



Fifty Stars

The B-Minus American Flag

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With the Revolutionary War and the birth of the United States, a national flag was needed. The Continental Congress established the first Flag Act on June 14, 1777 which read: "Resolved, That the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation." Since then the flag has evolved as our nation has grown. New stars and, for awhile, new stripes were added with each new state. In 1818, another act set the limit on stripes at 13 for the original colonies with additional stars to be added for each new state. So things were settled for awhile at least. But one day in a history class in Lancaster, Ohio a new chapter in Flag History began.

"You know, there are only 48 states!" Stanley Pratt told Robert Heft in 1958. Pratt was looking at his student's project – a new US flag with 50 stars. Robert admitted he knew that, but thought there might soon be 50 states and he thought we should plan ahead. He explained that he read about how Alaska had oil in the land and many people thought we should protect the area from the Russians. There was talk of making Alaska the next state. Robert further explained that he had checked things out. When he looked over the statistics he found that Alaskans were 80 percent Democrats and 20 percent Republicans. He figured that would be a hard sell unless the GOP could be balanced out by a state that was not so unfriendly to the party. Looking out on the horizon a little farther to the west, he discovered Hawaii waiting to be invited to our party. More importantly for his project, Hawaii was about 80 percent Republican and 20 per cent Democrat. So Heft figured that 50 states looked like a good bet.

So Robert decided to plan ahead and create a little history. He set to work using drafting tools to cut out two more stars with white adhesive mending material. Then he took his old 48-star flag and cut out the old blue field replacing it with a new blue piece of cotton and the new stars.

But after all his thought and planning and designing, his teacher wasn't impressed – in fact, Mr. Pratt said it wasn't too imaginative! B-Minus! Though Heft argued that he deserved a better grade, the teacher held firm. Robert continued to press his case. Finally, Mr. Pratt told his persistent pupil that he would change the grade to "A" if Congress accepted it.

So Robert sent the flag off to Columbus to try and get that "A". "You know, there are only 48 states," the letter from Ohio Governor Michael V. DiSalle said. However, the Governor's letter complimented his originality – which was more than Mr. Pratt had done.

"You know, there are only 48 states!" Congressman Walter Moeller told his neighbor when Robert gave him the flag. Of course, Robert KNEW that! But he managed to convince the congressman to take the flag to Washington just in case they ever needed a 50 star flag. The Congressman agreed, and that seemed to be the end of it – at least for awhile. It seemed Robert wasn't going to get that "A".

In 1959 both Alaska and Hawaii entered the Union and suddenly, Robert's flag was just what the county needed! Moeller remembered Heft's flag and took it to the committee that was looking at designs for a new 50 Star Flag. Amazingly, the B- high school project flag was chosen for the new design.

By this time, Robert was a draftsman at Babcock and Wilcox in Lancaster when President Dwight D. Eisenhower called to give him the news. Eisenhower invited Robert to the White House, but the young draftsman wasn't sure he could accept. He told the President he had to check with his boss and put the call on hold! His boss granted permission and told him NOT to leave the President on HOLD!

Heft arrived for the official raising of his flag at the White House on July 4, 1960. There was a large crowd at the flag-raising. Robert sat between Representative Moeller and President Eisenhower, but Robert was too shy to talk to the President. Moeller encouraged Heft to speak. Finally, Robert asked, "How do you like your job?" Eisenhower confessed that it was challenging. The conversation died. Moeller tried again, "You got something on your mind?" Heft replied, "I've got to get back to Lancaster. I've got to get that grade changed!"

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