



*How to Respect & Display* **Our Flag**

*U.S. Marine Corps*









## The Story of the Stars & Stripes

The story of the origin of our National flag parallels the story of the origin of our country. As our country received its birthright from the peoples of many lands who were gathered on these shores to found a new nation, so did the pattern of the Stars and Stripes rise from several origins back in the mists of antiquity to become emblazoned on the standards of our infant Republic.

The star is a symbol of the heavens and the divine goal to which man has aspired from time immemorial; the stripe is symbolic of the rays of light emanating from the sun.

Both themes have long been represented on the standards of nations, from the banners of the astral worshippers of ancient Egypt and Babylon to the 12-starred flag of the Spanish Conquistadors under Cortez. Continuing in favor, they spread to the striped standards of Holland and the West India Company in the 17th century and to the present patterns of stars and stripes on the flags of several nations of Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

The first flags adopted by our Colonial forefathers were symbolic of their struggles with the wilderness of a new

land. Beavers, pine trees, rattlesnakes, anchors, and various like insignia with mottoes such as "Hope", "Liberty", "Appeal to Heaven" or "Don't Tread on Me" were affixed to the different banners of Colonial America.

The first flag of the colonists to have any resemblance to the present Stars and Stripes was the Grand Union flag,

sometimes referred to as the "Congress Colors". It consisted of thirteen stripes, alternately red and white, representing the Thirteen Colonies, with a blue field in the upper left hand corner bearing the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, signifying union with the mother country. This banner was first flown by the ships of the Colonial Fleet in the Delaware River in December, 1775.

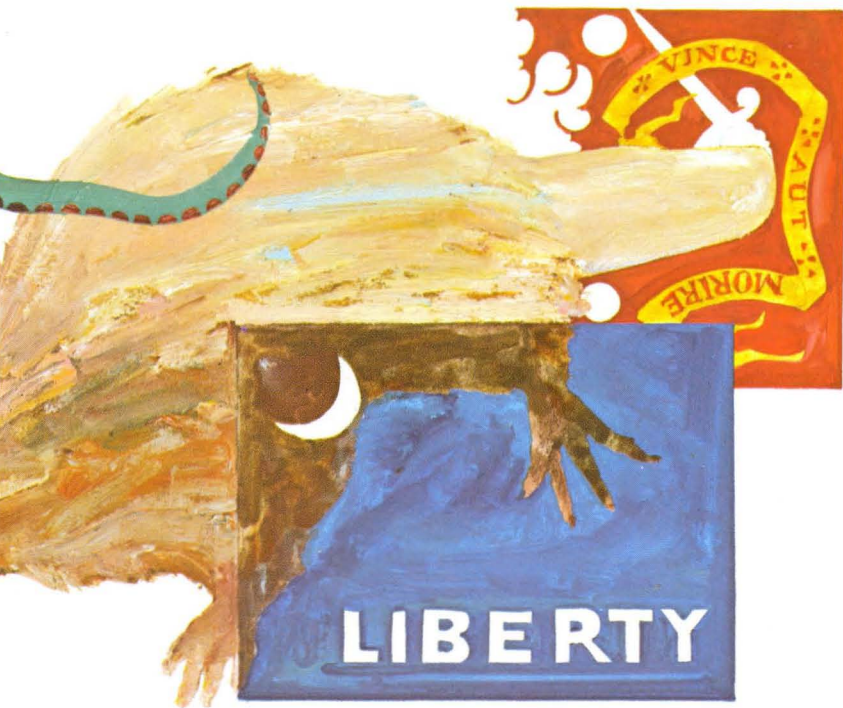


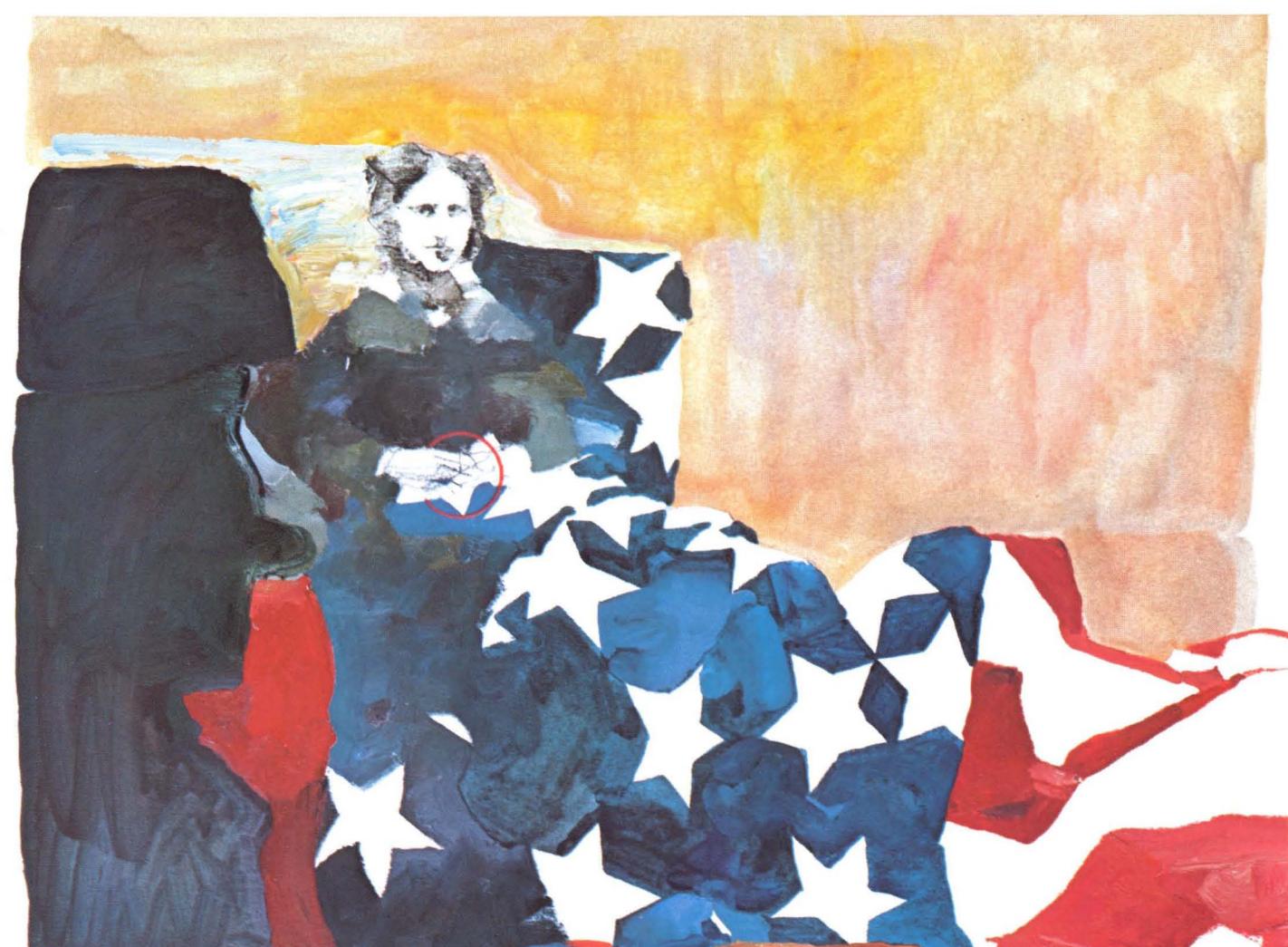


The Grand Union flag was the standard of the Continental Army when the latter came into being in January, 1776, and was also carried by Marines and American Blue-jackets comprising an expeditionary force in the West Indies during that year.

During the previous year a canton (section) of thirteen

stripes appeared on the yellow silk standard of the Philadelphia troop of Light Horse when the latter served as an escort to General Washington who was journeying to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to assume command of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Hampshire volunteers.





Many Americans still believe that Betsy Ross made the first flag, although historians dispute this story. Another disputed story is that the first Stars and Stripes displayed in the face of an armed enemy was at Fort Schuyler, August 3, 1777. The flag was improvised. The white part came from a soldier's shirt; a captain's cloak supplied the blue of the union; and the red stripes came from the flannel petticoat of a soldier's wife, who gladly donated it for the purpose. However, this was probably a Grand Union flag.

Continental Congress passed a resolution that established the Stars and Stripes on June 14, 1777, but did not specify the arrangement of the thirteen stars on the blue union, except to say that they should represent a new constellation. As a consequence we find a variety of forms. The first Army flag, popularly known as the Betsy Ross flag, had the stars arranged in a circle, based on the idea that no colony should take precedence.

The first Navy Stars and Stripes had the stars arranged in staggered formation in alternate lines and rows of threes and twos on a blue field. A close inspection of this arrangement of the stars shows a distinct outline of the diagonal X-shaped cross and the cross of St. George of the English flag. This indicates how difficult it was for the colonists, even at this late date, to break away entirely from the British flag under which they had been born and had lived all the years of their lives.


The Resolution of June 14, 1777, establishing the Stars and Stripes has an interesting history. After the Declaration of Independence, colonial vessels were putting to sea to hamper enemy communications and prey on British commerce. Many of them flew the flags of the particular Colonies to which they belonged. It was necessary to provide an authorized national flag under which they could sail, for England considered armed vessels without such a flag as pirate ships and hanged their crews when they captured them. So the Marine Committee of the Second Continental Congress presented the Resolution, which was on the subject of the Navy.





Samuel Reid

to be stars  
as states  
enter Union




11- Blue Field

13 Alternating  
red and white  
stripes will  
remain  
constant

same width







General Washington, when the Star-Spangled Banner was first flown by the Continental Army, is said to have described its symbolism as follows: "We take the stars from heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty."

After the admission of Kentucky and Vermont, a resolution was adopted in January, 1794, making the flag one of fifteen stars and stripes.

Realizing that the flag would become unwieldy with a stripe for each new State, Captain Samuel C. Reid, USN, suggested to Congress that the stripes remain thirteen in number to represent the Thirteen Colonies, and that a star be added to the blue field for each new State coming into the Union. A law of April 4, 1818, that resulted requires that a star be added for each new State on the 4th of July after its admission.

A 48-star flag came with admission of Arizona and New Mexico in 1912. Alaska added a 49th star in 1959, and Hawaii paved the way for 50 stars in 1960.

Following the War of 1812, a great wave of nationalistic spirit spread throughout the country; the infant Republic had successfully defied the might of an empire. As this spirit spread, the Stars and Stripes began to take on the characteristics of a mighty symbol of sovereignty. The homage paid that banner is best expressed by what the gifted men of later generations wrote concerning it.

The brilliant Henry Ward Beecher said: "A thoughtful mind when it sees a nation's flag, sees not the flag, but the nation itself. And whatever may be its symbols, its insignia, he reads chiefly in the flag, the government, the principles, the truths, the history that belong to the nation that sets it forth. The American flag has been a symbol of Liberty and men rejoiced in it.

“The stars upon it were like the bright morning stars of God, and the stripes upon it were beams of morning light. As at early dawn the stars shine forth even while it grows light, and then as the sun advances that light breaks into banks and streaming lines of color, the glowing red and intense white, striving together, and ribbing the horizon with bars effulgent, so, on the American flag, stars and beams of many-colored light shine out together...”

In a 1917 Flag Day message, President Wilson said: “This flag, which we honor and under which we serve, is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than that which we give it from generation to generation. The choices are ours. It floats in majestic silence above the hosts that execute those choices, whether in peace or in war. And yet, though silent, it speaks to us—speaks to us of the past, of the men and women who went before us, and of the records they wrote upon it.

“We celebrate the day of its birth; and from its birth until now it has witnessed a great history, has floated on high the symbol of great events, of a great plan of life worked out by a great people....

“Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way in this day of high resolution when every principle we hold dearest is to be vindicated and made secure for the salvation of the nation. We are ready to plead at the bar of history, and our flag shall wear a new luster. Once more we shall make good with our lives and fortunes the great faith to which we were born, and a new glory shall shine in the face of our people.”

Thus the Stars and Stripes came into being; born amid the strife of battle, it became the standard around which a free people struggled to found a great nation. Its spirit is fervently expressed in the words of Thomas Jefferson:

“I swear, before the altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”

The Stars and Stripes, which in 1941 flew over the United States Capitol on December 8 when we declared war on Japan and on December 11 when we declared war on Germany and Italy, has indeed proved to be the “flag of liberation”. This same flag went with President Roosevelt to Algiers, Casablanca and other historic places, and flew over the conquered cities of Rome, Berlin and Tokyo.

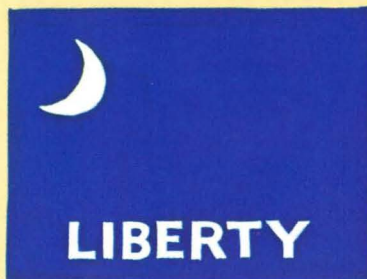
The Stars and Stripes that flew over Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, rippled above the United Nations Charter meeting at San Francisco and over the Big Three conference at Potsdam. This same flag was flying over the White House on August 14, 1945, when the Japanese accepted surrender terms.



# Flags of the Revolution



*Washington's Cruisers*



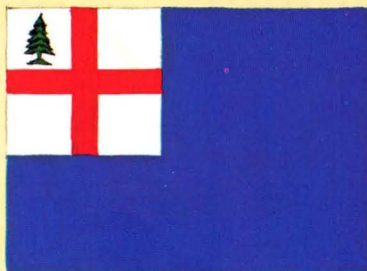
*Moultrie*



*Rhode Island*



*Continental Flag*



*Bunker Hill Flag*



*Bennington Flag*



## Early American Flags

Heraldry is as old as the human race, and the carrying of banners has been the habit of nations since the beginning of time.

Some years ago in northern India, Sir John Marshall, head of the archeological service of the government of India, discovered two abandoned cities; one at a site now called Mohenjo-Daro, the other at Harappa. These cities are

believed to have thrived about 3,500 B.C. and were in close contact with the earliest civilizations of Babylonia. Among the objects found in the former city was a seal, used to sign documents, showing a procession of seven men carrying square standards, held aloft on poles like modern flags. These ancient "flags" were not made of cloth but were rigid solids, like boards.





Far back in American history, the Vikings carried a flag which bore a black raven on a field of white.

Then in 1492, Columbus sailed to our shores, and his three small ships displayed the Spanish flag bearing two red lions on two white fields and two yellow castles on two red fields.

It is most natural that America should have had its

colonial flags as soon as the first colonists settled. And it is not surprising that those flags should have been created in a wide variety.

The Dutch brought their own striped flags when they settled in New Amsterdam, which we now call New York, and pioneers from other nations also brought along the standards of their countries when they settled on our shores.

The American colonists did not just use "the British flag". Puritans in the New England colonies objected to the cross of St. George and St. Andrew on the British Red Ensign as one of the "idolatrous remnants of popery". As a result they adopted their own flags. Eventually, the pine tree flag was widely used in New England.

This flag is represented by the canton of the Grand Union flag. For centuries the flag of England was the red cross of St. George on a white field and the flag of Scotland was the white cross of St. Andrew on a blue field.

The first Union Flag was adopted in 1606 and was a combination of the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew. Various other flags were also used at this time. The official Union Flag was not adopted until 1801 when St. Patrick's Cross was added to the flag, thus representing England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Our separation from the mother country came gradually, and it was only by degrees that the union flag of Great





Britain was discarded. The final breach between the Colonies and Great Britain brought about the removal of the union from the canton of our striped flag and the substitution of stars in a blue field.

Back in the days of the Revolution there were colonial or regimental flags by the score. While the pine tree was a

popular design, there were numerous other symbols, such as beavers, anchors and rattlesnakes, or combinations of these symbols, with appropriate slogans.

In early accounts of colonial activities, liberty poles and trees bear an important part. A fine old elm in Hanover Square, Boston, where the Sons of Liberty met, was known as the Liberty Tree.

A wide-spread live oak in Charleston, South Carolina, made a shelter under which the leading patriots of the day gathered to discuss political questions, and there the Declaration of Independence was first read to the people of the city.



When in 1652 the colony of Massachusetts first established a mint, the general court ordained that all pieces of money should bear on one side a tree, thus bringing into being the famous pinetree shillings.

Later a white flag with a green pine tree and the inscription "An Appeal to Heaven" became familiar on the seas as the ensign of cruisers commissioned by General Washington, a fact noted by many English newspapers of that time.

Meanwhile the rattlesnake theme was gaining increasing prestige with the colonists; eventually a coiled serpent at the foot of the tree was added to the pine tree design. The slogan "Don't Tread on Me" almost invariably appeared on rattlesnake flags.

The rattlesnake symbol appears again and again in early American flags. A flag of this type was the standard of the South Carolina Navy; one of its variants was the emblem of the Culpeper Minute Men of Virginia; and still another, the rattlesnake superimposed on a plain yellow banner, was known as the Gadsden flag.

One writer of the time quaintly stated that as the rattlesnake's eye exceeded in brightness that of any other animal, and she had no eyelids, she might therefore be esteemed a symbol of vigilance; that inasmuch as she never began an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrendered, she was therefore an emblem of magnanimity and true courage.

It was probably the deadly bite of the rattler, however, which was foremost in the minds of its designers, and the threatening slogan "Don't Tread on Me" added further significance to the design.

The Moultrie flag was the first distinctive American flag displayed in the South. It flew over the ramparts of the fort on Sullivan's Island, which lies in the channel leading to Charleston, South Carolina, when the British fleet, under the command of Sir Peter Parker, attacked on June 28,

1776. The British ships opened fire at about 10:30 a.m. and continued the bombardment for approximately ten hours, but the garrison, consisting of some 375 regulars and a few militia, under the command of Colonel William Moultrie, put up such a gallant defense that the British were forced to withdraw under cover of darkness. This victory not only saved the southern Colonies from invasion for some two years but marked the first defeat of a British naval force for a period of years. The design of this large blue flag with a white crescent in the upper corner next to the staff was suggested by the blue uniforms of the garrison and the silver crescents, which the men wore on their caps, inscribed with the words "Liberty or Death".

The maritime state of Rhode Island had its own flag, which was carried at Brandywine, Trenton and Yorktown. It bore an anchor, thirteen stars and the word "Hope", and its white stars in a blue field are believed by many to have suggested the "starry blue field" of our National flag.

There were a number of other famous New England flags, and noteworthy among them was the Bunker Hill. This flag, which was one of the first to include the pine tree, was one of those carried by the American colonial troops who opposed the British Regulars at the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775.

Strikingly similar to the Stars and Stripes was the flag carried by the Green Mountain Boys at the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777. It has been claimed that this flag was the true forerunner of the Stars and Stripes and that our National flag was fashioned after the pattern of the Bennington flag, but there appears to be nothing in the written history of the flag that would verify this claim.

All of these flags and scores of others disappeared soon after the Stars and Stripes was adopted, yet the insignia shown on some of them was retained in some cases and now appears occasionally on State flags.



**T**he President of the United States issued on June 12, 1961, a proclamation which calls for the American flag to be flown night and day at the Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, across the Potomac River from the Nation's Capitol.

The proclamation cites the Iwo Jima campaign as one of the most significant and costly battles of World War II. It points out that the



American flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi on February 23, 1945, is a symbol of the courage and valor of the American fighting forces in war.

The American flag is now flown 24 hours a day at four places in the United States, authorized by Presidential Proclamation. They are: Fort McHenry, Maryland; Flaghouse Square, Baltimore; the Capitol and the Marine Corps Memorial.

