

### Presidents Message:

Compatriots, I thank you for attending our 123<sup>rd</sup> meeting. The strength of any organization is its members and by your attendance, you have demonstrated your dedication to the RISSAR and to the United States.

2012 was a year of mixed results as far as our goals and achievements and I am sad to report not altogether successful by a long measure. We had set three primary goals and to my mind, all easily attainable.

First we wanted to work closely with the RI Historical Society in their project, RHODE ISLAND AT WAR. This seemed like a worthwhile endeavor and one that we thought would be readily accepted. Unfortunately, our offer fell on deaf ears and while we got a couple of "We'll get back to you" responses, nothing ever came of our offer.

Secondly, we wanted to renew our involvement with the Boy Scouts of Narragansett Council in the area of the Eagle Scout Essay Competition and reinstitute the Historic Trails Medal first developed by the RISSAR a few years ago. Several factors have conspired to delay this goal. The Scout Executive suddenly passed away and it took time to find his replacement. Then it was camping season which took up a lot of the new executive's time. This was followed by the bombshell report released in the fall that outlined the sexual abuse prevalent in the BSA for many years. And now they are embroiled in the decision to allow gay men and scouts to participate. So because of this turmoil, nothing came of that offer.

Thirdly, as you are probably aware, I was hopeful, given the publication of the 1<sup>st</sup> RI Regiment book, that we would be able to move forward with the idea of increasing the diversity by actively recruiting men of color whose ancestors were involved in the Revolution. Again, this project met with silence. No response was ever received despite our many attempts to contact the various entities.

Our fourth project is not dead. That is to provide a headstone or marker for John Peck Rathbun on these shores. This project is ongoing and shows every sign of progress.

So there you have it, four worthwhile projects with no responses to speak of except for the JPR marker.

But I am not discouraged. For 2013 I am determined to try again for at least one of these prior goals.

Firstly, I will once again attempt to set up a meeting with the Scout Executive to get back on track with the Eagle Scout Essay and Historic Trails Award.

Secondly, at a recent BOM meeting, we approved a motion to "adopt" a troop in East Greenwich as sort of a trial balloon to be involved in the Eagle program on a local level.

Thirdly, I am in contact with a descendant of JPR who has authorized me to act on behalf of the Rathbun Family Association to apply for a headstone from the VA. This stone will be erected in the Exeter Memorial Veterans Cemetery instead of at his wife's graveyard in South Kingstown due to its inaccessibility. Our goal is to have this in place in time for the Rathbun Family Reunion to be held in Newport this coming July.

And recently, we have had several inquiries via our website asking about locations of ancestor's burials. This has made for an interesting question as to how involved do we get in this type endeavor.

I am also aware of many news stories that tell of heroic efforts by public safety personnel. It seems to me that we could honor those individuals by awarding the Law Enforcement or Emergency Service Medals. So I would ask each of you to bring such distinguished service to the attention of the Board of Managers for action. Please feel free to call or write me for your suggestions.

In conclusion, I want to thank all of you for your continued support. It is truly appreciated.

John C. Collins

## On the book shelves

### R.I. 1781 Regimental Book now available for \$10 for Library donations!

RISSAR members and friends may now make a donation of our new book: Regimental Book; Rhode Island Regiment for 1781 &c. to any library in the United States for \$10 post-paid. Simply send \$10 for each book you would like to donate, list the names and addresses for each library, and a copy of this important book will be mailed to those libraries.

Consider donating books to your hometown library, and the libraries where you, or a member of your family have a personal connection. This is a wonderful way for members of the SAR, SR, DAR, Society of Cincinnati and other historical and genealogical groups to honor their families. Consider donating a book in honor of your father, mother, or a Revolutionary War veteran.

For full information about the book, visit our website: [www.rhodeislandsar.org](http://www.rhodeislandsar.org).

Honor your family, and your favorite libraries, and donate copies today! The following public libraries still need copies of our book: Burrillville – Jesse M. Smith Library; Burrillville – Pascoag Library; Central Falls Library; Charlestown – Cross Mills Library; Cranston – Arlington Reading Room; Cranston – Auburn Branch Library; Cranston – Knightsville Branch Library; Cranston – Oak Lawn Branch Library; Cumberland Public Library; Foster Public Library; Foster – Tyler Free Library; Glocester – Manton Library; Hopkinton – Langworthy Library; Jamestown Library; Lincoln Public Library; Middletown Public Library; New Shoreham – Island Free Library; Newport Public Library; North Kingstown – Davisville Library; North Kingstown – Willett Free Library; North Smithfield Public Library; Pawtucket Library; Richmond – Clark Memorial Library; Scituate – Hope Library; Scituate – North Scituate Public Library; Smithfield – East Smithfield Public Library; S. Kingstown Public Lib.-Kingston Free Lib.; S. Kingstown Public Lib.–Robert Beverly Hale; Woonsocket – Harris Public Library

Send \$10 per book, and the name of the ancestor/family member you wish to honor, along with the name of the library to whom you wish to donate the book, to: RISSAR, 202 Kent Drive, East Greenwich, RI 02018

## ORDER FORM

Regimental Book Rhode Island Regiment for 1781 &c.

Number

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 donation per copy, post-paid, with no sales-tax

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL ENCLOSED.

Library Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Return order form with your check, payable to RISSAR, to:

RISSAR, 202 Kent Dr. East Greenwich, RI 02818

Order date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_, City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**BE SURE TO INCLUDE LIBRARY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)!**

### Your State Registrar Carlen Booth reports the following:

Rodney Alton Hoel, Providence, RI, admitted February 12, 2013, national number 186353, state number 1775. He is descended from Rufus Sprague, 1745-1795, Johnston, RI - member of committee to procure blankets for troops.

Dennis John Lurgio, Narragansett, RI, admitted February 26, 2013, national number 186448, state number 1776. He is descended from Comfort Chafee, 1756-1826, Rehoboth, MA - Private in Capt. Nathaniel Carpenter's Co., Col. John Hathaway's Reg't at Tiverton, RI.

Robert Livingston Rewey, Jr., Palm Beach, FL, admitted February 27, 2013, national number 186518, state number 1777. He is descended from John Rewey, 1747-1813, Thompson, CT - Private in Capt. George King's Co., Col. Benjamin Simonds' Detachment of Berkshire County Militia. Served at Ticonderoga.

Robert Livingston Rewey, III, Summit, NJ, admitted February 27, 2013, national number 186519, state number 1778. He is descended from John Rewey, 1747-1813, Thompson, CT - Private in Capt. George King's Co., Col. Benjamin Simonds' Detachment of Berkshire County Militia. Served at Ticonderoga.

## Supplementary Application

Daniel Smith Harrop, III, Providence, RI, approved January 29, 2013, national number 102271, state number 1421. He is descended from Joseph Bitting, 1758-1844, Germantown, PA - Orderly Sergeant, Continental Militia Volunteers, PA.

**Nathanael Greene Homestead Association** – David Procaccini reported that in May they held a RI Independence Day Ceremony. In August there was a Revolutionary War encampment at the Homestead. It was very well attended with over 200 visitors over two days. The Homestead participated in Smithsonian Museum Day last year. People could go online and download free tickets to visit the Homestead. A major goal for the last year was to set a schedule that the Homestead would be open and to stick to it. Only one day was missed all season, which was great. An interesting fundraising program this year was the paranormal investigations of the Homestead. The Homestead is in negotiations with the Clariant Corporation in regards to Clariant donating some 3 ¾ acres of abutting property. Brad Gorham is representing the Homestead and progress is being made slowly. David started negotiations with the Department of Defense to do an Innovative Readiness Training program on the property in 2014. This project would have a National Guard unit clear underbrush and make a gravel parking lot. For 2013, they are looking to get more volunteers on the weekends. The first major event for the year will be a Revolutionary War reenactment in May. There are 100 reenactors signed up already to participate. There was a round of applause at the conclusion of the report.

### **This date in Rhode Island History: April 6, 1776...**

**The Battle of Block Island** (April 6, 1776) was a nighttime naval encounter between the Continental Navy, returning from a successful raid on Nassau in The Bahamas on its maiden voyage, and HMS *Glasgow*, a Royal Navy dispatch boat. *Glasgow* successfully escaped capture by a fleet of seven ships under the command of Commodore Esek Hopkins, although she sustained significant damage in the encounter.

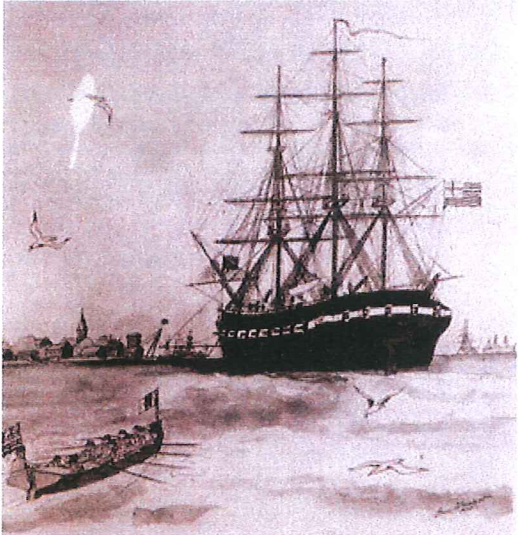
Several of the ship captains of the Continental fleet were criticized for their actions in the engagement, and one was dismissed as a result. Commodore Hopkins was criticized for other actions pertaining to the cruise, including the distribution of seized goods, and was eventually also dismissed from the Navy.

### **Background**

HMS *Glasgow* was a sixth-rate 20-gun frigate of the Royal Navy. In early April 1776, under the command of navy captain Tryingham Howe, she was carrying dispatches from Newport, Rhode Island to the British fleet off Charleston, South Carolina. (This fleet had been assembled to launch an assault on Charleston, which ultimately failed in the June Battle of Sullivan's Island.)

The Second Continental Congress had established the Continental Navy in late 1775. By February 1776 the first ships of the fleet were ready for their maiden voyage, and Commodore Esek Hopkins led a fleet of eight ships on an expedition to the Bahamas, where the British were known to have military stores. In early March, the fleet (reduced by one due to tangled rigging en route) landed marines on the island of New Providence and captured the town of Nassau. After loading the fleet's ships, enlarged to include two captured prize ships, with military stores, the fleet sailed north on March 17, with one ship dispatched to Philadelphia, while the rest of the fleet sailed for the Block Island channel. The fleet's cruise was marked by outbreaks of a variety of diseases, including fevers and smallpox, resulting in significant reductions in crew effectiveness.

By April 4 the fleet had reached the waters off Long Island, and captured a prize, HMS *Hawk*, which was also laden with supplies. The next day brought a second prize, the *Bolton*. Hoping to catch more easy prizes, Hopkins continued to cruise off Block Island that night, forming the fleet into a scouting formation of two columns. The right, or eastern, column was headed by the USS *Cabot*, followed by Hopkins' flagship, the USS *Alfred*, at 20 guns the largest ship of the fleet, and the left column was headed by the USS *Andrew Doria*, followed by the USS *Columbus*. Behind these came the USS *Providence*, with USS *Fly* and USS *Wasp* trailing further behind as escorts for the prizes. The need to provide crews for the prizes further reduced the fighting effectiveness of the fleet's ships.



USS Alfred being prepared for her maiden voyage

### **Battle**

That night was an exceptionally clear night with a nearly full moon. Between 1 and 2 am on April 6, with the fleet headed in a generally southerly direction, Andrew Doria and Glasgow spotted each other about 8 leagues (20 to 24 nautical miles) southeast of Block Island. Glasgow was heading westerly, destined for Charleston. Captain Howe came about to investigate the fleet, and over the next 30 minutes closed to within hailing distance. Commodore Hopkins gave no signals during this time, so the fleet formed no battle line which resulted in a battle that Captain Nicholas Biddle of the Andrew Doria later described as "helter-skelter".

Howe first came upon the Cabot, whose captain was Esek Hopkins' son, John. The younger Hopkins, when hailed for identification, replied, "The Columbus and Alfred, a 22-gun frigate." An overzealous seaman on his ship then tossed a grenade onto the Glasgow's deck, and the battle was engaged. Cabot, a lightly armed brig, fired one ineffective broadside of

six-pounders. Glasgow countered with two broadsides with its heavier weaponry, killing Cabot's master, wounding Hopkins, and disabling her steering. As she drifted away, the Alfred came up to engage Glasgow, and the two engaged in a broadside duel. A shot from Glasgow early in the action broke the lines to Alfred's tiller; her temporary loss of steering exposed her to raking fire. Her drift also made it difficult for the Andrew Doria to join the action, who also had to maneuver to avoid the drifting Cabot. The Providence held back, and Columbus was eventually able to join the action late, but her fire was so wild that little to no damage was done to Glasgow.

With Glasgow now exposed to fire from three ships, Howe decided to break off the battle in order to avoid being boarded, and made sail for Newport. Despite extensive damage to sail and rigging, he pulled away from the pursuing fleet, which was fully laden with its captured goods. After several hours of chase, lasting into daylight, Hopkins called off the chase to avoid an encounter with the British squadron at Newport. His only prize was Glasgow's tender, which the fleet brought to anchor in New London, Connecticut on April 8.

### **Aftermath**

The Glasgow suffered only four casualties, one killed and three wounded. This count demonstrated the poor quality of the Continental fleet's gunnery: all of the casualties were due to musket fire. Aboard the Cabot there were four killed and seven wounded, and the Alfred had six each killed and wounded; Andrew Doria's drummer was also wounded.

Although Continental Congress President John Hancock praised Hopkins for the fleet's performance, its failure to capture the Glasgow gave opponents of the Navy in and out of Congress opportunities for criticism. Nicholas Biddle wrote of the action, "A more imprudent, ill-conducted affair never happened." Abraham Whipple, captain of the Columbus, endured rumors and accusations of cowardice for a time, but eventually asked for a court martial to clear his name. Held on May 6 by a panel consisting of officers who had been on the cruise, he was cleared of cowardice, although he was also criticized for errors of judgment. John Hazard, captain of the Providence, was not so fortunate. Charged with a variety of offenses by his subordinate officers, including neglect of duty during the Glasgow action, he was convicted by court martial and forced to surrender his commission.

Commodore Hopkins came under scrutiny from Congress over matters unrelated to this action. He had violated his written orders in sailing to Nassau instead of Virginia and the Carolinas, and he had distributed the goods taken during the cruise to Connecticut and Rhode Island without consulting Congress. He was censured for these transgressions, and dismissed from the Navy in January 1778 after further controversies, including the fleet's failure to sail again (a number of its ships suffered from crew shortages, and also became trapped at Providence, Rhode Island by the British occupation of Newport late in 1776).

Glasgow, suffering from the battle and having dumped her dispatches, returned to Newport. She was found to be in bad enough shape that she was made as seaworthy as possible and sent to Portsmouth for repairs. Her mission was reassigned to Nautilus, another ship in the Newport squadron.

## The Purple Heart

It is one of the most recognized and respected medals awarded to members of the U.S. armed forces. Introduced as the "Badge of Military Merit" by General George Washington in 1782, the Purple Heart is also the nation's oldest military award. In military terms, the award had "broken service," as it was ignored for nearly 150 years until it was re-introduced on February 22, 1932, on the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. The medal's plain inscription "FOR MILITARY MERIT" barely expresses its significance.

On August 7, 1782, from his headquarters in Newburgh, New York, General George Washington wrote:

*"The General ever desirous to cherish virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of Military merit, directs that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding. Not only instances of unusual gallantry, but also of extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way shall meet with a due reward. Before this favour can be conferred on any man, the particular fact, or facts, on which it is to be grounded must be set forth to the Commander in chief accompanied with certificates from the Commanding officers of the regiment and brigade to which the Candidate for reward belonged, or other incontestable proofs, and upon granting it, the name and regiment of the person with the action so certified are to be enrolled in the book of merit which will be kept at the orderly office. Men who have merited this last distinction to be suffered to pass all guards and sentinels which officers are permitted to do. The road to glory in a patriot army and a free country is thus open to all. This order is also to have retrospect to the earliest stages of the war, and to be considered as a permanent one."*



Only three soldiers are known to have received the original honor badge: Sergeant Daniel Bissell of the 2d Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Line; Sergeant William Brown of the 5th Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Line, and Sergeant Elijah Churchill of the 2d Continental Dragoons, also a Connecticut regiment.

For unknown reasons, the medal apparently was not awarded again. In fact, it was not until October 1927, after World War I, that General Charles Summerall proposed that a bill be submitted to Congress to revive the "Badge of Military Merit." In January, 1928, the Army's Office of The Adjutant General was instructed to file the materials concerning the proposed medal. Among those materials was a rough drawing of a circular medal disc with a concave center on which a raised heart was visible. Engraved on the back of the medal was "For Military Merit."



## Upcoming SAR events:

- RISSAR/RIDAR Flag Day Luncheon – Sunday, June 9
- RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, July 6
- RISSAR Fall Luncheon – Monday, September 30 (Cooke House)
- RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, October 5
- RISSAR/OFPA/Dar Veteran's Day memorial – Sunday, November 10
- RISSAR Veteran's Day Luncheon – Sunday, November 10
- RISSAR JPR memorial CPT Thomas Cole – Saturday, December 7
- RISSAR Christmas Luncheon – Saturday, December 14
- RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, January 4 2014