

## Lesson Thirty-Four

# The Star-Spangled Banner

### LESSON IDEA

To tell the dramatic story of the Star—Spangled Banner, our national anthem, and the unique battle flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write it.

### PREPARATION

Make a copy of the fourth stanza of the Star-Spangled Banner for each family member. (See page four.) Read the discussion sections of the lesson and prepare the necessary information. Have a dictionary handy.

**W**HEN YOU HEAR the words “Star-Spangled Banner,” do you think of our national anthem — or the Stars and Stripes, our nation’s flag? [Urge each family member to answer.]

Most of us probably think of both, but actually the Star-Spangled Banner was a unique flag, designed for one specific purpose, and used for that purpose only. The enormous banner (measuring 30 feet high and 42 feet long, and weighing about 200 pounds) never flew again.

Let us think for a moment how big that would be. Does anyone know the width and length of this room? [Have the room dimensions in mind and make some comparisons so that the family can fully appreciate the size of a 30-by-42 foot flag.]

Why would anyone want such a gigantic flag? Are there any flags that large today? [If any of the tall office buildings in your town flies an American flag from its tower, have a family member call the building manager to ask the flag size and thank the company for displaying it.]

Such a big flag can be seen for miles, and that is precisely why the Star-Spangled Banner was so gigantic. Her designers wanted her to be seen from a great distance.

The flag was also unique in another way. You will remember that last week, when we discussed the design of “Old Glory,” we mentioned that in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s it had 15 stripes and stars. Do you recall why? [Remind family members, if necessary, that the original intent of Congress was to add a new stripe and a new star

for each new state. This resulted in a 15-stripe flag when Vermont and Kentucky joined the Union in 1791 and 1792.]

Later, as more and more states were added, it became apparent that a new stripe could not be added for each state unless the nation wanted to fly something that resembled a bed sheet more than a patriotic banner. So “Old Glory” was returned to her original design of 13 stripes representing the original 13 colonies.

**B**UT THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER was designed in the era of a 15-stripe flag. Its design and size made one of the most extraordinary flags in American history. The year was 1814, and the young nation was once again at war with Britain. The issue was independence; this time, freedom of the seas for American ships. England was also at war with France, and the United States had been drawn into the conflict because Britain had attempted to halt the shipment of American goods to France and other countries. American ships were stopped on the high seas, searched, and stripped of cargo and, occasionally, their crews. Native-born American sailors were accused of being British deserters. Many of these unfortunate seamen were sent to Dartmoor Prison in England where conditions, at best, resembled an ill-kept barnyard. Survival was precarious.

Provoked by the aggressive violation of her shipping rights as a neutral nation, and the harsh treatment of her seamen, the United States declared war on Britain in 1812. It was a courageous act of defiance for which the nation was militarily unprepared. Fortunately, however, the English war machine had become so preoccupied with its French enemy that it was unable to retaliate with a full-scale attack on its former colonies until 1814.

When the attack came, it was at the heart of the new nation: its capital in Washington. The British fleet sailed into Chesapeake Bay in August 1814, landed troops, and, after an easy victory over the

