



The Iowa Compatriot

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We the descendants of the heroes of the American Revolution, who by their sacrifice established the United States of America, reaffirm our faith in the principles of liberty and solemnly pledge to defend them against every foe.

9/11 Remembrance Day at Gray's Lake Park in Des Moines, Iowa

By Mike Rowley

On Friday, September 9th, 2022, Iowa SAR members Mike Rowley and Isaac Rowley joined with hundreds of volunteers to support the Iowa Air National Guard's 9/11 Remembrance Day. VFW members, American Legion members, veterans, local media, Congressional Candidate Zach Nunn, and others placed over 3,000 flags at Gray's Lake Park in Des Moines to honor the victims of 9/11.



Iowa SAR members Isaac Rowley (age 4) and his grandfather, Mike Rowley, joined with Max Schaeffer of WHO Newsradio 1040 (left), candidate for Congress Zach Nunn (right), and hundreds of volunteers for a flag ceremony at Gray's Lake Park in Des Moines.

Flag Retirement Ceremony at Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines, Iowa

By Mike Rowley



On Saturday, September 10th, 2022, the Iowa SAR organized and led Boy Scouts, veterans, VFW members, families, and other volunteers in a flag retirement ceremony that saw the formal retirement of over 4,000 flags. This is an annual event that has taken place the last several years on the 2nd Saturday of September at Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines, Iowa.

Monthly Joint Meeting of the Iowa SAR and Iowa GSW 1812 on Zoom

By Chris Moberg

The monthly Zoom meetings have been very successful, with 18 members participating in our August 25th meeting. I would like to thank Mike Rowley for preparing the GSW 1812 reports and Justin Blood for an excellent presentation on uniforms and gravestone cleaning. I am especially grateful for all of the members who stayed after the meeting to discuss possible ways to share the heavy burden of the office of the registrar. As a direct result of that discussion, a motion was taken forward to the Board of Managers to install Randy Breese as state registrar so that there will not be an interruption in processing new applications. The motion was quickly approved. Randy will continue to work toward finding ways to distribute the workload. Some of the options being considered include the creation of a genealogist position, assistant registrar position, and a genealogy committee.

The next joint meeting of the Iowa SAR and the Iowa GSW 1812 on Zoom will be on Thursday, September 22, at 7 p.m. Central Time. I look forward to seeing you then!

Flag Certificate Presentations

By Randy Lyon



Catherine Kaesbauer asked me to leave the certificate in the door. She appreciated the award but had a bad cold and did not want to open the door.



Carl Summer definitely owns the largest flag I've encountered at a private residence. He gave me a short course on where the best flags could be purchased in Dubuque and what to look for in flag construction. He welcomed the certificate and thanked me for our efforts.



Mrs. Kathy Nesteby wished her husband could have been home to see my uniform and receive the certificate himself. She said he was always proud of the flag and flew it in all weather.



Eileen Meyer said that although she could see me through the glass, it was better for her that I left the certificate on the porch. She thanked me for the effort and understanding.



Mrs. Perry assured me that her husband would be thrilled upon learning of the presentation. She mentioned that he enjoyed flying the flag and seeing other people doing the same thing in the neighborhood.

Privateers: Unsung Heroes of the American Revolution

By Randy Lyon



During the American Revolution, the British Navy enjoyed a huge advantage over the small and inexperienced colonial navy. In 1776, more than 270 British ships were sailing in American waters, while the Continental Navy commanded less than 30. (1) Although the Continental fleet had little impact on the outcome of the war, tens of thousands of citizen sailors played a critical and little known role in the war for independence. More than 2,000 privateers, commissioned by either the Continental Congress or the states in rebellion, hunted enemy shipping on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, disrupting the British economy and turning British public opinion against the war. (2)

International law permitted countries at war to license private seamen to seize and plunder enemy vessels. Privateers differed from pirates in that they received legal authorization to operate through an official "letter of marque and reprisal." The

Continental Congress authorized privateers as guerrilla-style disrupters. (3)

In the fall of 1775 and unable to attack British-occupied Boston because of shortages of cannons and gunpowder, George Washington observed the flow of enemy supplies into Boston harbor and wondered if capturing a British weapons ship might help supply his small army and uplift his army's spirit. Offering a percentage of the spoils to the crews, Washington dispatched several armed schooners. They succeeded

in capturing a British transport carrying tons of munitions. Word spread that the seamen had made fortunes. (4)

Washington called these vessels privateers; however, that was technically inaccurate as they were not commissioned by the Continental Congress and therefore were essentially pirates under international law. Nevertheless, the American public liked the idea. By the end of 1775, seven ships comprised "Washington's Navy." (5)

On March 26th, 1776, the Continental Congress permitted private citizens "to fit out armed vessels to cruise on the Enemies of these United Colonies." (6) Privateers seeking commissions were required to post bonds of up to 5,000 pounds as collateral to ensure captives would not be mistreated and that the privateers would not knowingly raid American or neutral ships. (7) Early privateers sailed on small vessels normally carrying no more than six guns with a crew of about twenty-five. As the war continued and the size of the Continental Navy declined, the scale of privateering grew. By the summer of 1781, the American fleet of privateers numbered in the hundreds. In the American Revolution, privateers transported arms, munitions, and tropical products to the American continent. (8)

Washington offered the crews of his makeshift navy a one-third share of any goods they captured and sold. The Continental Congress appealed to the financial self-interest of the citizen seafarers by decreeing that privateer crews could keep all of their plunder. (9) There were also bonuses: the first privateersman to spot an enemy ship would earn a 100-pound finder's fee, while the first to board the ship received 300 pounds. (10) Nathaniel Tracy received 23 letters of marque, commanded 24 vessels, captured 120 British ships, and confiscated cargo with a net worth of \$3,950,000. (11)

The measure proved instantly popular as merchants, whalers, and fishermen converted their vessels into makeshift warships. By May of 1776, at least 100 New England privateers were sailing the waters of the Caribbean. (12)



According to the National Park Service, the Continental Congress issued approximately 1,700 letters of marque over the course of the war, and various American states issued hundreds more. Privateering proved so popular that the Continental Congress distributed preprinted, preauthorized commission forms with blank spaces for the entry of the names of ships, captains, and owners. (13) To encourage privateering, Congress passed laws that expedited the sale of prize goods, lowered some of the taxes on prized goods, set up a pension fund for privateers wounded in action, and authorized a bounty payment equal to half the value of each vessel destroyed.

The expansion of privateers angered Continental Navy commanders such as John Paul Jones. Privateers also lured many seamen away from the navy with the potential of better pay, shorter enlistment periods, and engagements with unarmed merchant ships instead of the fearsome warships of the Royal Navy. (14) The reluctance of privateers to take enemy prisoners make it more difficult to negotiate swaps for the return of American sailors. (15) In 1779, when privateers could share in thousands of dollars from a successful capture of a ship, a soldier's monthly pay was \$12 and a Continental Navy captain's pay was about \$32. (16)

Like investors in the stock market, speculators made huge fortunes buying shares in and bankrolling privateering enterprises. Ship owners and investors usually received half the value of seized goods, with the other half divided among privateering crews.

"Fellows who would have cleaned my shoes five years ago have amassed fortunes and are riding in chariots,"
- James Warren, New England aristocrat

*"One arrival will pay for two, three or four losses...
Therefore it's best to keep doing something constantly."*
- Robert Morris, Philadelphia financier (17)

Privateering became so common in the Caribbean that, at one point, 82 English ships were anchored at Saint-Pierre awaiting the sale of their pilfered goods - in some cases back to their original owners. The cut on a single shipload of coffee and sugar exceeded a quarter-million dollars in today's terms. (18)

American privateers' hit-and-run attacks severely disrupted British commerce from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Caribbean Sea. The privateers also operated close to British shores, even ambushing merchant ships in the English Channel. As a result, maritime insurance rates and the prices of imported goods in Britain soared. (19)

The privateers' success in looting and hijacking ships angered Britain's wealthy merchants, as well as consumers facing higher costs. Denying the legitimacy of the Continental Congress or its right to license privateers under international law, many British lawmakers viewed the American commerce raiders the same as pirates.

Parliament passed the Pirate Act of 1777 that allowed American privateers to be held without trial and denied them the rights of prisoners of war, including the possibility of exchange. These measures created an anti-war movement among the segment of the British public that saw the country lowering its moral values in its treatment of enemy combatants and in its decision to license its own privateers, which led to the return of forced conscription of British citizens into the navy. (20) In the rebelling colonies, the inhumane conditions that captured privateersmen suffered on crowded, unsanitary, and ill-provisioned British prison ships increased the resolve of the Founding Fathers. "She has given us by her numberless barbarities," Benjamin Franklin wrote of England and her prison ships in 1777, "so deep an impression of her depravity that we can never again trust her in the management of our affairs and interests."

As a result of the Pirate Act, the Royal Navy captured or destroyed hundreds of American privateering vessels. Most of the 12,000 seamen who died in British prison ships during the war were privateers. The losses left behind a generation of widows and orphans in some New England seaports. Newburyport, Massachusetts lost 1,000 men in the destruction of 22 privateering vessels, while Gloucester lost all 24 of its registered privateers, cutting the population of adult males in half over the course of the war. (21)

Despite the British crackdown, there were more than 100 privateer strikes in British waters in 1778 and more than 200 in 1779, according to James M. Volo, author of *Blue Water Patriots*. This delighted Benjamin Franklin, who from his diplomatic post in Paris issued letters of marque to Irishmen sailing around the British Isles. (22) Franklin succeeded in persuading the French to allow Yankee skippers to sell their loot in French ports - a breach of the country's neutrality that aggravated diplomatic tensions, as Franklin knew it would, and helped deepen Paris's commitment to American independence. (23)

Throughout the war, an estimated 70,000 men served aboard privateering vessels that carried upward of 20,000 guns. This can be compared with the Continental Navy, which had a total of 53 ships, 340 officers and 3,000 men, and carried only 2,770 guns. Privateers captured an estimated 3,087 prizes, including 89 British privateering vessels. The British captured only one U.S. American merchantship and 216 privateering vessels. (24)

Another important contribution was in the form of a bill giving the government of Massachusetts the right to authorize privateering. Massachusetts, whose maritime economy was severely damaged by the Boston Port Act, was the first American colony to give itself this power. This was no insignificant move as, according to the customs of international law, letters of marque (the legal document that authorizes privateers) could only be issued by a sovereign state. (25)

The American Revolution was the last hurrah for American privateers. There were very few during the War of 1812, which was a war with only a few sea encounters. Navy ships had become so large and carried so much armament that armed merchantmen "privateers" were no match for them. The South issued a few Letters of Marque during the Civil War but after that, the practice of privateering ended in the United States. (26)

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*Let us remember our obligation to our forefathers, who gave us our Constitution,
The Bill of Rights, an independent Supreme Court, and a nation of free men.*