

Lesson Thirty-Three

“Old Glory”

LESSON IDEA

With this lesson we begin a series about four important symbols of our American heritage: the flag, national anthem, Liberty Bell, and Statue of Liberty. The first, about the Stars and Stripes, is designed to promote an understanding of Old Glory's history and the ideals it represents.

PREPARATION

Locate a copy of the U.S. Flag Code (the law relating to care and display of the flag). Possible sources included an American Legion Post, a public library, or the local offices of your U.S. Representative and Senators.

D ID YOU KNOW that there is a famous American beauty for whom young Americans continue to fight and die despite her age of more than 200 years? She was born on June 14, 1777, two years into the Revolutionary War, and went to battle with the shoemakers, farmers, and tavern owners of the Continental Army as if she had been born for the experience. Which was indeed the case.

Do you know who she is? [Urge each member of the family to answer.] We are talking about Old Glory — also nicknamed the Stars and Stripes — that red, white, and blue beauty that for more than two centuries has marked our nation as a land of opportunity and freedom.

In 1777, the British flag which had been flying above colonial assembly halls for more than 100 years came down, just as England's Old World concept of authoritarian rule by kings would fall a few years later to the new American ideals of self-government and individual responsibility.

Does anyone know what the British flag looked like? Does it resemble the Stars and Stripes in any way? [The pictures on page three show the similarity in design. Point out that the colors of both flags are red, white, and blue. Also note that the British flag is a combination of the flags of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Originally it was the red cross of St. George on a white field, while the flag of Scotland was the white cross of St. Andrew on a blue field. In 1606, when England and Scotland were united into one nation, the two

crosses were combined, with Scotland's in the background and England's in the foreground. The Irish cross of St. Patrick was added in 1801.]

During the early days of the Revolutionary War, the spirit of rebellion against British injustice was sufficiently strong to cause muskets to be fired at Lexington and Concord, and an army to be formed to oppose His Majesty's troops in Boston. But it was not yet strong enough to contemplate nationhood — or a new flag. Many colonists hoped that a show of strength would convince the British to begin treating them with respect. Slogans and symbols of defiance began springing up in each of the colonies like mushrooms after a rain.

For example, at the battle of Concord, when the militia from surrounding towns gathered to stop the Redcoat advance toward the colonial cache of gunpowder, the Minutemen of Bedford carried a flag with the fiery rallying cry *Vince Aut Morire* — “Conquer or Die.” This elaborate and unique Bedford Flag is still displayed by the Minutemen of the town (distant descendants of the original Minutemen), who give musket-firing demonstrations for visitors at the historic Concord Bridge near Boston. [Perhaps your family could visit Concord some day during a vacation. The famous “Battle Road” that the British traveled from Lexington to Concord on April 19, 1775 has been preserved. At the bridge, guides vividly describe the “shot heard ‘round the world” that signaled the beginning of the war.]

A S THE MILITIA gathered outside Boston to form the Continental Army in 1775, its members brought a variety of flags and banners. The hard-hitting slogans typified the spirit of righteous indignation that was to become an American hallmark. The pine tree was a popular symbol on these early flags, especially in the northern states. Some historians believe that it was to protest against King George's decree to cut the best and tallest New England pines to use as masts for his navy. Others suggest that the pine tree represented the famous patriotic meeting

