

THE FLAG: *ITS HISTORY*

Heraldry is as old as the human race. The carrying of banners has been a custom among all peoples in all ages. These banners usually contain some concept of the life or government of those who fashion them.

The evolution of the American Flag marks the progression of the government of the American people.

From the founding of Jamestown in Virginia, in 1607, until 1775, the Flag of England was the Flag of the Peoples of America.

It is said that this same "Ranger's" Flag was flown by Jones' ship, the "Bon Homme Richard" in its thrilling fight by moonlight, upon the high seas, with the British frigate "Serapis." When the "Serapis" struck her colors, the immortal fame of John Paul Jones was insured as the intrepid defender of the youthful republic.

The original thirteen Stars and Stripes represented the original thirteen colonies. In 1795 two additional Stars and Stripes were added to represent admission to the Union of Vermont and Kentucky. Under this banner of fifteen Stars and Stripes was fought the War of 1812. It was the sight of it flying over Fort McHenry, on September 14, 1814, that inspired Francis Scott Key to write what was to become our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Miss Margaret Young, who cut the stars for that particular banner, was the mother of Henry Sanderson, the Grand Exalted Ruler of the Order of Elks in 1884.

The Congress on April 14, 1818, adopted a resolution that on and after July 4, 1818, the number of stripes should be thirteen and that the blue field should carry one star for each of the twenty states in the union and that a new star should be added for each state thereafter admitted.

Since 1818, there has been no change in the Flag design except that twenty-eight new stars were added before July 4, 1912, and this Flag of forty-eight stars flew over this nation for forty-seven years until just before the Vietnam War.

On July 4, 1959, a star was added for Alaska, our first non-connected state and a year later, Hawaii, our island state added a fiftieth star. Our present Flag — fifty stars and thirteen stripes. It is accompanied by the POW-MIA Flag to recognize the plight and demise of a special group of our Armed Services, those who were prisoners of war or still remain missing in action.

What John Paul Jones achieved upon the high seas in the War of Independence had to be repurchased by Commodore Perry on Lake Erie in the War of 1812.

The prestige of Admiral Dewey's victory at Manila Bay in 1898 was won by the naval battles in the seas about the far-distant islands of the Pacific, after the sneak attacks upon Pearl Harbor and Manila in 1941 had summoned our country to assume its role in World War II.

What our troops achieved under the Stars and Stripes at Chateau-Thierry and Flanders in World War I, their sons were required to repurchase in World War II in the bloody trek across northern Africa, on the beachheads of Europe and in the Battle of the Bulge.

The Flag our American men raised at Iwo Jima was the same Flag later raised in the defense of Inchon, Pusan and Pork Chop Hill in far-off Korea. Then another generation under the same Flag bled to stem the threat of communism in far-off Vietnam.

Our young people were again called to carry our Flag in the defense of a free world in the actions in Grenada and Panama. Willingly, our brave men and women carried our Flag and the honor of the American people into battle in Operation Desert Storm.

And who among us will ever forget the sight of firefighters raising our Flag over the ruins of the World Trade Center, the military personnel draping our Flag on the side of the Pentagon, or the citizens of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, placing our Flag near the site where brave Americans died fighting the hijackers of Flight No. 93? No other symbol could have offered such comfort, as we still, today, endure the horrors of that day.

Today, American Armed Forces carry our Flag in the villages of Iraq, the mountains of Afghanistan and the jungles of the Philippines and wherever terrorism may reside.

Their struggle against the sponsors of terrorism is the hardest battle yet, and this threat to our Nation, and to our way of life, is certainly as great a challenge as our Flag has ever seen.

The resurgence of patriotism since September 11, 2001, has rekindled respect for our Flag. Today, we see the Star Spangled Banner wherever we turn, on homes, businesses, automobiles and billboards. Such displays stimulate our love for our Nation and for what it stands; they remind us of the sacrifices being made by the men and women of our Armed Forces around the world; and, they are a tribute to the heroes of the Police and Fire Departments the Nation over.

The greatest significance of this Flag, however, lies in the influence it has in the hearts and minds of millions of people. It has waved over the unparalleled progress of a nation in developing democratic institutions, scientific and technological knowledge, education and culture. It has served as a beacon for millions of poor and oppressed refugees abroad and stands as a promise that the under-privileged will not be forgotten.