

Our flag—born through valor

Out of the travail of our nation's birth, in the midst of a bitter war for independence, there emerged on June 14, 1777, our National Emblem, a beautiful flag combining the blue of vigilance, perseverance and justice, with the white of purity, and the red of hardiness and valor, in a symbol of freedom that has lifted the hearts of Americans down through the years.

It has been said that our Stars and Stripes is a "living" flag. It breathes vitality as it ripples in the breeze. It has exemplified vigor and endurance in proclaiming man's freedom and his right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness through almost two centuries. It grows as our nation grows, adding a star for each new state taken into our Union.

The Navy is closely involved in the history of our flag. The records of the Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia on June 14, 1777, reveal that the resolution authorizing the Stars and Stripes appears between several naval matters, leading some historians to the belief that the resolution was proposed by the Marine Committee, which introduced all naval legislation.

The name of John Paul Jones, revered as the father of the American Navy, is also closely linked to our flag. An order placing Jones in command of the new warship USS RANGER was issued by the Congress the same day the flag resolution was adopted.

Jones raised the flag on USS RANGER in Portsmouth, N.H., on July 4, 1777, and may have been the first military commander to have flown it. He requested a group of patriotic ladies of Portsmouth to gather in a "flag bee" and sew together the Navy's first Stars and Stripes ensign.

History tells us that the Stars and Stripes is a development of an earlier flag, authorized by the Congress in the fall of 1775, sometime in November, and known as the Congress Colors, the Grand Union Flag, and the Cambridge Flag. The Congress Colors included the same red and white stripes, signifying separation from the mother country, but had the Union Jack of Britain instead of the blue field and white stars.

The Navy was the first to fly the Congress Colors, raising them on the first day of its own existence, December 3, 1775, when John Paul Jones, then senior lieutenant of the fleet and executive officer of Commodore Esek Hopkins' flagship USS ALFRED, personally raised the ensign to the gaff. The Navy fought many gallant actions under this flag.

The devotion of John Paul Jones to the flag of his adopted nation, and the principles for which it stands, is best demonstrated in his determination, and success, in gaining the recognition of a foreign country in the form of a salute to our Stars and Stripes. On February 14, 1778, after negotiations with French Admiral La Motte Picquet, Jones sailed USS RANGER into Quiberon Bay, near Lorient, France, where Picquet's fleet was moored, rendered a salute to the French Admiral and in turn received one. The next day, he boarded the USS INDEPENDENCE, sailing in company with USS RANGER, rendered another salute and was again saluted in return.

John Paul Jones left a great heritage to the United States Navy, and this devotion to the Stars and Stripes is a shining part of it.

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