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REPORT ON DESIGN OF FLAG FLOWN AT WASHINGTON'S
HEADQUARTERS, MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY, DURING
THE WINTER OF 1779-80.

Submitted by:
Alfred F. Hopkins,
Museum Curator.
Morristown National Historical Park.

Sept., 1940.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
MORRISTOWN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY

Handwritten signature
Mr. Appleton

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September 4, 1940.

Memorandum for the Director:

Attention: Mr. R. F. Lee.

Enclosed herewith is a report on the Design of Flag Flown at Washington's Headquarters, Morristown, New Jersey, during the winter of 1979-80, which report was prepared by Alfred F. Hopkins, Museum Curator.

(SGD.) Francis S. Ronalds
Francis S. Ronalds,
Coordinating Superintendent.

GM

CC: Region One

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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
MORRISTOWN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
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Report on Design of Flag Flown at Washington's
Headquarters, Morristown, New Jersey, During
the Winter of 1778-80.

by

Alfred F. Hopkins,
Museum Curator.

Morristown National Historical Park

In so much as the question periodically arises as to what flag, if any, was flown during the occupancy of the Ford House by General Washington, denoting it as his headquarters, this report embracing opinions of several authorities who have made extensive research regarding the use of flags during the Revolutionary period, together with a summary and conclusion, is respectfully submitted.

The Stars and Stripes have figured in so many Fourth-of-July orations as the banner of liberty under which Independence was achieved that very few American patriots ever stop to think that this now famous and long established national flag was not adopted as the official standard of the new republic till well on in the third year of the Revolutionary War.¹

¹The Flag of America, by William Hood and Ralph Henry Gabriel, Yale University Press, 1927, Vol. VI, page 133.

When General Washington, after his election as General and Commander-in-Chief, reached Cambridge, on July 3, 1775, to take command, he found the so-called army practically without either flags or colors though some of the individual companies are supposed to have brought with them those which they had previously used. Washington had the entire army to organize in all its minute details, and the question of colors, being of less importance than many others, was not given serious consideration at the start, but a little later he urged the various Colonels to provide for their regiments colors of such design or designs as might appeal to them. This was frequently done, and in many instances some design of thirteen units was used to represent the revolting colonies.¹

Among the many designs for colors adopted by the colonies or regiments or to be flown from war vessels or privateers were the following. While they have been frequently depicted, they are here briefly described to show the great diversity of thought concerning appropriate designs which existed at the time or immediately prior to, or following. It is possible that flags of local military units which were quartered at New-town in 1779-80, were installed in their quarters or in the rooms at Headquarters (see Mr. Solot's statement).

Massachusetts flags:

Taunton: on red field, motto: Liberty, in white; British union jack in canton.

Bowdoin: same, on green field.

Bay Colony: red field, green pine tree on white in canton.

Bunker Hill: blue field, cross of Saint George in canton with green pine tree in upper left quarter.

Liberty Tree: white field with blue stripes at top and bottom, green tree in center, motto, "Liberty Tree - an Appeal to God."

¹The Origin and Evolution of the United States Flag, by G. G. Ballard Thurston, The National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, 1917, page 6. This address is published as a government document, House P, 23, 1926; House P, 295, 59th Congress, first Session.

Navy Ensign: White field, green tree with coiled serpent in center, motto, "An Appeal to God - Don't Tread on me."

Bedford: Red field, a mailed arm from elbow holding sword, on yellow scroll, motto, "Vincit Aut Morire" (Conquer or die).

New Hampshire Flags:

Second Regiment: Yellow field, circle of linked chain in center, British jack in canton.

Second Regiment: Blue field, shield and scroll with "N H 2 R" in center, British jack in canton.

Rhode Island Flag:

White field, fouled anchor with scroll above in blue with motto, "Hope," in center, thirteen white five-pointed stars in blue canton.

Connecticut:

On red field, the seal of the colony.

Webb's Regiment, 1st Connecticut: On yellow field, a sword and wreath with numeral 1.

New York:

On white field, a black beaver.

Gansevoort's New York Regiment: On blue field, the seal of the colony with motto, "Excelsior."

Tallmadge's Regiment: On red field, a circular device of wings, arrows and lightning bolts above a scrolled motto, "Pata Concita Fulvad Nati," thirteen alternate red and white stripes in canton.

White Plains Flag: On red field, crossed sword and staff with liberty cap, beneath motto, "Liberty or Death."

Pennsylvania:

Hanover: On red field, a Rifleman above scrolled motto, "Liberty or Death."

Pulaski: On red field, within a roped and tasseled border, a motto on each side: "Unites Virtus Fortior" and "Non Alius Regit."

Philadelphia Light-Horse: On buff field, within a floral border, the arms of the corps with motto, "For these we strive"; thirteen alternate blue and white stripes in cantons.

Westmoreland Battalion: On red field, a coiled rattlesnake within a scroll, above the motto, "Don't tread on me" and beneath the letters, J. F. I. S. W. C. P. (John Proctor's Independent Battalion Westmoreland County Pennsylvania (7), British Jack in cantons.

First Pennsylvania Regiment: On green field, a red center on which is rifleman lowering a standard beneath, "P. M. I. S."

South Carolina Flags:

Fort Moultrie Flag: On blue field, motto, "Liberty" in white, a crescent in cantons.

Navy Ensign: On thirteen red and blue stripes, an uncoiled serpent beneath the motto, "Don't tread on me."

Virginia:

The Culpepper Flag: On white field a coiled rattlesnake with mottoes: "Liberty or Death" and "Don't tread on me" beneath the scrolled inscription, "The Culpepper minute men."

Gadsden Flag: On a white or yellow field, a coiled rattlesnake above the motto: "Don't tread on me."

Linked Hand Flag: On field of green, in white canton, thirteen mailed hands grasping thirteen links of chain in circle, in blue.

The flag of merchant ships, and also used as a privateer ensign, consisted of thirteen alternate red and white stripes. It may at times have been carried by land forces.¹ This flag, showing obliquely across the stripes an uncoiled serpent and having on its lower white stripe the motto, "Don't tread on me," was hoisted as the first navy jack by Mack Hopkins, at the mast head of the "Alfred," December 3, 1775.²

It would not do to accept any of these flags as emblematic of the thirteen colonies because of their sectional prejudices, and singular as it may seem, the flag which apparently first received some official recognition by General Washington as representative of the thirteen colonies sprang into being without any known official orders or direction. The statement is made that it was the result of a committee appointed by Congress for that purpose, but the committee referred to was appointed to confer with Washington and others for the purpose of devising means for reorganizing and maintaining an army, and neither does their official report nor correspondence show that they even considered the question of a flag.³

Shortly after the return of this committee to Philadelphia, on January 2, 1776, there was hoisted over General Washington's headquarters at Cambridge a flag having thirteen horizontal red and white stripes and in the canton the British Union Jack. It was merely the British marine flag of that day, with the solid red field divided by white ribbons so as to make thirteen red and white stripes, representing the thirteen colonies.⁴

¹See illustrations in Barnard's New Complete and Authentic History of England, London -- 17--(7)

²For cuts in color of the flags described see chart, Flags of American Liberty, published by the United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, Washington, D. C., and the National Geographic Magazine for October, 1917, and September 1934.

³Thruston.

⁴Ibid.

This flag, the Grand Union or Great Union, (both terms are used) was not only hoisted by Washington at Cambridge, but also at Prospect Hill in Waverly, Massachusetts on New Year's Day, 1776.¹ It was used in Virginia, at Williamsburg, on May 15 and by Benedict Arnold at the Battle of Valcour.²

It had been hoisted by John Paul Jones on the "Alfred," the flagship of the Congress Navy, on December 3, 1776.³

"This was the flag hoisted by John Paul Jones on December 3, 1776, as the navy ensign of the thirteen colonies, when Commodore Esek Hopkins assumed command of the navy built by Congress. It was also hoisted by General Washington January 2, 1776, as the Standard of the Continental Army and remained as our National Flag until the adoption of the Stars and Stripes, June 14, 1777."⁴

"After the reading of the Declaration, the Grand Union Flag was raised over his fortifications and headquarters at what is now the Battery in New York, Ambrose Bearse, Confidential Secretary of Admiral Lord Howe, a few days later wrote of the American troops: 'They have set up their standard in the fort upon the Southern end of the town. Their colors are thirteen stripes of red and white alternating, with the union canton in the corner.'⁵

In the same article from which the above paragraph is quoted is the statement that historians have searched in vain for the slightest inkling of the flag's designer or the

¹Flags of the World, Gilbert Grosvenor and William J. Showalter, the National Geographic Magazine for September, 1934.

²The Pageant of America, Vol. VI, p. 166.

³Grosvenor and Showalter.

⁴Cyrus McCandless and Gilbert Grosvenor, Co-authors of an article on flags, the National Geographic Magazine for October, 1917.

⁵William J. Showalter and Gilbert Grosvenor, the National Geographic Magazine for September, 1934.

authority under which it was established. An English authority, W. J. Gordon,¹ publishes a picture in color of the flag and states that what is known in America as the Cambridge Flag is that of the East India Company, and that these flags were flown on the tea ships at the time of the "tea parties" in 1773, and were hoisted down and carried off in triumph by the citizens.

At the time of adoption of the Grand Union or Cambridge flag, the idea of independence was not generally seriously considered, so that the British Union Jack in this flag showed the allegiance of the Colonies to their mother country. Mr. Thruston states: "The flag itself was immediately appropriated by the navy, and although our army used it over fortifications and barracks, they did not carry it in battle. With the growth of the idea of independence, the colonists apparently conceived a dislike for the Union Jack in the flag, for before the end of the calendar year 1776 its use by our Revolutionary patriots seems to have ceased entirely. After the abandonment of this flag, and before the adoption of our starry emblem, I have not been able to obtain reliable information as to just what our navy did carry, but it probably consisted of thirteen horizontal stripes, in each case composed of two of the four colors -- red, white, blue, and yellow."²

The illustration from the Schuyler Papers, New York Public Library, of the Schooner Royal Savage, flagship of Jacobus Wynkoop, Commodore of the Continental Flotilla on Lake Champlain in the early summer of 1776, shows the Grand Union flag at the mast head and is said to be the earliest surviving picture of the flag.³

John McGraw's powder horn shows Fort Schuyler on December 25, 1777 with the Grand Union flag flying⁴. There are several powder horns at Stanwix carved during the siege which show the Cambridge Flag.⁵

¹Flags of the World by W. J. Gordon, Frederick Warne & Co., London, 1915, plate XXV.

²Evolution of the United States Flag.

³The Pageant of America, Vol. VI, p. 155.

⁴The Stars and Stripes in 1777, by John Spargo, Bennington, Ver. 1926.

⁵S. H. P. Fell, in letter to Superintendent Ronalds, Morristown National Historical Park, dated July 17, 1940.

Grosvonor and Showalter agree that the Grand Union flag served as the outward symbol of the Union of the colonies from December, 1775, until the adoption of the Stars and Stripes.¹

"On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the following act establishing the Stars and Stripes as the flag of our country:

"Resolved that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."²

The act does not define how many points the stars were to have nor how they were to be arranged.

The designer was probably Francis Hopkinson, member of the Naval Committee. The design probably was taken from the flag of the East India Company, thirteen alternate red and white stripes, and the thirteen white five-pointed stars in a blue canton, probably adopted from the Rhode Island Colonial flag.³

"Our navy immediately appropriated the new flag; but as the British Army and Navy had used different flags for many years, we thought we should do likewise, and the official correspondence between General Washington and the Board of War shows that it was over two years before they agreed upon a design for the army to carry 'as variant from the marine flag,' and over three years more before the Board of War succeeded in obtaining the necessary materials and having national colors made for our army. The details of the design are only imperfectly described in this correspondence, neither flag nor design having been preserved, so far as we have been able to learn, but it contained the union, and in the center was a serpent, with the number of the regiment and name of the State where the regiment was organized. This correspondence also shows that the national colors prepared by the Board of War for the army were ready for distribution in the fall of 1782, and that they had not been distributed as late as March 11, 1783, being then in the hands of the keeper of military

¹The National Geographic Magazine for September, 1934.

²The Journal of Congress, Charles Thompson, Secretary No. 2, Vol. VI, p. 1837.

³Flag Day Release, issued by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of New Jersey, Theodore M. Gottlieb, Newark, N. J., 1934.

stores. The war was then practically over, and there is nothing to show that our Revolutionary Army had ever carried any flags furnished by the American Congress. Those that were carried were purely personal, each made by or for some officer, company, or regiment, and represented the sentiments of the makers." ...

"So far, I have succeeded in locating only one Stars and Stripes that I feel sure was carried by the American Army during our Revolutionary War. It was carried by the North Carolina Militia at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, March 15, 1781; but the stripes are blue and red and the union has a white field with thirteen eight-pointed stars. There is also another flag hanging in the State House at Annapolis that it is claimed, and probably correctly, was carried by the Third Maryland Regiment at the Battle of Cowpens, January 17, 1781. It has thirteen red and white stripes, and the union is a blue field with thirteen five-pointed stars--one in the center and twelve arranged in the form of a circle around it. In both cases these flags were purely personal, not official."

"The first flag carried by our army as national colors is still in existence. It was recently mounted between two layers of Brussels net, at the expense of our Society, for the purpose of preservation, and is today hanging in the Chapel on Governor's Island."¹

The flag referred to above by Mr. Thurston as the first carried by the army is not the stars and stripes but one having an eagle upon a blue field.

¹Evolution of the United States Flag.

Regarding the immediate appropriation of the new flag by the navy: on the same day that Congress passed the act establishing the Stars and Stripes as the flag of the United States, namely, June 14, 1777, it also appointed John Paul Jones to the command of the "Bonner," a new ship of 18 guns recently completed at Portsmouth. "Jones, in raising this banner over the Bonner, seems to have been the first man to raise the Stars and Stripes over an American war ship -- on November 1, 1777, he set sail for France."¹ Thus it would seem that at some time during the fourteen weeks duration between the adoption of the flag and the departure of Jones, an ensign of the new design had been made -- first navy stars and stripes -- in the absence of specific arrangements of stars in the resolution of Congress, June 14, 1777, it was customary in the navy to place the stars in the form of the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew.²

The flag flown by Jones from the "Bon-homme Richard,"³ in 1779, had thirteen alternate red and white stripes with twelve, five-pointed white stars, arranged three in a row, in a blue canton. It is preserved in the U. S. National Museum, Washington, D. C.⁴

The proposed army flag was designed from the many styles of rattlesnake flags then in the army and navy. The Stars and Stripes was not in general use in the Revolutionary War nor in the army for years thereafter.⁵ It was probably carried, but not by the National Army, at Bennington, (the Fillmore Bennington Flag of August 1777, is preserved at Bennington. It has the numerals 76 in a semi-circle of eleven 7-pointed stars with twelfth and thirteenth larger star in upper right and left canton); perhaps at Cowpens (Flag of the Third Maryland Regiment); and at Guilford, (blue and red stripes, eight-pointed blue stars in white canton).

Mr. Theodore T. DeLoe, Curator of History, United States National Museum, Washington, D. C., expresses the following:⁶

¹The Flagant of America, Vol. VI, p. 263.

²Chart of American Flags, U. S. George Washington Bicentennial Commission, C. S. Hammond & Co., published N. Y., 1931.

³Flagant of America, Vol. VI, p. 277.

⁴Gottlieb

⁵Letter from L. E. Graf, Associate Director, U. S. National Museum to Superintendent Kahler, Morristown National Historical Park, January 25, 1940.

"In my opinion the Stars and Stripes were flown over Washington's Headquarters in Morristown during the winter of 1779-80, with the thirteen stars arranged in the form of a circle. This was the logical flag to be used as a headquarters flag at the time mentioned. Local military flags were rarely used for this purpose and the display of the Grand Union Flag at Washington's Camp at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in January, 1776, would lead us to infer that the national flag was also used for this purpose at Morristown."

"It is also entirely possible that the flags of the local military units which were quartered at Morristown during the winter of 1779-80 were installed in the quarters of those units or in the rooms of the Washington headquarters. If Mr. Kahler has a list of these units, I should be glad to supply all information at hand concerning the design of the flags by which these units were represented. In most cases, however, the designs of these local Revolutionary flags have not been preserved."

Again quoting Mr. Rolotes:¹

"Much additional information concerning the history of the United States flag has been assembled since the publication of Mr. Thurston's admirable paper on the subject. This paper must now be interpreted in the light of more recent information, much of which at present exists only in manuscript form.

"The flags to which Mr. Thurston referred in the statements mentioned by Mr. Ronalds were regimental flags and not garrison or headquarters flags such as would have been used at Morristown in 1779. These two types of flags are entirely separate and distinct from each other and each type had its own origin and development. It is most unlikely that the Grand Union Flag was used as an American headquarters flag as late as 1779. The Grand Union Flag was definitely displaced by the Stars and Stripes as the American National Flag by the passage of the Act of the Continental Congress of June 14, 1777.

"In so far as we know, no garrison or headquarters flags of the period 1777-1781, have been found but my prediction is that when such flags are found they will be of the type described in my letter of January 23. The best evidence we have

¹Letter from J. E. Graf, Associate Director, U. S. National Museum Washington, D. C. to Superintendent Kahler, Morristown National Historical Park, February 13, 1940.

of the former existence of such flags is that flags of this type were shown by John Trumbull and Charles Wilson Peale in some of their paintings of Revolutionary subjects.

"In the paper mentioned by Mr. Ronalds, Mr. Thurston undertook to prove that the Stars and Stripes was not carried in battle during the Revolution by Continental Army units and I agree with his conclusion in this connection. He did not undertake to prove that the Stars and Stripes was not used as a garrison or headquarters flag at this time."

"The Continental Board of War devoted much time and trouble to the problem of selecting a design and having made a series of national regimental flags for use in battle by the individual Continental Army units.

"As Mr. Thurston states, this effort was unsuccessful and no flag of this type were distributed during the Revolution. No reference has been found in the War Department records concerning any efforts on the part of the Continental Board of War to procure garrison or headquarters flags. It is clear that battle flags were regarded as of greater importance than headquarters flags and no special effort was made by the Board of War to procure such flags. In my opinion, however, flags of this type were made and used between 1777 and 1781, and they were flags of the Stars and Stripes type."

At Fort Ticonderoga the Grand Union Flag is now flown. The Director asked concerning the correct flag to be flown at the Washington's Headquarters at Morristown states:-

"We have never been able to find any documentary evidence that the Stars and Stripes were used by the land forces of the United States during the Revolution. It was used by the Navy.

"They claimed that it was used at Fort Stanwix on account of a letter stating that a red, white and blue flag was made, but the Cambridge flag is also red, white and blue and there are several powder horns carved at Stanwix during the siege which show the Cambridge flag.

Letter from S. H. P. Pell, Director, Fort Ticonderoga Museum, Fort Ticonderoga, N. Y. to Superintendent Ronalds, Morristown National Historical Park, July 17, 1940.

"In 1777, Major Stevens put in a requisition for red, white and blue hunting for two standards; one for Fort Mifflin, and one for Mount Independence, but again there is no description of the flags.

"Trumbull, in several of his historical paintings, shows the Stars and Stripes in front of headquarters but these pictures were painted after the war.

"My impression is that the Cambridge Flag -- that is thirteen stripes with the British Jack in the corner -- was the only one used by the Army. Each state, of course, had its own flag and the authority of the National Government was very weak."

The late Dr. John C. Fitzpatrick, authority on all phases of Washington's life, when consulted in 1935, reported that there was no documentary evidence in existence which would give any clue as to what flag was flown by the Commander-in-Chief at his headquarters.¹

It has been suggested that probably, if any flag was flown, it was that of the Commander-in-Chief's Guard.²

The design of flag for the Guard was probably first introduced in March, 1783. See The Commander-in-Chief's Guard, by Carlos N. Coffrey, Stevenson-Smith Co., Washington, D. C., 1906, p. 98.

The Commander-in-Chief's Flag, shown in color on page 370, The National Geographic Magazine for September, 1934, is a blue flag having thirteen 5-pointed white stars arranged in the crosses of Saint George and Saint Andrew, and on page 368 of the same magazine is a statement concerning it as follows: "Commander-in-Chief at Valley Forge, General Washington used this flag before his tent. It has been suggested that this is a possible source of the stars in our National Flag."

¹Report on the Design of Flag Flown over Washington's Headquarters in Morristown, 1779-1780, by Edward C. Kemper, Student Technician, Branch of Historic Sites, 1936.

²*Ibid.*

Mr. Gilbert Grosvenor, Editor of the magazine, addressed concerning this flag, states, in part, as follows:¹ "You can see a picture of the Valley Forge Flag in The Valley Forge Guide, by W. Herbert Buck, D. S., 1932, page 117. There is also given a history of the flag. For more information, I suggest you write to Valley Forge."

The Historical Committee, Valley Forge Park Commission, had already been asked for information concerning the flag, but to date no advice has been received.

Summary

The Grand Union or Cambridge Flag, first symbol of the United Colonies, hoisted over Army Headquarters in 1776, was the British Marine Flag of that day with the solid red field divided by white stripes to form alternate red and white stripes. (Thruston)

It was the Flag of the East India Company. (Gordon)

It apparently remained in use only during the calendar year 1776. (Thruston)

It remained in use until displaced by the Stars and Stripes in 1777. (Grosvenor, Showalter, McCandless, Belote, Gottlieb)

It was the only flag used by the National Army. (Bell)

In 1777 the design was changed, white stars on a blue field being substituted in the canton in place of the British Union Jack.

The idea for the new canton was probably taken from the flag of the Colony of Rhode Island. (Gottlieb)

The new flag, the Stars and Stripes, was immediately adopted and used by the Navy. (All authorities)

It was never carried in battle by the National Army during the Revolution. (Thruston, Belote, Bell, Grosvenor, McCandless, Showalter, Gottlieb)

¹Letter from Gilbert Grosvenor to Superintendent Kahler, Morristown National Historical Park, January 12, 1940.

With the stars in the center arranged in a circle, it was used as a garrison and headquarters flag by the Army between 1777-1780. (Delote) Mr. Delote gives as best evidence for this opinion the fact that flags of this type were shown by John Trumbull and Charles Wilson Peale in some of their paintings of Revolutionary subjects. Both artists, however, depict in paintings the flag before its adoption, namely, at Trenton and Princeton.

No documental evidence exists which would give any clue as to what flag was flown by the Commander-in-Chief at his headquarters. (Pitpatrick)

The only design now known for the standard of the Commander-in-Chief's Guard is obviously late, showing as it does, among other figures, a United States shield and eagle.

Conclusion

There is not sufficient evidence presented at this time to prove convincingly what design of flag, if any, indicated the Ford House as headquarters of the National Army in 1779-1780.