, 1776: He assumed George Read would vote for independence. Read had been at a meeting in New Castle 2 weeks earlier when a unanimous vote for independence was taken. After he found out about the vote, that is when Caesar Rodney rode up to Philadelphia (although records indicate he did stop twice-once in New Castle and once just after he crossed the Pennsylvania border, near Chester) and cast the deciding vote for Delaware's delegation. Three days later, his own political party, the moderate Court Party, basically kicked him out of the party for voting for independence, when most of Kent County wanted to stay with the Crown.

In this way Caesar Rodney went against the majority of the people he lived with and served publicly because he was extremely adamant about independence.

Historical fact: Delaware was the only one of the original colonies who did not have to have the British Crown approve new laws passed in its borders, mainly due to the already independent nature of the Delawareans who lived at that time. The king often rejected the colonist's laws, which was one of the complaints listed against him in the Declaration of Independence.

Recommended reading for those of you who want to learn more about this great patriot:

"The Coalition of Two Brothers: Caesar and Thomas Rodney" by Ann Decker. Published January 1, 2006, Lehigh University. Accessed October 5, 2012. You just type in Ann's name and 'Lehigh' and the article will come up.

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