

On the wall of the Covenant Reformed Episcopal Church in Roanoke is a framed flag from England. This cheaply printed flag was made for the Victory Parade in July 1919 to celebrate the end of World War I in London.



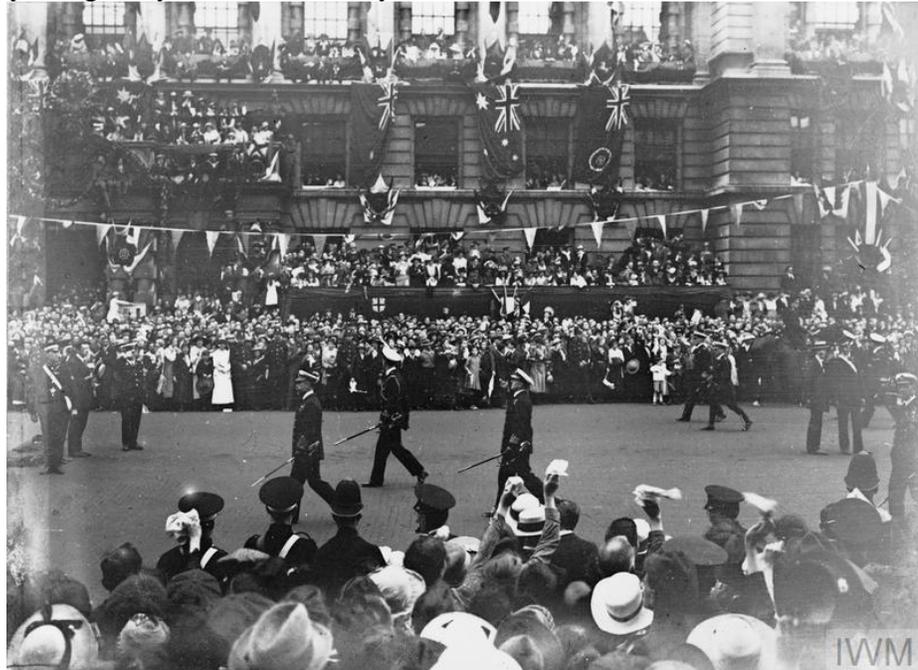
Strung between light posts, these flags of all the Allies and all their defense forces celebrated the end of the most costly war, until then, known to man. The total deaths for the Allied Powers were between 9,200,000 and 10,080,000, with many more deaths after the war came from disease and wounds. Close to 1.25% of the entire peace time population of the Allies died in the war, and many other men, women and children were wounded, disfigured or died from lung diseases initiated by poison gas warfare.

Truly an international and worldwide war, the flags of Albania, America, Armenia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, the British Commonwealth, China, Dutch, the Emirate of Nejd and Hasa, France, Greece, Hejaz, the Idrisid Emirate of Asir, Italy, Japan, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Siam, were all represented and decked the streets of London during the parade.

A little over nine months after the Armistice of November 11, 1918 that ended hostilities in “The War to End All Wars”, the Allied Victory Parade through London had soldiers and sailors from all the Allied armies and navies marching through the capital city, along with civilian and women workers, tanks, trucks, cavalry units, generals and politicians, captured arms, captured airplanes, floats demonstrating various units, and dozens of groups and special interests from the Allies. Other victory parades were held at other times in the individual countries such as France and Greece. The US Victory Parade was held later in New York City on September 19, 1919. It included 25,000 US soldiers and sailors, and the troops were led down 5th Avenue by General Pershing.



This particular flag is called a “White Ensign” and has been used on British Royal Navy ships since the 16th century. Originally white, over the years it has become darker and somewhat dingy, even though it had not had much exposure to the elements. It has a red cross of St. George, the patron saint of England, dividing it into four quarters. In the upper canton is a British Union Jack composed of the St. George cross for England and Wales, the white saltire of St. Andrew for Scotland and the red saltire for St. Patrick for Ireland.



This flag is printed on cotton cloth with a string inserted through the flag’s sleeve, then the flag was sewn to the string at the top to keep the ensign from creeping along the string and bunching together with the other flags in the wind. After the parade, many of these flags were cut down as souvenirs, or used to wave at other patriotic and celebratory occasions through the years. This flag was purchased in 1972 by the author while traveling through southwestern England. The antique dealer had several of them on display for sale, and enjoyed telling the story of their use during the Victory Parade. It was a good story, and the flag was worth the cost. Thus, the old English expression applies, that if the story isn’t true, then it should be!

The Reformed Episcopal Church separated from the Episcopal Church of the United States in 1873 during the church’s Oxford Movement over the issue of open communion offered for all Christians.



There was some discussion as to whether the white ensign should even be held by the church. This year, the flag becomes one hundred years old. However, this is not a battle flag per se, but was used to celebrate not war, but peace. The end of the war was welcomed world-wide, as the suffering, death and destruction from the war were felt almost everywhere. Peace allowed all the countries involved after so many years of war to finally bring their sons home, re-build their economies and to bring the blessings of peace home to their populations. Quite a good symbol for a church established by the Prince of Peace 2000 years ago.

The Covenant Reformed Episcopal Church in Roanoke was established in 1985 on Merriman Road, opposite the historic Starkey School. Because of the early separation, the Reformed Episcopal Church still uses the traditional “Anglican Book of Common Prayer (BCP)”

from 1662 and the newly revised “Book of Common Praise”. The Rev. Rich Workowski is the interim vicar at Covenant, and he often says that “The only thing wrong with the congregation is that there are too many single men!”

The photographs of the Victory Parade are borrowed from the Imperial War Museum World War I photographic collection held in London.

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