

By EDWARD HAND, Esquire, Colonel,
commanding the First (or Rifle) Regiment, in
the Service of the United American Colonies.

~~THESE ARE TO CERTIFY~~, That the Bearer
hereof, *Christopher Hartong* has served the
American Continent in the abovesaid Regiment and
Captain *Charles Craig*, Company, faithfully
and honestly, for the Space of *One Year*. . . . and
the Term of Inlistment being expired, is discharged
from the said Regiment, he having received all his
Pay, and all other just Demands from the Time of
his inlisting in the said Regiment, to this Day of his
Discharge. GIVEN under my Hand and Regi-
mental Seal, at *Long Islands* this *first*
Day of *July* 1776

Edw. Hand Col.

THE REVOLUTIONARY
SEAL OF THE 1ST
CONTINENTAL (RIFLE)
REGIMENT



An extremely rare and unique American silver hand seal for the 1st Continental (Rifle) Regiment, 1776. The silver collar with molded borders above flat silver disc, intaglio engraved with the regimental device of a tiger escaping a hunter's net, with "P.M./1st Rt" superimposed above and with the motto "Domari Nolo" ("I will not be subjugated") below. Diameter of seal 2.5 cm.; 1 in. Height overall 8.1 cm.; 3 3/8 in.



“I WILL NOT BE
SUBJUGATED”



THE REVOLUTIONARY SEAL OF THE 1ST CONTINENTAL (RIFLE) REGIMENT

REDISCOVERY

Four years ago, a collector from Lancaster, Pennsylvania kindly brought a selection of Revolutionary War artifacts from his notable collection to my home, where a professional photographer was then shooting pieces under consideration for inclusion in a then-forthcoming reference book on Revolutionary War metal insignia¹. During this visit, he handed me an object and asked my opinion of it. It was a fine seal of typical 18th century form, made of silver and mounted on what appeared to be a turned, mahogany handle. When I examined the face to see what coat of arms or crest might be engraved upon it, my jaw nearly dropped. I couldn't believe what I was seeing: the device was identical to that painted upon the field of what is arguably the most famous American regimental flag that survives from the Revolutionary War--that of the 1st Continental Regiment or Continental Rifle Regiment, the first regiment raised in what is now known as the United States Army! The collector saw my astonished look and smiled; his prized possession had certainly elicited the response he anticipated. It certainly looked original to the period and while I knew that some European regiments did use such in the period, a seal for an rebel American regiment seemed hardly likely--most Continental regiments were hard pressed to keep their men clothed or armed, much less provided with such niceties.

James Milligan's receipt for standard and seal

Receipt	Amount	Description	Amount
Brought Forward			266.00
to paid Capt. Ross on the accounting acct. as per Rec. & Ret. N ^o 15,	41.00		41.00
to paid Capt. Harris on d ^o of Rec. N ^o 16,	326.15		326.15
to paid Capt. Channing on d ^o as per his Rec. & Ret. N ^o 17,	154.00		154.00
to paid Capt. Harris & Hamilton on the acct. of Rec. & Ret. N ^o 21,	106.00		106.00
to paid Lieut. Weiser on d ^o of Rec. N ^o 23,	67.00		67.00
to paid Lieut. Hamilton on d ^o of Rec. N ^o 24,	180.00		180.00
to paid Sgt. Leiper of Capt. Watson's Company on d ^o of Rec. N ^o 25,	22.00		22.00
to paid Lieut. Paton for Capt. Simpson on d ^o of Rec. N ^o 26,	45.00		45.00
to paid Lieut. Hubley on d ^o of Rec. N ^o 27,	81.00		81.00
to paid Capt. Miller & Lieut. McConnell to purchase Blankets for the Regt. as per their Rec. & Receipts N ^o 28,	350.50		350.50
to paid William Kay for Blankets purchased & Deliv ^d to the Regt. as per his Rec. & Ret. N ^o 29,	137.16		137.16
to cash advanced Capt. Ingle at Congell's Ferry	15.00		15.00
to paid Capt. Green by an Order on Jas. Milligan in favour of John Dunahy	27.00		27.00
to paid by Jas. Milligan for Regim. Colours & Seal	29.13		29.13

James Milligan's receipt for standard and seal

I asked the owner about the seal and its provenance. He had very little information to offer, other than stating that he had similarly recognized the 1st Continental's device when he first saw it more than 20 years ago, then with a Lancaster County collector-dealer. An experienced collector of 18th century Pennsylvania furniture, silver and rifles, he knew that it was "right" and that it had to be somehow associated with the regiment--perhaps it was the personal seal of its commander or another officer, he wasn't sure. He bought it that very day and, according to him, only two or three individuals had seen it since, none of whom seemed to share our excitement over this rarity. A few years earlier, I had completed a research packet on that very regiment for a painting that historical artist Don Troiani had been commissioned to do for the Army War College. The work featured the standard after it had been received by the regiment in 1776, just prior to the

battle of Long Island. I ran to a cabinet in the adjoining room and pulled out my file on the 1st Continental and began poring through its contents. Then I found it, a photocopy of a 1777 letter in which outgoing Colonel Edward Hand mentions leaving the regimental standard and seal at his Lancaster home for future collection by the new regimental commander!!! I had never gotten around to fully transcribing it and other than noting mention of the flag's disposition, had never given it much further consideration. Yet now before me was what certainly seemed to be that very seal--only the second artifact known to survive from the raising of that famous and elite unit. I dug through my file further and found my transcriptions of other Revolutionary War documents that verified the procurement of both the standard and the seal, ones that I'd typed up years earlier and forgotten about over time. Now the table was turned--it was the collector who was astonished.

He had no idea that any such records or documentation for the seal existed or that it appeared to be an official regimental pattern, rather than a privately-procured item. But one nagging question remained--was it every really used on campaign by the 1st, a regiment that fought in nearly every major battle of Washington's army from 1776 until its disbandment in 1783. We both felt that this seal was absolutely authentic, but where was the smoking gun to quell even the most skeptical of critics? It wasn't in my research files... yet.



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Cambridge in 25 days, the first troops from south of the Hudson River to join the army. Their unusual and uncouth appearance (dressed as they were in fringed, linen hunting shirts, leggings and moccasins, their faces sometimes "*painted like Indians*," and carrying long "*Pennsylvania rifles*," tomahawks and scalping knives) caused quite a stir amongst the plainer-dressed and -armed New England troops and soon, among the Redcoats they were to face. The riflemen were deployed in operations against the advanced British posts defending Boston and soon proved their worth as fearsome warriors, both as snipers and as light infantry in close-fought skirmishes. The accuracy of their rifle fire became legendary: their favorite targets were British officers, easily recognized in their gold- or silver-trimmed, scarlet uniforms; after a number of them were killed or wounded, the officers stripped the lace and rank insignia off their uniforms to lessen the chances of being singled out by the American sharpshooters².

On January 1st, 1776, remnants of Thompson's Riflemen were reorganized as the 1st Continental Regiment--the first unit to be raised, equipped and paid directly by the Continental Congress. Its new commander was Lieutenant Colonel Edward Hand (promoted to colonel on March 7th), who had previously been second-in-command of the Thompson's Battalion. Hand (1744-1802) originally came to Pennsylvania in 1767 as a surgeon's mate in the 18th (or Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot, having earlier completed his medical studies in Edinburgh, Scotland. Part of the 18th Foot, Hand included, were stationed at Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh).



Left: Portrait of
Colonel Edward Hand

"HAND NOTED THAT "OUR STANDARD IS TO BE A DEEP GREEN GROUND, THE DEVICE A TIGER PARTLY ENCLOSED BY TOILS [A NET], ATTEMPTING THE PASS, DEFENDED BY A HUNTER ARMED WITH A SPEAR (IN WHITE), ON CRIMSON FIELD [AND BEARING] THE MOTTO 'DOMARI NOLO'"

In 1772, Hand obtained an ensign's commission, serving simultaneously as a company officer and regimental surgeon. When the 18th Foot returned to Philadelphia in 1774, Hand sold his commission and resigned from the army, married, and took up the practice of medicine in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. An early and ardent supporter of the Patriot cause, his prior experience as a professional military man rendered him a particularly valuable officer and he soon became one of General George Washington's most valued and trusted subordinates³.

Upon assuming command of the 1st Continental Regiment, Colonel Hand took great pains to properly train and equip his riflemen and instill in them a sense of esprit de corps. On February 20, 1776, General George Washington issued the following order: "As it is necessary that every Regiment should be furnished with Colours, and that those Colours should, if it can be done, bear some kind of similitude to the Uniform of the regiment to which they belong, the Colonels with their respective Brigadiers and the Qt. Mr. Genl. may fix upon such as are proper, and can be procured.--There must be to each Regiment, the Standard (or Regimental Colours)... The Number of the Regiment is to be mark'd on the Colours, and such a Motto, as the Colonel

may choose, in fixing upon which, the General advises a Consultation amongst them. The Colonels are to delay no time, in getting this matter fix'd, that the Qr. Mr. Genl. may provide the Colours as soon as possible...."⁴ Writing from the Cobble Hill entrenchments outside of Boston on March 8th, Hand noted that "Our standard is to be a deep green ground, the device a tiger partly enclosed by toils [a net], attempting the pass, defended by a hunter armed with a spear (in white), on crimson field [and bearing] the motto 'Domari nolo' [Latin for 'I will not be subjugated']."⁵ Nine days later, the British evacuated Boston and Washington, anticipating an attempt against New York, sent Hand and his riflemen southward in advance of the remainder of Continental Army, to defend the city and its environs. Prior to their departure, Hand apparently also wrote to James Milligan (the Lancaster merchant who acted as the 1st Continental's regimental agent) to oversee the contracting of regimental uniforms and equipage, which included procuring both the regimental standard noted above and a "regimental seal."⁶

During the 18th century, seals were commonly employed by private persons, businesses, and government offices to ensure the privacy of a letter or packet and for the certification of a document's authenticity. Seals were often engraved

in intaglio on silver, gold, copper alloy or soft mineral (such as carnelian or topaz) medallions, usually of a circular or oval form. Typically, this would consist of the family or organization's coat of arms or "device." When used for business or extensive personal correspondence, they were typically mounted on turned handles of hardwood, ivory or precious metal. Most gentlemen had had personal or traveling seals without handles, set in a metal mount with looped end, that was attached by a chain or ribbon to their "timepiece," the seal or "fob" dangling decoratively from the watch pocket. By the mid-18th century, the seal also became an important tool for regimental administration, as increased professionalism in the large, standing European armies also brought about increased paperwork. As with civilian use, a folded military letter or the cover to said letter or packet of documents would have a small amount of melted sealing wax or sometimes a wafer applied to its overlapping, closure flaps, the seal then firmly pressed and released while the wax was still warm and pliable. However, its primary use and importance in military paperwork was for the authentication or notarization of important documents that were frequently forged, such as discharge or furlough forms, the regimental seal being applied near the bottom of the

form, usually next to the signature of the commanding officer. One British military treatise recommended that *"the Adjutant must always be provided with printed blank ones, ready to fill up; on the top of which, the device or number of the Corps, encircled by the Trophies of War, should be impressed by a neat Copper-plate, which it will be very much the interest of a Regiment to allow, for this and other purposes; as it must be more conspicuous on the discharge, than the impression of a seal, on either wax or wafers, besides not being so easily effaced."*⁷

Edward Hand, previously a commissioned officer in the 18th or *Royal Irish Regiment of Foot*, certainly had prior, firsthand knowledge of the form and practice of such regimental seals. It is possible that the *Royal Irish*, being one of the fifteen "ancient regiments" of the British Army entitled to use a unique regimental device or badge (in this case, an Irish harp) on their standard and colors and following such tradition, would have employed the same device on their seal as found upon their standard. Regardless, Hand had great aspirations for his new command and lobbied Congress heavily for the funds in which to provide distinctive uniforms and other martial equipment for the *Rifle Regiment*. Eventually, Congress authorized 9,000 dollars for this purpose, of which 8,000 were actually turned over to Hand and Milligan, his regimental agent⁸. From these funds, set Milligan to work finding the proper craftsmen to fabricate both the standard and seal, using the rough design parameters previously established by Hand and other officers during their deliberations earlier that winter. The makers of both remain unknown to us today; however, they were probably leading artisans in their respective trades working in the greater Philadelphia area. Plunket Fleeson, a merchant-upholsterer in Philadelphia, seems to have held a virtual monopoly in the flag-making business in that city and the silk standard of the 1st Continental was probably the product of two subcontractors, a seamstress or sailmaker sewing the flag itself and a sign or decorative painter painting on the device, motto and regimental number.

There were some slight deviations in the final design and execution of both the standard and seal at variance with what Hand probably intended. Although the primary element of *"a tiger partly enclosed by toils, attempting the pass, defended*

by a hunter armed with a spear" was fully realized upon a painted, crimson field, no white was employed on the device, with the exception of the regimental number or title surmounting the central device above: "P.M./ 1st. Rt." This abbreviation is almost certainly an abbreviation for "Pennsylvania Militia/ 1st Regiment," probably a well-intentioned error on the part of Milligan and his contractors, who failed to distinguish that the 1st Regiment was actually a regular unit of the Continental Army and not a regiment of colony militia, as they supposed. With regard to the engraved, silver seal, the same anomaly of a "P.M." appellation occurs--recorded and placed in identical context to that found on the standard with the incorrect "P.M." appellation. The surviving flag, its silk ground once a deep green, is now faded to a pale, yellowish cast⁹. The scroll below the figures on both the flag and seal bear the same patriotic motto in Latin: "DOMARI NOLO" ("I will not be subjugated"). Milligan paid a good sum for the flag and the seal, being reimbursed 29 pounds, 13 shillings and six pence for the pair. Based on the costs of other seals and standards made in Philadelphia during this period, the seal probably accounted for one-quarter to one-third of the total cost. That the seal was most likely in use by June 1776 is substantiated by a June 25th entry for 2 dollars or 15 shillings for "Seal Wax" purchased from "Mr. Holt" in the accounts of the regiment. John Holt was a patriotic printer, who published the *New York Journal*, notable for its "Join or Die" fragmented rattlesnake masthead and fiery, anti-Parliament editorials¹⁰.

Hand and his riflemen served with great distinction during the battle of Long Island and in subsequent actions through the remainder of the year, including Throg's Neck, White Plains. The disastrous retreat of Washington's army through New York and New Jersey in late 1776 finally culminated in two important American victories at Trenton and Princeton, in which Hand and the 1st Continental played no small parts. In January 1777, the regiment was reorganized as the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment, a title it retained through the balance of its service until being disbanded at the close of the war. Hand was promoted to brigadier general in 1777 and appointed commander of the Western Department, headquartered at Fort Pitt, Prior to departing to his old frontier

stomping ground. Hand wrote a letter on May 12th to *"Col. James Chambers or Officer commanding the 1 Penna. Regt."* from his home outside of Lancaster:

Dear Sir,

I take this Opportunity of Sending you my Acct. Current with the Regt. I also send you several Accts. of Recruiting produced by the Officers... I took every Pain in my Power to have the Accts. of the Regt. settled but could not accomplish it. I inclose the Amt. of the Sum Capt. Grier stands Accountable to the Regt. for, and also the Amt. of his Abstract of August 1776; lodged with me. I leave it with Mrs. Hand to be Delivered to your Order, as also the Regimental Colours & Seal...

No. 15 The Seal was Sent by C[aptain]. Ross against Mr. [Frederick] Hubley [lieutenant and regimental quartermaster] in the Qr. Mastr. G[enera]ls Bill No. 4 you can pay by his Acct...¹¹

At this point, the written trail seems to run cold on the regimental seal, although both it and the standard were apparently collected from Hand's home sometime in spring or summer of 1777. The standard is known to have been carried in the remaining battles in which the regiment fought, including Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, Greenspring, and Yorktown and it is presumed that the seal, likewise, accompanied the regiment through its various adventures. At the close of the war, the standard and possibly the seal were taken home by the regiment's third and final commander, Colonel Thomas Robinson. In 1874, the colonel's grandson, William S. Robinson, lent the old standard to the National Museum at Independence Hall, where it was displayed through the Centennial. In 1879, he sold the flag to Matthew C. Quay, acting for Pennsylvania in his capacity as Secretary of the Commonwealth. The 1st Continental standard, recently conserved and remounted, now sits in storage at the Pennsylvania State Museum in Harrisburg, pending future exhibition at Washington's Crossing State Historic Site.¹²



1st Continental Regiment Standard

THE SMOKING GUN

As noted in the prefatory section, although substantial primary source documentation exists to verify the purchase and regimental possession of the 1st Continental seal through 1777, there is no further provenance known about the artifact from that point until the recent past (with its purchase some twenty years ago by the Lancaster collector in whose collection it has remained until present). Although materials, form, method of construction, engraving all point to this being the original seal of Revolutionary War usage, could it possibly be an skillful fabrication of a master forger who had access to such obscure primary source information? Probably not, but even the greatest skeptic's fears would be allayed if even one example of a wax impression from this seal survived, still impressed upon some regimental discharge or other form,

which would also prove that it was actually used in service? However, up until this date, I was unaware of the survival of any document relating to Hand's riflemen bearing such a wax impression. So where could this final shred of definitive evidence --this "smoking gun"--be located, if it indeed survived (or ever existed)?

One of the great sources of primary source information on the events and personages of the Revolutionary War, still largely untapped today, are the voluminous records related to pension applications of the Continental Army and Navy veterans. These pension applications (now part of Record Group 15 of the National Archives) were filed by the veterans or their surviving widows in the early 19th century and largely consist of applications with accompanying affidavits of fellow veterans or others having knowledge of their service. However, upon rare occasion, they also

included the original discharge papers and other wartime documents, to prove the veracity of their claims. To find such a discharge, literally a needle in the haystack of pension applications (as they are not filed by regiment, but by geographic location of applicant), I first went through all known muster rolls, description lists and company returns for the 1st Continental Regiment, building a master list of the known enlisted men who had served with the regiment during 1776. This compilation was then used to look up all of the applications filed by 1st Continental veterans, in hopes that at least one rifleman might have saved his discharge paper and submitted it as proof of service when filing for his pension. Ultimately, I found not one, but three such discharges. All the more interesting was that these discharge documents were not the typical, handwritten discharge papers normally encountered for Continental

- ¹ Don Troiani and James L. Kochan, *Insignia of Independence: Military Buttons, Accoutrement Plates and Gorgets of the American Revolution, 1775-1783*. Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2012.
- ² James L. Kochan, *Don Troiani's Soldiers of the American Revolution* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007), 88-93.
- ³ Ibid.; Mark M. Boatner III, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (NY: David McKay Co., Inc., 1974), 484-485, 1099.
- ⁴ The Library of Congress: George Washington Papers. Series 3g, Letterbook 1, p. 185.
- ⁵ Letter, Hand to Judge James Yeates of Lancaster, in *Pennsylvania Archives*. 2d series, X (1890), 12.
- ⁶ National Archives (hereafter NARA), Record Group 93, M246. Muster rolls, payrolls, strength returns, and other miscellaneous personnel, pay, and supply records of American Army units, 1775-83; reel 80, folder 3, 162.
- ⁷ Thomas Simes, *The Military Guide for Young Officers*, 2d ed. (London: J. Millar, 1776), 172-173; Bennet Cuthbertson, *Cuthbertson's System: for the Complete Interior Management of Oeconomy of Battalion of Infantry* (Bristol: Rouths and Nelson, 1776; unauthorized, revised printing from 1st edition of 1768), 135-136, 141-142.
- ⁸ Peter Force, *American Archives*, v.5, 1178 and v.6, 2012.
- ⁹ Wendy Werner and John Armstrong, "1st Continental/1st Pennsylvania Regiment Flag," *The Military Collector & Historian* XXVII No. 1 (Spring 1975), 4-7; John Sisca, "Standard of the First Regiment of the Continental Line," Accessed: www.teddysactical.com/archive/Feature2004/09_Feature.htm on March 24, 2011.
- ¹⁰ NARA: M246, roll 80, folder 3, 145, 162.
- ¹¹ University of Wisconsin Spec. Colls., Draper Manuscripts, 'U' Series, v.1, Edward Hand Papers, Ltr. Hand to Chambers, May 12, 1777.
- ¹² Werner and Armstrong, op. cit., personal communications with Deborah Bede, Stillwater Textile Conservation Center and Bruce Bazelon, Curator Emeritus, PMHC, 2013.

veterans, but rather a partially-printed, blank form unique to the 1st Continental Regiment, printed by none other than John Holt, the patriot newspaperman from whom the regiment had also purchased its sealing wax. Of the three, all had once had wax seals attached near the signature of Colonel Edward Hand at the bottom of the document, but only two still remained, the other having fallen away. Of the two survivors, only one still retained a crisp impression that could be distinctly compared to the original. It belonged to Private Christopher Hartong of Captain Charles Craig's Company, discharged at Long Island on 1 July 1776 after one year's service. The seal was laid against the impression--was it a match?

Bang! A 100% reverse impression of the original seal!! Smoking gun found.

James L. Kochan
Frederick, Maryland

James L. Kochan is the author or co-author of eight books, including the recently-published reference work, Insignia of Independence: Military Buttons, Accoutrement Plates and Gorgets of the American Revolution, and more than 100 published articles or research reports on various facets of early American history, art, and material culture. He is a leading expert on Revolutionary War artifacts and military history and serves as a consultant to numerous museums and private collectors. Prior to forming

his own business in 1998, he spent nearly two decades in the museum world, including serving as director of collections at Mount Vernon Estate and supervisory curator of Morristown National Revolutionary era sites and collections in this country. He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards for his curatorial and historical work, including the Anne S. K. Brown Military Fellowship at Brown University, the Award of Merit from the American Assoc. for State and Local History, a Museum Fellowship from the British Council, and is a Fellow of the Company of Military Historians.



from the said Regiment, he having received all
Pay, and all other just Demands from the Time
his inlisting in the said Regiment, to this Day of
Discharge. GIVEN under my Hand and R
mental Seal, at *Long Islands* this *first*
Day of *July* 1776



Edw. Stone

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