

MINUTEMAN

THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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APRIL 2026



VP Rawn Rhoades presents Kent Fortner with Certificate of Appreciation

President's Notes

Compatriots, it is hard to believe that we are already moving into April of this year. It is an exciting time for patriotic Americans. We are 100 days away from celebrating our country's 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and our freedom. I am very proud of my ancestors' contributions to our country, and I am sure that July 4th holds a special significance for each of you and your families, as well.

I want to thank Vice President Rawn Rhoades for filling in for me last month while I was traveling in Japan. I understand that Kent Fortner gave an excellent presentation on Mare Island and its history. And, I look forward to Walt Bilofski's presentation at our April meeting where we will hear the story of the Port Chicago Trial of 1944—the

largest mass mutiny trial in US history. Walt is the vice president of the Treasure Island Museum Association.

I would also like to thank Past President Glenn Martin for his America 250th Minute talk, and I am sure we will all look forward to another great moment in history at our next meeting as we accumulate points for the SAR America 250 Medals. Derek Brown continues to process a large number of new SAR Applications as our Thomas Jefferson Chapter and our membership continues to grow.

And finally, I would like to give a big thank you to our officers for their efforts, and to you, our members, for making the Thomas Jefferson Chapter SAR so special. I am looking forward to seeing you all again at our April 18, 2026, in Concord.

— Tom Silva, President

250
Years
1776-2026



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CIVIS AMERICANUS SUM



Secretary's Notes

The Thomas Jefferson Chapter held a regular meeting on Saturday, March 21, 2026, at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Concord, California. We had 17 members and guests at the meeting.

Vice President Rawn Rhoades called the meeting to order. In the absence of President Silva, and he introduced our VIPs and guests: Derek Brown (past VPG, past chapter and state president, and chapter registrar), Stephen Renouf (past VPG, past chapter and state president, and chapter secretary/treasurer), Robert Ebert (SF Chapter, past VPG and state president), past chapter presidents Dan Shurtz, Greg Owens, and Glenn Martin, DAR member Janet Brown, Ladies Auxiliary member Joy Javellana, and guest speaker Kent Fortner.

Derek Brown presented the Registrar's Report. In 2026, we have 12 new members so far this year, with 8 awaiting approval at NSSAR. He is working on 35 other applications in various stages of preparation. Registrar Brown is currently assisting the new San Francisco Chapter registrar to help him process applications. In 2026, the chapter has awarded 55 SAR Eagle Certificates, with 56 more planned soon. Registrar Brown announced that the San Francisco Chapter has requested our Color Guard for their meeting on September 12, 2026. Vice President Rhoades held a drawing for a \$20 Amazon Gift Certificate.

Janet Brown announced that the Jose Maria Amador Chapter, DAR is holding a Barbecue Pot Luck Event at Don Biddle Park in Dublin on July 2, 2026 from 5-8PM. They have invited our chapter to participate. It was suggested we could bring the meat, and provide volunteers for grill masters. Chaplain Bob Vernagallo announced that our September 2026 speaker will be Bob Sada, and he will discuss the Veterans Halls in Danville and Pleasanton. He has invited us to participate in the November 11, 2026 Veterans Day program in Danville, and has requested our Color Guard to be in the program. Anyone interested should contact Chaplain Vernagallo.

Following lunch, VP Rhoades introduced our guest speaker, Kent Fortner, a well-respected winemaker and brewer, as well as community contributor and entrepreneur. Following his graduation from the College of William & Mary in Virginia, he worked as a sommelier in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and was a partner in a wine shop in Boise, Idaho. His first job in the wine industry was at Beringer in Napa in 1993, and he studied viticulture at UC Davis. After working in a number of wineries, in 2000, he launched his own Road 31 Wine Co., with Carneros Pinot Noir. In 2013, he founded Mare Island Brewing Company, and creates small-batch artisan beers, and celebrates the rich history of Mare Island. He is the president of the Mare Island Historic Park Foundation. He lives in the 1916 neo-colonial officer's quarters on Mare Island.

He started his presentation

with General Mariano Vallejo. When the General was moving from Vallejo to Sonoma, his livestock was being ferried across San Pablo Bay on an old raft, when it capsized. General Vallejo's prized mare swam ashore to a flat island. General Vallejo was thrilled when he found his prize mare alive on the island, and named the island *Isla de la Yegua* (Island of the Mare), the origin of the name "Mare Island."

In 1853, the US purchased the island, and the following year, Commander David Glasgow Farragut founded the US Navy Yard on Mare Island. A floating drydock was sent around the horn of South America to Mare Island. The Old Foundry is the oldest building on the Island, and witnessed 142 years of shipbuilding there. In 1859, the first ship, the USS *Saginaw*, was built on Mare Island as a steam-driven, paddle-wheel gunboat. In 1870, the USS *Saginaw* sailed from Midway Island to check Kure Atoll for any shipwreck survivors. The ship struck an outlying reef, and was grounded. The crew managed to transfer most of the cargo to the atoll. They put masts on the whale boat, and five men set out for Hawaii to seek help for the stranded crew. After 31 days and 1,500 miles, the boat broke up on the breakers of Kauai, and only Coxswain William Halford survived to request aid from King Kamehameha V of Hawaii, who sent a ship to rescue the stranded crew of the *Saginaw*. Halford received the Medal of Honor for his bravery, and was buried in the Mare Island Navy Yard Cemetery in 1919.

In 1891, Dry dock #1 was completed – the first permanently



constructed dry dock on the West Coast. It has been used as a set for one of the Transformers movies. In 1911, Mare Island built a wooden landing platform on the cruiser Pennsylvania, and a bi-plane pilot successfully made the first airplane landing on a ship in San Francisco Bay.

The coal shed was built along the waterfront to store the European coal that fueled the ships. President Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet was fueled by the coal sheds of Mare Island. Kent Fortner's brewery is located in a former coal shed. The World War I Pool Hall on the island was demolished, and Kent was able to rescue the wood to be used for building his brewery.

The destroyer USS *Ward* was built at Mare Island for World War I. It had the distinction of firing the first shot in World War II – just before the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, the *Ward* spotted a Japanese submarine attempting to enter Pearl Harbor, and fired upon it with 4-inch guns and depth charges, destroying the vessel.

Only one super dreadnought battleship was built on the West Coast – the USS *California*, at Mare Island. They had to demolish part of a building to accommodate the immense size of the ship. When it was launched in 1919, the ship was so heavy, when it slid down the ramp to the water, five chains broke and the ship crashed into the ferry dock in Vallejo, becoming stuck in the mud. The USS *California* was

sunk in the Pearl Harbor attack, but was refloated and repaired to fight in 1944.

The USS *Indianapolis* was overhauled at Mare Island before setting off on its mission to deliver atomic bomb components to Tinian Island. After fulfilling her critical mission, the ship was sunk by a Japanese submarine – out of a crew of 1,196, only 316 survived the 5 days in the water.

During the Cold War, Mare Island built submarines and equipment to tap Soviet underwater cables, as detailed in the book, *Blind Man's Bluff* (1998). The submarines placed a listening device near a Soviet underwater cable 400 feet below sea level, and listened for 9 years to secret Soviet transmissions. The recordings would be taken to Mare Island to be read. The Soviets only learned of the cable tapping from American traitor John Anthony Walker. The Soviets captured the device, and placed it in a museum.

Mare Island became a victim of the Base Closures on the West Coast. Its 9,000 civilian workers were terminated, and 142 years of shipbuilding came to an abrupt end in 1996. The Mare Island Historic Park Foundation exists to preserve the rich history of Mare Island, and offers tours of the island. When Farragut arrived in 1854, he planted the mast of his ship on the island as a flagpole, and claimed the island for the US government. He was then able to evict all the squatters on the island. The mast has since rotted out, but the foundation is raising funds to restore the mast. St. Peter's Chapel is available for weddings, and features beautiful

Tiffany stained glass windows. For more information on the foundation, visit <https://mihpf.org/>. Vice President Rhoades presented the SAR Certificate of Appreciation to Kent Fortner for his interesting presentation.

Past President Glenn Martin delivered the SAR America 250 Minute, on the Fortification of Dorchester Heights, a decisive action early in the Revolutionary War that precipitated the end of the siege of Boston and the withdrawal of British troops. The siege of Boston had begun on April 19, 1775, in the aftermath of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, and Colonial militia encircled Boston. The British military leadership headed by General William Howe had long known of the importance of the Dorchester Heights and the heights of Charlestown which had commanding views of Boston and its outer harbor. The harbor was vital to the British, as the Royal Navy provided protection and supplies for the troops in Boston. The British agreed on June 15, 1775 to the plan of seizing both heights, starting with Dorchester. It was the leaking of this plan that had precipitated the Battle of Bunker Hill.

George Washington took command of the army outside Boston in July 1775, and he considered occupying Dorchester Heights but rejected the idea, feeling that the army was not ready to deal with the likely British attack on the position. Colonel Henry Knox raised the idea of bringing the cannons from Fort Ticonderoga in upper New York to the siege. Washington gave Knox the



assignment of transporting weapons from to Cambridge. Knox went to Ticonderoga in November 1775 and moved 60 tons of cannons and other armaments by boat, horse, and ox-drawn sledges along poor-quality roads, across two semi-frozen rivers, and through forests and swamps to the Boston area. Historian Victor Brooks has called Knox's successful effort "one of the most stupendous feats of logistics" of the entire war. By the end of February, Knox had arrived with the cannon, and supplies of powder and shells. Washington decided that the time was right to act.

On the night of March 4, General John Thomas and about 2,500 troops quietly marched to the top of Dorchester Heights, hauling artillery, tools, and other military materials to assemble prefabricated fortifications. Hay bales were placed between the path taken by the troops and the harbor in order to muffle the sounds of the activity. General Washington was present to provide moral support and encouragement, reminding them that March 5 was the sixth anniversary of the Boston Massacre. By 4 a.m., they had constructed fortifications that were proof against small arms and grapeshot. Work continued on the positions, with troops cutting down trees and constructing abatis to impede any British assault. The outside of the works included rock-filled barrels that could be rolled down the hill at attacking troops. British General Howe looked over from Boston the

next morning and remarked that "the rebels have done more in one night than my whole army would have done in a month."

British Admiral Shulldham declared that his fleet was in danger unless the Heights were taken. Howe made plans for an assault, preparing to send 2,400 men under cover of darkness to attack. However, a snow storm began late on March 5 and halted any chance of a battle. By the time the storm subsided, Howe had reconsidered, reasoning that preserving the army for battle elsewhere was the higher priority. On March 8, intermediaries delivered an unsigned paper informing Washington that the city would not be burned to the ground if Howe's troops were allowed to leave unmolested. The British forces departed Boston on March 17 and sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, taking with them more than 1,000 Loyalist civilians.

Vice President Rawn Rhoades adjourned the meeting.

— *Stephen Renouf, Secretary*

April Meeting

The April Regular Meeting will be held at The Old Spaghetti Factory in Concord on **Saturday, April 18, 2026, at Noon**. There will be a concurrent Zoom Meeting this month at 1:15PM.

The meeting will feature Walt Bilofski, vice president of the Treasure Island Museum Association. Walt will present a program entitled, "Detective Story: The Port Chicago Trial," which was held in 1944 on Yerba Buena Island.

Please join us for an informative presentation!



VP Rhoades presents the SAR Bronze Henry Knox Medal to Jeff Nibert



President Silva presents the SAR Bronze Good Citizenship Medal to PO1 Rian Spradlin, US NSCC



Past President Glenn Martin delivers the SAR America 250 Minute on Dorchester Heights



Winemaker Kent Fortner speaks of the History of Mare Island

APRIL 2026

REGULAR MEETING

Saturday, April 18, 2026

the old spaghetti factory

1955 Mount Diablo Street, Concord, CA



11:30AM—Pre-Meeting
Social

Noon to 2:30PM—Meeting

Programme:

Walt Bilofsky, Vice President of the Treasure Island Museum. Walt Bilofsky will discuss the trial of 50 Black sailors tried for mutiny on Yerba Buena Island for refusing to handle munitions after the Port Chicago Naval Magazine explosion. The location of the trial was lost until Bilofsky rediscovered it. Come join us for a great meeting!

MENU

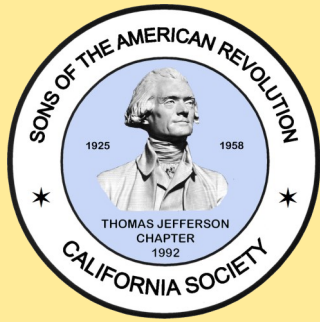
*Spaghetti with Mushroom Sauce,
Fettuccini Alfredo, Chicken Parmigiana, or Lasagna
\$30 per person*

Deadline: 15 April 2026

Questions? Contact Stephen Renouf at usina@aol.com

Please make check payable to THOMAS JEFFERSON CHAPTER, enclose this reservation slip, and mail to: **Secretary Stephen Renouf, 16123 Paseo del Campo, San Lorenzo, CA 94580**

Name: _____	Entrée choice:	Spaghetti	Fettuccini	Chicken	Lasagna
Guest: _____	Entrée choice:	Spaghetti	Fettuccini	Chicken	Lasagna
Guest2: _____	Entrée choice:	Spaghetti	Fettuccini	Chicken	Lasagna



**THOMAS JEFFERSON
CHAPTER**

SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Thomas E. Silva
President

S. Rawn Rhoades
Vice President

Stephen R. Renouf
Secretary/Treasurer

Th. Jefferson

Quote of the Month

"People who take no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants."

– *Thomas Babington Macaulay.*



You can download the full version of the *Minuteman* at <https://www.tjsar.org/index.php/minuteman>

The Thomas Jefferson Chapter

MINUTEMAN

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