

*Development of the Flag of the United States
in Revolutionary British America*

*Including an Introduction to the
Continental Regimental Standards and Colors of Colonial Militias*

by Roger S. Williams

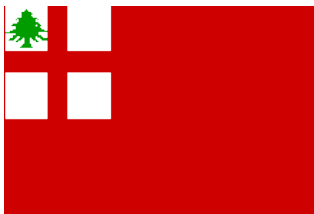
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The Information for this flyer was culled from various books and internet sources, including [CRW Flags](#) and Wikipedia. The most complete and reliable source for book on British America and the American Revolution is Edward Richardson's, STANDARDS AND COLORS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, UPenn Press, 1982 ISBN 0812278399. This book is out of print, but can be obtain from used book dealers.

KING'S COLORS 1606 -In 1603, James VI of Scotland inherited the English and Irish thrones (as James I), thereby uniting the crowns of England, Scotland and Ireland. On 12 April 1606, a new flag to represent this regal union between England and Scotland was specified in a royal decree, according to which the flag of England (*a red cross on a white background, known as St George's Cross*), and the flag of Scotland (*a white saltire on a blue background, known as the Saltire or St Andrew's Cross*), would be joined together, forming the flag of Great Britain and first union flag



ENGLISH ENSIGN 1620 - Ensigns were flown on both civilian and military vessels of Great Britain. Ensigns of the fleets were either Red (Atlantic), Blue (Pacific) or White ("Home" fleet, which included the Mediterranean).



NEW ENGLAND ENSIGN c1686 The history of the Pine Tree as a symbol of New England predates the European colonial settlements. In eastern Massachusetts, southern New Hampshire and the southern corner of Maine, there lived a nomadic tribe of Native Americans known as the Penacook. "Penacook" is an Algonquin word meaning "Children of the Pine Tree." The Penacook people have been credited with teaching the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony much needed survival skills when the colonists were starving to death during the winter of 1621-22. A common way to customize English Red Ensigns for ships sailing out of New England was to modify the Cross of Saint George in the canton by adding a pine tree in the first quarter.



COLONIAL ENSIGN 1707 (or, "Meteor"), was adopted by Queen Anne as the new flag for England and her colonies in 1707. This was the best known of the British Maritime flags, or Ensigns, which were formed by placing the Union flag in the canton of another flag having a field of white, blue or red. This flag was widely used on ships during the Colonial period. This was the first national flag of the English colonies, and Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown under this flag.

Colonial "Liberty" Protest Flags Flags with the word "Liberty" on them came to be called Liberty Flags and were usually flown from Liberty poles. They were flags of protest and petition flown throughout the Thirteen Colonies during the five years prior to the outbreak of the Revolution. They proclaimed loyalty to the Crown, but laid claim on behalf of the colonists to the rights of Englishmen, and called for a union of the colonies against current English colonial policies.

THE RATTLESNAKE The rattlesnake was the favorite animal emblem of the Americans even before the Revolution. In 1751 Benjamin Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette carried a bitter article protesting the British practice of sending convicts to America. The author suggested that the colonists return the favor by shipping a cargo of rattlesnakes to England, which could then be distributed in the noblemen's gardens. Three years later the Gazette printed a political cartoon of a snake as a commentary on the Albany Congress. To remind the delegates of the danger of disunity, the serpent was shown cut to pieces. Each segment is marked with the name of a colony, and the motto "JOIN or DIE" below. Other newspapers took up the snake theme. Some contemporary flag companies are selling a "JOIN or DIE" flag using this drawing. There is no historical documentation to support this



THE SONS OF LIBERTY FLAGS c1765 The history of the Stamp Act flag began in about 1765, when protests of the duties and taxes and stamps required by Parliament began in the colonies. After a protest of the Stamp Act was held under an Elm tree in Boston, the tree became known as the "Liberty Tree," and a protest group known as the Sons of Liberty was formed. The Sons of Liberty continued to meet under this tree, so the British cut the tree down, and the Sons replaced it with a Liberty pole. A flag of nine red and white vertical stripes known as the "Rebellious Stripes" was flown from this pole. The actual date of this flag is speculative. When the British outlawed the "Rebellious Stripes" flag, tradition tells us the Sons of Liberty created a new flag by changing the direction of the stripes. Three and a half years after the Boston Tea Party, the nine stripes had grown to thirteen horizontal stripes. This plain red and white striped flag evolved into a naval ensign and was commonly used as a United States merchant ensign in the period from 1776



Gadsden

Flag The flag is named after American general and politician Christopher Gadsden (1724–1805), who designed it in 1775 during the American Revolution. It was used by the Continental Marines as an early motto flag. At the Congress, Continental Colonel Christopher Gadsden represented his home state of South Carolina. He was one of seven members of the Marine Committee who were outfitting the first naval mission. Before the departure of that first mission in December 1775, the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the Navy, Commodore Esek Hopkins, received the yellow rattlesnake flag from Gadsden to serve as the distinctive personal standard of his flagship. It was displayed at the mainmast.[7]:289 Hopkins had previously led The United Companies of the Train of Artillery of the Town of Providence, before being appointed to lead the Navy. The 1775 flag of the Providence Train of Artillery's featured a coiled timber rattlesnake and the motto "Do Not Tread on Me" along with an anchor, cannons and the motto "In God We Hope" on a gold



background. The flag presented to Hopkins as Commander of the Continental Navy is a simplified version of that design.

In late 1775, as the first ships of the Continental Navy readied in the Delaware River, Commodore Esek Hopkins issued, in a set of fleet signals, an instruction directing his vessels to fly a "striped" jack and ensign. The exact design of these flags is unknown. The ensign was likely to have been the Grand Union Flag, and the jack a simplified version of the ensign: a field of 13 horizontal red and white stripes. It is likely that the colonial ships did not use (and could not have legitimately used) the canton of the Grand Union Flag (i.e., the Union Jack) as their jack given its use as a jack by Royal Navy warships. Despite the probability that the original jack may have been a simple striped flag, since about 1880, this jack has traditionally been depicted as consisting of thirteen red and white stripes charged with an uncoiled rattlesnake and the motto "Dont Tread on Me (sic)"; this tradition dates at least back to 1880, when this design appeared in a color plate in Admiral George Henry Preble's influential *History of the Flag of the United States*. Recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated that this inferred design never actually existed but "was a 19th-century mistake based on an erroneous 1776 engraving".[

Schenectady Liberty Flag 1771 In 1771, a liberty pole was erected the center of the City of Schenectady, New York, as a protest of British policies and interference in the communities' affairs. On top of this Liberty Pole hung a homemade blue silk flag measuring 44 by 44 inches with the word "LIBERTY" in white sewed on one side. Later, this Liberty flag was reportedly carried by the First New York Line Regiment, who largely came from Schenectady, between 1776-1777 during the revolution. Today, it is one of a handful of a pre-revolutionary flags known to exist. It is housed in the Schenectady County Historical Society Museum.



The Taunton Flag 1774 was one of the earliest of the colonial flags, first raised in 1774 at Taunton, Massachusetts. It was simply a Queen Anne Flag with the words, "LIBERTY AND UNION" sewn onto the red field. The Boston Evening Post reported the incident and the idea caught on. Flags with identical or similar mottos began to appear throughout the colonies soon after.

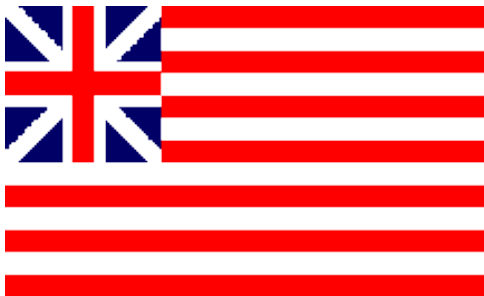


**VIRGINIA
FOR
CONSTITUTIONAL
LIBERTY**

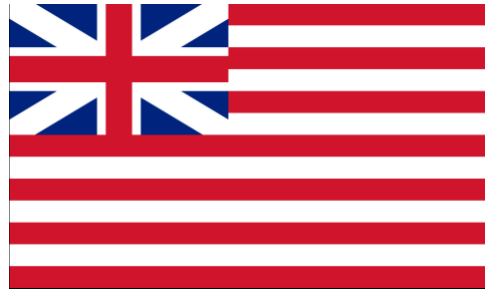
Virginia For Constitutional Liberty Flag c1775 This flag was reportedly flown from the Williamsburg "Liberty Pole" just prior to the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War.

LIBERTY

The Huntington "Liberty Flag," was flown in the town of Huntington, New York, on July 23, 1776 after the townsfolk received the news of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The flag was later carried at the Battle of Long Island by the 1st Regiment of Suffolk County Militia. It was reported captured by Hessian troops and taken back to Hess (Germany) by the mercenary soldiers. The flag is reported to have survived in Germany until its destruction by fire in a bombing raid during World War II.



THE CONTINENTAL UNION Dec. 3, 1775 was first raised aboard Continental Navy Commodore Esek Hopkins' flagship "Alfred" on the Delaware River on December 3, 1775. This flag was never officially sanctioned by the Continental Congress, but was in use from late 1775 until mid 1777, probably because it was very simple to make. All one had to do was sew six white strips over the red field of a British Red Ensign. Washington writes in his correspondence that on January 1, 1776, the "Union" flag was first raised at Cambridge. He personally paid to equip the first 1000 soldiers under this flag. Although this flag was known as

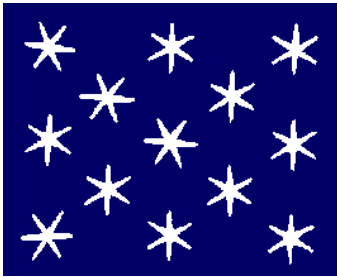


BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY 1707 Though almost identical to the Continental Colors, there is no evidence that this ensign was even flown on ships in British America. Few provincials would not have known of its existence.



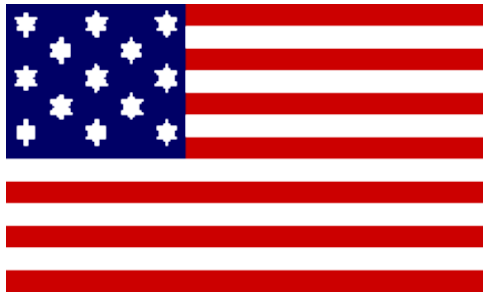
The Washington coat of arms at Selby Abbey (mid 15th century)

WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS The flag carried by the re-enactors has been called the



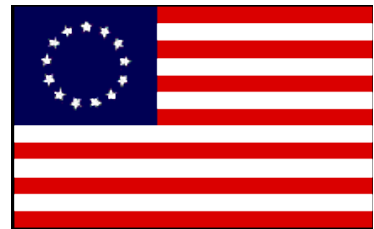
Washington Headquarters Flag. After the war, Wm. Mercer, son of the VA general that was killed at the Battle of Princeton 3 Jan 1777, collaborated with Charles Wilson Peale, and his son, James Peale, on a painting that presented a rendition of this flag. Charles, and probably James, were either at, or near, the battle that day. According to tradition Washington used this flag throughout the whole Revolutionary War. Unfortunately, there has been no verifiable record that this flag ever belonged to, or was used by, General Washington. There are some writing that suggest that

Washington may have designated a specific flag at his camp, but that would have been after the Flag Resolution 14 Jun 1777 in Congress. The reason why many attribute this flag to Washington's Headquarters is due to the fact that in 1912 a remote descendant of Washington donated an heirloom that the family called Washington's "personal flag" to the Valley Forge Historical Society. There is no period documentation or proof to support it ever being an actual flag used during the Revolutionary War. In fact, the donated flag lacks a hem on either the fly or bottom sides, which may indicate it was a canton from a larger Stars and Stripes, and it was not designed to fly on its own. It also has no fringe, nor any obvious header that would indicate that it was pole mounted or hoisted.



THE HOPKINSON FLAG 1776 The design of the first Official "Stars and Stripes" is credited to Francis Hopkinson, a Congressman from New Jersey, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. His design had the thirteen stars arranged in a "staggered" pattern. Although there is no original example of this flag still left, we do have the bill he gave Congress for its design. Congressman Hopkins asked Congress for a keg of ale for his work. There is no record of Congress ever paying him.

THE BETSY ROSS FLAG 1777 According to tradition that was propagated by William Canby (grandson to Betsy Ross) in 1870, Betsy Ross, a widow struggling to run her own upholstery business sewed the first flag in 1777. Upholsterers in Colonial America not only worked on furniture, but did all manner of sewing work, which for some included making flags. According to the legend, General Washington, Robert Morris, and John Ross showed her a rough design of the flag that included six-pointed stars. Betsy suggested a five-pointed star because it was easier to make, and demonstrated how to cut a five-pointed star in a single snip. Impressed, the three entrusted Betsy with making our first flag.

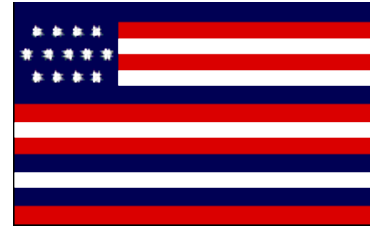
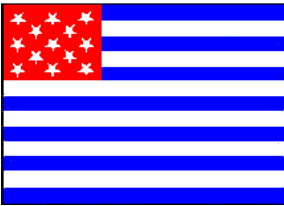


THE FIRST OFFICIAL NAVY FLAG 1777-1795 The first official documented US flag had also a staggered star pattern and was used by the navy. On **April 24, 1778**, Captain John Paul Jones, in command of the U.S.S. Ranger

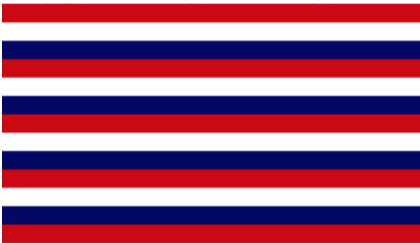


and flying this flag, became the first American officer to have the American flag recognized by a foreign power. Although very similar to the original Hopkinson flag, this flag replaced the six-pointed stars with the more traditional five-pointed "American" stars.

Variation of the Stars & Strips



Texel, Serapis or "John Paul Jones" 1779



randywine 1777

Fort Mifflin Flag was originally the official flag of the Continental Navy Jack. As you can see it is very distinctive in its design, consisting of thirteen alternating stripes of red, white and blue, representing the thirteen colonies of the new nation at the time. The Fort Mifflin flag borrowed the design because the navy was operating in the vicinity of the Delaware River forts and it was the only flag the soldiers of the fort saw on the island. The present flag that flies over the fort is an exact replica of the flag that flew over the fort in the fall of 1777, but is only one quarter the size of the garrison flag that flew during the battle and could be seen as far away as Philadelphia, over 7 miles away. During the siege of Fort Mifflin from October 4th to the morning of November 16th 1777, the flag remained flying, despite the largest bombardment the North American continent has ever seen. Over 10,000 cannonballs were shot at the small garrison of men at the fort and at one point 1,000 cannonballs in one hour. Through the tremendous shelling by the batteries on land and the British fleet in the river, the Continental soldiers held fast and heroically stood against the onslaught. At one point the flag was shot from the pole and two soldiers rushed to raise it, but no sooner than they had done so a British mortar shell burst and killed both men. Eventually the Fort was unable to bear under the constant barrage, but the defenders did not surrender the Fort, the flag was still flying the morning they evacuated to New Jersey. It is said that this same flag flew over the American defenders at Fort Stanwix during the Burgoyne Campaign in New York State of the same year as well as at Fort Griswold in Connecticut.



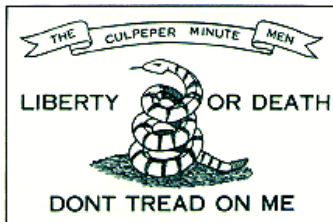
THE-STAR-SPANGLED-BANNER This flag became the official United States Flag on May 1, 1795. Two new stars were added for the admission of Vermont and Kentucky. This flag was used for the next 23 years, and it is the only flag to ever have more than 13 stripes. During the War of 1812, Major George Armistead, Commandant of Fort McHenry outside of Baltimore, Maryland, said he "desired to have a flag made so large that the British will have no difficulty in seeing it from a distance" if they

attacked. A giant garrison flag was made by a Baltimore flag maker named Mary Young Pickersgill, whose mother, Rebecca Flower Young, had made the Grand Union Flag for George Washington. The Fort McHenry Flag was 30 feet high and 42 feet long. During the war, the British attacked and burnt the capital building in Washington, D.C. in August of 1814. The next month they attacked Baltimore. During the bombardment of Fort McHenry, Francis Scott Key wrote: "The Star-Spangled Banner" in honor of the men at Fort McHenry and the very big flag that flew over the Fort. The British failed to capture Ft. McHenry and were unsuccessful in their attack of Baltimore.

Regimental Standards and Colors in Revolutionary British America



THE BEDFORD FLAG APRIL 1775 This may be the oldest complete flag known to exist in the United States. Its description matches one made for a cavalry troop of the Massachusetts Bay Militia in the French and Indian Wars. Legend claims it is the flag carried by Bedford Minuteman, Nathaniel Page, to the Concord Bridge on April 19, 1775, at the beginning of the American Revolution. There is, however, no real proof, either from testimonials or diaries that mention any flag flown that day by either side, except one by a British officer (Lt. Barker), who reported that British grenadiers chopped down and destroyed a flag and liberty pole standing on a hill near Concord Center. However, he reports that this was done hours before the Bedford's militiamen arrived at Concord. The Latin inscription "*Vince Aut Morire*" means "conquer or die." The arm emerging from the clouds represents the arm of God. The original is housed at the Bedford, Massachusetts Town Library.



THE CULPEPER MINUTEMEN FLAG JUNE 1775 This flag represented a group of minutemen from Culpeper, Virginia. These men formed part of Colonel Patrick Henry's First Virginia Regiment of 1775. Three hundred Culpeper Minutemen led by Colonel Stevens marched toward Williamsburg at the beginning of the fighting. Their unusual dress alarmed the people as they marched through the country. They had bucks' tails in their hats and tomahawks and scalping knives hung from their belts. Their flag's central symbol was a coiled rattlesnake about to strike, and below it the words "DON'T TREAD ON ME." At each side were the words of Patrick Henry "LIBERTY OR DEATH!"



WASHINGTONS CRUISERS 1775 This flag was used by George Washington on a squadron of six schooners which he outfitted at his own expense in the fall of 1775. This flag was a variation of the New England Pine Tree flag. The Continental Navy, knowing they were up against the greatest naval power in the world, set sail flying a flag with an "APPEAL TO HEAVEN." They needed all the help they could get.



Philadelphia Light Horse

In September of 1747, as the first Continental Congress met at Philadelphia, large amounts of British troops arrived in America to put down colonial unrest, seize and secure the military stores, and erect fortifications. In this alarming crisis, this troop was formed by a group of Philadelphia "gentlemen." Many were businessmen and merchants who supplied their own uniforms, military equipment and horses. The flag was contributed to the unit by Captain Markoe. It was designed by John Folwell and hand-painted by James Claypoole. According to legend, the British Union had been originally painted in the canton, but the artist was instructed to paint thirteen blue and silver stripes over it to represent the united colonies. It was this troop of men that escorted General Washington from Philadelphia to first take command of the Continental Army which was assembled at Cambridge outside of Boston in June of 1775. Throughout 1776 and 1777, while General Washington was in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, many times the Troop acted as his body guard. The Light Horse Troop later carried their flag in the Battles of Brandywine Creek, Germantown, Princeton, Trenton, and then served throughout the whole war. They also went on to served with



First Pennsylvania Rifles

1775 This is the flag of the First Pennsylvania Rifles. The regiment would see action during the New York Campaign, Battle of Trenton, Second Battle of Trenton, Battle of Princeton, Battle of Brandywine, Battle of Germantown, Battle of Monmouth and the Battle of Springfield. The letters "P.M." on the flag refers to "Pennsylvania Militia," and the "i.R." is "1st Rifles." The Latin legend "Dominari Nolo" means "I Will Not Be Dominated" and refers to the American's desire to be free from the King of England.



Second Connecticut Regiment

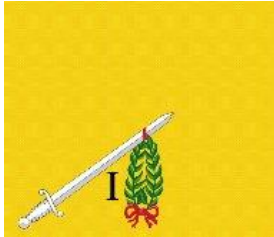
Eight companies were recruited from the counties of Fairfield, Windham, and Hartford and assigned to the 1st Connecticut Brigade. The regiment would see action in the New York Campaign, Battle of Brandywine, Battle of Germantown and the Battle of Monmouth. The three grape vines on the "Arms of Connecticut" shield, represent the three original settlements of the colony; Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield. The motto is "Qui Transtulit Sustinet," and means "He who brought us here will take care of us."

11th Virginia Col. Daniel Morgan, first cousin of Daniel Boone, was one of the Revolution's most renown tacticians. Under his leadership, Morgan's Rifle Corps played a key role in the Battle of Saratoga, initiate fires on the American side, targeting key personnel such as officers and artillerymen. The 11th Virginia Regiment saw action at the Battle of Brandywine, Battle of Germantown, Battle of Monmouth, and the Battle of Cowpens, and Yorktown.



2nd New Hampshire

The 2nd was one of two New Hampshire regiments that reported to Washington's camp in Cambridge at the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1776. Henry Dearborn led the men from New Hampshire and troops under John Sullivan held the "rail fence" on one of the flanks at the Battle of Bunker Hill. In the spring of 1776, the Second saw action at Fort Ticonderoga, Mount Independence, Bennington, and wintered at Valley Forge. Men from New Hampshire would take part in nearly every battle fought in New England, including the turning point of the American Revolution at Saratoga. The 2nd New Hampshire's first leader was Colonel Enoch Poor, but by the time of the Battle of Hubbardston (Hubbardton), where these two flags may have been captured by the British 9th Foot, it was commanded by Colonel Nathan Hale. The British dispatches of the day suggest that the flags were taken at Fort Anne (or at Hubbardton, on the previous day), quite some distance from the battle, and probably the supply base of the Americans.



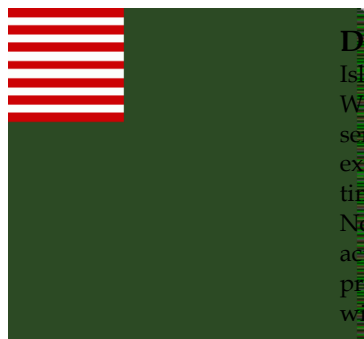
Webb's Continental Regiment, 1st Company of the Continental Regiment of Foot 1777 under the command of Colonel Samuel Blatchley Webb of Connecticut. Webb had formerly served as one of Washington's personal aides. Connecticut Line was a formation within the Continental Army. The term "Connecticut Line" referred to the quota of numbered infantry regiments assigned to Connecticut at various times by the Continental Congress. These, together with similar contingents from the other twelve states, formed the Continental Line. Webb's Regiment was officially designated the 9th Connecticut Regiment and would first see action at the Battle of Rhode Island. The regiment was consolidated into the 2nd Connecticut Regiment in 1781 and disbanded in 1782.



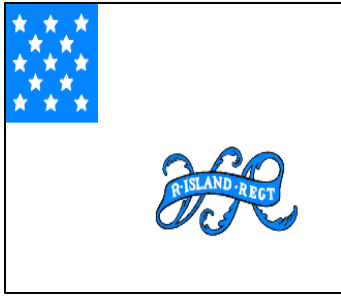
2nd Continental Light Dragoons, also known as "Sheldon's Horse," named after their commander Colonel Elisha Sheldon, was the first of four Dragoon regiments to be raised during the War and the only Dragoon regiment to serve throughout the War. Appointed Colonel Commandant by order of General Washington in December of 1776, Sheldon served as commander of the Second Dragoons until the end of the American Revolution. Under his command, the regiment would see action at the Battle of Brandywine, Battle of Saratoga, Battle of Germantown, Battle of Crooked Billet and the Battle of Yorktown.



3rd Virginia Formed in 1775 in Alexandria and its notable commanders included Col. Hugh Mercer, Col. George Weedon, Col. Thomas Marshall (*the father of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall*), Colonel William Heth, and finally Col. Abraham Buford. James Monroe, Thomas Helm, and John Marshall served as lieutenants in this regiment. The regiment saw action in the New York Campaign, Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, Valley Forge, Monmouth and the Siege of Charleston. In 1780, when the 3rd Virginia under the command of Col. Buford was trapped by a British and American Loyalist force under Col. Banastre Tarleton, the American forces suffered over a hundred casualties.



Delaware Militia The Battle of Brooklyn Heights, part of the longer Long Island campaign of the Summer of 1776, was the first battle of George Washington's new Continental Army, just a month after it was formed. It began a series of defeats for the untried rebel forces at the hands of British General Howe's experienced combat forces that eventually ended with Washington's famed nighttime retreat across the East River on the night of August 29, 1776, into the forest of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. According to tradition, the dogged rear guard actions of the Delaware Militia, with flag flying, and the 1st Maryland Regiment, prevented the capture of the majority of Washington's army during the Colonial withdrawal.



1st Rhode Island was a Continental Army regiment from Rhode Island during the American Revolutionary War (1781–1783). Like most regiments of the Continental Army, the unit went through several incarnations and name changes. It became well-known as the "Black Regiment" because, for a time, it had several companies of African American soldiers. Although it is regarded as the first African-American military regiment, its ranks were not exclusively African-American.

2nd Rhode Island Although tradition claims that the Rhode Islanders were among the first to join the Minutemen outside of Boston, and the Rhode Island regiments served at the Battles of Brandywine Creek and Trenton, the regiments were not formed until 1781. They most certainly were at Yorktown and remained active until the end of the Revolution. The starry canton in the flag of the Rhode Island Regiment symbolized national unity, but the white field corresponded to the uniforms of the Rhode Island troops. The anchor symbol and motto which completed the design had been used as a government symbol since 1647 and is carried in the current state flag



The Green Mountain Boys Ethan Allen and his cousin Seth Warner came from a part of the New Hampshire land grant that eventual became the modern State of Vermont. They commanded a New Hampshire and Vermont militia brigade known as the "Green Mountain Boys." A notable victory of the Green Mountain Boys occurred on the morning of May 10, 1775, when they silently invaded the British held Fort Ticonderoga and demanded its surrender. The captured cannon and mortars were then transported across the snow covered mountains of New England. This surprise installation of some of these on the heights over Boston Harbor enabled George Washington to force the British to leave that important harbor. On August 16, 1777, the Green Mountain Boys fought under General Stark at the Battle of Bennington. This flag's green field made sense when you realized the Green Mountain Boys carried the flag in the forest. Bright red and white stripes were not very practical there. As in many American flags, the stars here were arranged in an arbitrary fashion. Nevertheless, they signified the unity of the Thirteen Colonies in their struggle for independence.

BUCKS OF AMERICA When the American Revolutionary War began in 1775, black soldiers—both slaves and freemen—served with white soldiers in integrated militia units in the New England colonies. Later that year, these New England militia units became the nucleus of the newly created Continental Army, the national army of the colonies. The inclusion of black soldiers in the army was controversial.



By the end of 1775, the Continental Congress and the army's Commander-in-Chief, George Washington, decided to stop enlisting black soldiers. Washington soon reversed this decision, however, both because of manpower shortages and because the British had offered freedom to slaves who would escape from Patriot masters to join the British. Washington permitted free blacks to enlist in the Continental Army. White owners could enroll their slaves as substitute forces for their own service. On the local level, states made independent decisions about the enlistment of African Americans. Massachusetts continued to accept black soldiers in its integrated militia units. It was also one of several northern states to create a segregated unit of black soldiers. Blacks and abolitionists generally disapproved of the creation of segregated units, preferring integrated units.

The Bucks of America, organized in Boston, was the name given to the all-black Massachusetts company. Little is known of the campaign history of the company, but it seems to have operated in the Boston area. It may have acted primarily as an auxiliary police or security service in the city during the war, and is not believed to have seen action against British soldiers