

The Thomas Jefferson Chapter

MINUTEMAN

THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

VOLUME XXXV : NUMBER 5

MAY 2026



Chapter Compatriots in Colonial Attire with President Silva

President's Notes

For our new members, welcome to the Thomas Jefferson Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. We have had an exciting start for the year with the induction of many new members, and an interesting schedule of speakers, whom we hope you have enjoyed. Walt Bilofsky gave an excellent in-depth summary of the Port Chicago tragedy and subsequent trial at our April meeting.

As summer approaches, there are only 65 days to go before our great country celebrates its founding 250 years ago. With that in mind, I encourage all of you to continue to submit your points for your America 250 medals. The Bronze Medal Award is only 25 points, and I am sure many of you have already qualified. I am proud to see our Color Guard is growing with many of you attending

meetings, and participating in community events in colonial attire. Let us continue to look for opportunities to share the story of patriotism in our communities. Past President Glenn Martin has been active in telling our story at local schools. Please feel free to invite your family, friends and neighbors to attend our meetings, and help to grow our membership.

May ushers in a number of graduations, and your chapter will be represented at local Naval Sea Cadet Corps, JROTC and ROTC events where we will be presenting SAR medals and certificates to honor graduates who exhibit strong patriotism, leadership and community service. In addition, we have been invited to a number of events, from May through the summer, to give presentations, and inform our communities of the mission of the SAR.

250
Years
1776-2026



Thomas Jefferson Chapter Officers for 2026

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The Thomas Jefferson Chapter Minuteman is the official newsletter of the Thomas Jefferson Chapter, California Society Sons of the American Revolution. The opinions expressed herein are the opinions of the authors, and not necessarily those of the Chapter or the SAR, unless specifically stated.

CIVIS AMERICANUS SUM



The California Society SAR held its 151st Annual Spring meeting in Visalia this year. Randy Dhindsa, Yosemite Chapter, was elected as our new SAR State President and themes for this year include leadership, education and service to our communities.

I look forward to getting to know more of you at our meetings, and I hope to see you at events this summer with Memorial Day, America 250 celebrations, the Fourth of July, and Veterans Day all coming up.

Jerry Whiting will be giving a very interesting presentation on World War II bombers and the Red Tail fighter pilots. Jerry's father was a tail gunner on a B-24 bomber, who had an incredible experience in Italy with the Tuskegee airmen and the famed Red Tail fighter pilots who escorted bombers on their missions over Europe. I hope to see you all at our next meeting.

— Tom Silva, President

Secretary's Notes

The Thomas Jefferson Chapter held a regular meeting on Saturday, April 18, 2026, at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Concord, California. We had 22 members and guests at the meeting.

President Tom Silva called the meeting to order, and he introduced our VIPs and guests: Guest Speaker Walt Bilofsky of the Treasure Island Museum Association, Councilman Jeff Nibert of Pleasanton, 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 Tim Ernst, Greg Owens, and Glenn Martin, DAR members Pat Everette and Staci Kendrick, and Ladies Auxiliary member Joy Javellana.

Derek Brown presented the Registrar's Report. In 2026, we have 16 new members so far this year, with 4 awaiting approval at NSSAR. He is working on 34 other applications in various stages of preparation. Registrar Brown is continuing to assist the new San Francisco Chapter registrar to help him process applications. In 2026, the chapter has awarded 94 SAR Eagle Certificates, in cooperation with the Golden Gate Council. We will also be presenting ROTC/JROTC medals later in the year. We presented three Bronze Good Citizenship Medals to the Sea Cadets recently.

President Silva presented the new member certificate for Timothy Nibert to his father, Jeff Nibert. Timothy descends from Luther Barney (1757-1844), a private in Col. Spencer's Regiment in Connecticut. Private Barney married Abigail Winship in 1779, and was buried in 1844 at Bemus Point in Ellery, New York. President Silva also presented a supplemental membership certificate to Glenn Martin on his patriot ancestor Joakim Quick (1734-1816), an ensign in Capt. Peter Vroom's company, 2nd Battalion, Somerset County New Jersey Militia. Ensign Quick married

Catherine Snedeker in 1757, and was buried in 1816 in the Harlingen Reformed Church in Belle Mead, New Jersey. President Silva went around the room and asked each person to introduce themselves, and their patriot ancestor.

Following lunch, President Silva presented the SAR Military Service Veterans Corp Certificate to Compatriot Benton C. Miller, Jr., on behalf of the President General. Compatriot Miller served in the US Army from August 1961 to August 1967.

Our Vice President, Rawn Rhoades, presented the SAR America 250 Minute. In 1776, New York was one of the most important locations in North America. Its harbor made it a natural target for British forces, and its position made it central to controlling the colonies. At the center of it all was George Washington, leading an army that was inexperienced, short on supplies, and operating in a city where loyalty was divided. By early summer, British troops had begun to assemble in large numbers. Ships filled the harbor, and it was clear that a major military operation was coming.

At the same time, New York contained a substantial Loyalist population. Many residents still supported the Crown, and some were willing to act on that loyalty. This created a difficult situation for Washington, who had to prepare for an external attack while also considering the possibility of internal threats.

Within Washington's army was a soldier named Thomas Hickey. Hickey was an enlisted man, but his



position made him significant. He served in the Commander-in-Chief's Guard, the unit responsible for Washington's personal protection. That role required trust and placed him close to the leadership of the army. At first, the concerns about Hickey were related to criminal behavior. He was involved in passing counterfeit Continental currency, which was a serious offense. The Continental economy was already under strain, and counterfeiting directly weakened the war effort. Once Hickey was in custody, the investigation began to expand. What started as a counterfeiting case quickly raised larger concerns. In court, testimony indicated that Hickey had been speaking with other soldiers about the likely outcome of the war. He reportedly expressed confidence that the British would succeed and suggested that it would be wiser to join them rather than remain with the Continental Army.

More concerning was the claim that he was actively encouraging others to defect. This was not simply a matter of personal opinion. Encouraging soldiers to abandon their posts and join the enemy directly threatened the stability of the army. As investigations continued, additional information pointed to connections between Hickey and individuals in New York who were loyal to the British. These were not casual associations. They appeared to be part of a network of people who intended to support British

operations once the army arrived in force. Hickey also made statements suggesting that there were others, both in the city and within the army, who were prepared to act when the British entered New York. Some accounts from the time indicate that he spoke about the possibility of targeting Washington himself, either through capture or assassination. Historians still debate how specific or organized those plans were, but the concern at the time was real.

At that point, the issue was no longer limited to counterfeiting or individual misconduct. It appeared to involve a broader effort to undermine the American position from within. Hickey was formally charged and brought before a military court. The charges focused on mutiny and sedition, as well as conduct that threatened the order and discipline of the army. These charges reflected the military's primary concern, which was maintaining stability within its ranks. The court-martial found him guilty. On June 28, 1776, Thomas Hickey was executed by hanging. The execution took place in front of a large group of soldiers and civilians. It was intended to be visible and understood. Washington approved the sentence, and the decision reflected the seriousness of the situation. At that moment, the Continental Army was preparing to face a major British offensive. There was no room for uncertainty about loyalty within its ranks.

The execution served as a clear warning. Actions that threatened the cohesion of the army would be dealt with decisively. The timing of these events is important.

Hickey was executed at the end of June 1776. Within days, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The country had not yet formally declared independence, and already there were signs of internal strain. This highlights how fragile the situation was. The army was still developing, political unity was still forming, and the outcome of the conflict was uncertain. Any serious disruption at that point, especially one involving the leadership of the army, could have had significant consequences. The handling of the Hickey Plot had an immediate effect on the Continental Army. It reinforced the importance of discipline and made clear that Washington intended to maintain order, even under difficult circumstances. It also showed that loyalty was not assumed. It had to be demonstrated.

General George Washington emphasized vigilance after the incident. He understood that the British would take advantage of division whenever possible, and that internal stability was essential. By addressing the situation directly, he helped maintain cohesion at a critical time.

The Hickey Plot is not one of the most widely discussed events of the Revolution, but it provides useful perspective. It shows that the conflict involved internal divisions as well as external threats. It also illustrates the type of leadership required in that environment. Washington had to address not only military challenges but also issues of trust and discipline within his own ranks. The Hickey Plot is a relatively



small episode compared to the major battles of the Revolution, but it occurred at a time when even small events could have large consequences. It highlights the challenges Washington faced in holding his army together while preparing for war. It also shows how serious issues of loyalty were treated. Remember to record your three points for your America 250 Medal!

President Tom Silva introduced our guest speaker, Walt Bilofsky, the vice president of the Treasure Island Museum Association. Walt was a software developer, who founded The Software Toolworks, Inc. in 1980, which started out developing software for the Heathkit H89 microcomputer. He sold the successful company in 1994, and it was rebranded as Mindscape. He is a past president of the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, and hold graduate degrees in mathematics and electrical engineering from MIT.

Walt discussed the Port Chicago Naval Magazine Explosion, which took place almost 82 years ago, about 5 miles from the Old Spaghetti Factory. It was the largest stateside military disaster, and largest mass mutiny. In 1944, the military was segregated, which was reflective of society at that time. Port Chicago was the largest ammunition transshipment point on the West Coast, loading ships to deliver to US forces fighting the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Port

Chicago's officers were White and the enlisted sailors were Black. The sailors were put to work loading ammunition onto ships with no training, inadequate equipment, and very few safety protocols. The longshoreman's union offered to train the sailors, but the offer was rejected by the Navy.

In July 1944, two ships, SS *Quinault Victory* and the SS *E.A. Bryan*, were being loaded with ammunition. At 10:18 PM on July 17, 1944, a large explosion took place, followed by smaller explosions, and then a massive explosion of all the munitions in the *E.A. Bryan's* hold. The massive explosion registered 3.4 on the Richter scale, and destroyed the *E.A. Bryan*, most of the dock, and all structures within 1,000-ft. radius. The *Quinault Victory* was broken in half and sunk in Suisun Bay. The explosion killed 320 people, and survivors were ordered to clean up body parts.

A Navy court of inquiry could not determine the cause of the explosions due to the devastation and lack of witnesses, but blamed excessive wartime requirements that led to inadequate training, and removal of safety procedures to speed up loading. Recommendations were made to improve safety, which were implemented before war's end.

Surviving sailors were transferred to Mare Island Naval Weapons Station in Vallejo to continue loading ships with munitions. Many were nervous and jumpy, and were afraid to go back to work. On August 9, 1944, 328 ordnance battalion sailors refused to

march to the dock to load munitions. Officers convinced 70 of them to work. The following day, Rear Admiral Wright ordered the remaining 258 sailors of dire consequences of mutiny in wartime, and 208 sailors returned to work. They received summary courts-martial for disobeying orders, and forfeited 3 months pay. The remaining 50 were charged with mutiny in wartime.

On September 14, 1944, the general court-martial of the 50 mutineers convened on Yerba Buena Island. Although the *San Francisco Chronicle* covered every day of the trial, they never mentioned the site of the trial. NAACP chief counsel, Thurgood Marshall, flew to San Francisco to advise the defense. On October 24, 1944, the 50 sailors were found guilty of mutiny, and were sentenced to 7-15 years in prison, and given dishonorable discharges. Thurgood Marshall unsuccessfully appealed the conviction to the Navy Judge Advocate General. His appeals to Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, led to a Navy review of the case, which resulted in a new trial. The new trial upheld the convictions, but pressure from Eleanor Roosevelt and others led Forrestal to release the men in January 1946. They completed their military service, and were given general discharges under honorable conditions. The trials led to the Navy de-segregating, and in 1946, President Truman de-segregated all the other military branches.

The story faded until Professor Robert L. Allen at UC Berkeley researched, and wrote the



book, *The Port Chicago Mutiny: The Story of the Largest Mass Mutiny Trial in US Naval History* (1989). Representative George Miller pushed for the Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial, which was dedicated in 1994 to the memory of those lost in the disaster. There was then a movement to exonerate the Port Chicago 258. In 1999, Freddie Meeks, the last known survivor, was given a presidential pardon. On July 17, 2024, the 80th Anniversary of the disaster, the Secretary of the Navy overturned the court-martial verdicts for the Port Chicago 258.

There is an annual commemoration of the disaster on the Saturday closest to the anniversary. Although it is open to the public, it is on an active military base, so reservations in advance, and guided tours are required.

The site of the court-martial on Yerba Buena Island was not recorded. Although it received widespread coverage, only one small newspaper gave a clue – it was in the “general court martial building.” Another clue was two existing photos of the inside of the court building. The 1995 Base Closure Group inventoried the buildings on Yerba Buena Island, and a prime candidate was Building 97. It was built in 1920, had an addition in 1943, and was demolished in 1961. There were plans at the National Archives, but researchers had to wait until the end of Covid restrictions to access the plans. There was a “general court martial

room” on the plans, and showed a girder and supporting posts that can be seen on the existing photos of the court. After identifying the location of the trial, On October 22, 2024, the San Francisco Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States placed a memorial at the site of the trial in Panorama Park atop Yerba Buena Island. President Silva presented Walt Bilofsky with the SAR Certificate of Appreciation for his informative presentation.

The chapter voted to approve up to \$300 to donate to the July 2, 2026 DAR Barbecue Potluck Event at Don Biddle Park in Dublin to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The next chapter meeting will be held on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Concord.

President Tom Silva then adjourned the meeting.

— **Stephen Renouf, Secretary**

May Meeting

The May Regular Meeting will be held at The Old Spaghetti Factory in Concord on **Saturday, May 16, 2026, at Noon**. There will NOT be a Zoom Meeting this month.

The meeting will feature Jerry Whiting, who will speak on his book, *Red Tails and Liberators*, about Black fighter pilots called “Red Tails,” who escorted American bombers in World War II. Whiting’s father was a tail gunner on a Consolidated B-24 Liberator bomber, flying out of Italy, and often told him stories of the Red Tails.

Please join us for an informative presentation!

CASSAR Meeting

The CASSAR Annual Meeting was held on April 24-26, 2026, in Visalia, California. Our Chapter was well represented with seven members in attendance; President Tom Silva, Secretary Stephen Renouf, Registrar Derek Brown, Vice President Rawn Rhoades, Eagle Scout Chairman Jeff Brown, and Past Presidents Greg Owens, and Dan Shurtz.

The Yosemite Chapter hosted the meeting at the Wyndham Hotel in Visalia. State leaders had a Thursday night dinner at the Vintage Press Restaurant. We welcomed Treasurer General Brooks Lyles, Historian General Jeff Thomas, and Past President General Joe Dooley.

CASSAR President John Ferris experimented with a new format for state meetings. On Friday, the California Society held its business meeting, with most reports being reported "in the Book," and only new and critical information being reported in person. Another change was having chapter flags in our meetings. Many chapters, like our own, have generic SAR flags for our chapters. We will be considering adopting a more specific flag. There was a motion to propose to the National Society to modify the SAR Recessional to end with "and a nation of free men **and women.**" After passionate arguments on both sides, the motion passed. Genealogist David Morrow is currently working on a presentation on AI tools to use in genealogy he will present on Zoom Meeting later in the year. Our long-time former Genealogist and current Registrar Terry Briggs is stepping down after



17 years of service to the state.

Under new business, the nominating committee presented its recommendations for 2026-27 officers: President Randy Dhindsa, Executive VP Brandon Villardi, VP North Dan Shurtz, VP South Kevin Bidenkap, VP Membership Scott Whitman, Secretary Steve Andrews, Treasurer Phil Mitchell, Chancellor Michael Hirman, Genealogist David Morrow, Registrar David Arthurs, Historian Steve Belden, Chaplain Rev. Scott Elliot, Surgeon Dr. Matthew Bowdish, and Investment Fund Trustees Stephen Renouf (2026-29), Kevin Bidenkap (2025-28), and John Dodd (2024-27). The slate was elected unanimously. We recommended John Ferris for NSSAR Trustee for California, and Randy Dhindsa for Alternate Trustee.

The location for the Fall CASSAR Board of Managers Meeting is still undetermined. President Dhindsa recommended setting up a permanent committee to handle state meeting planning.

CASSAR voted to donate \$1,000 to the marionette project of CAR President Julia Harr. President Ferris presented an oak leaf cluster for the Liberty Medal for to Derek Brown.

VPG Jim Klingler held a Western District meeting following the CASSAR Meeting on Friday. After a spirited debate on both sides, the Western District voted to amend its bylaws to restrict future vice president general nominees to compatriots living full time in California, Nevada, and Hawaii by a

vote of 25-9.

On Friday night, the CASSAR Color Guard presented the flag for the American Anthem at the Fresno Grizzlies baseball game at Chukchansi Park. We watched the home team Grizzlies defeat the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes 10-3, and had dinner on the Party Deck.

On Saturday, break out sessions were held during the day for Youth Engagement in SAR; Marketing, Community Outreach & Americanism; and Genealogy and Brick Walls. In the afternoon, the Memorial Service was held to honor the compatriots who passed away in the previous year, including Past Treasurer James Remington.

The Formal Banquet on Saturday featured Keynote Speaker Paul Loeffler, the Voice of the Central Valley, who spoke on Fresno Honor Flights, as well as interviewing World War II veterans.

President John Ferris awarded Dan Shurtz with the General Adjutants Award for serving on his executive committee. Dan Shurtz and Greg Owens were presented with the Gold 250th Anniversary Medal. Greg Owens was presented with the Silver Meritorious Service Medal. Tom Silva received the Silver 250th Anniversary Medal. The Thomas Jefferson Chapter was awarded the Col. Richard F. Locke Award (and \$250) for new members and retention.

VPG Jim Klingler installed the 2026-27 CASSAR Officers, and Past President General Joe Dooley installed Randy Dhindsa of the Yosemite Chapter as CASSAR President.



President Tom Silva presents the SAR Certificate of Appreciation to Walt Bilofsky



President Tom Silva presents the SAR Military Service Veterans Corp Certificate to Benton Miller



Registrar Brown presents SAR Supplemental to Glenn Martin and SAR Membership for Timothy Nibert to his father.



Wilt Bilofski presents a program on the Port Chicago Disaster



VPG Klingler swears in 2026 CASSAR Officers, including VPN Shurtz and Invested Funds Trustee Renouf



Chapter Delegates to CASSAR—Rhoades, J. Brown, Shurtz, President Silva, Renouf, Owens, and D. Brown



CASSAR President Ferris presents Gold 250 Anniversary Medal to Greg Owens



CASSAR President Ferris presents Gold 250 Anniversary Medal to Dan Shurtz



President Ferris presents General Adjutants Award to Executive Committee, including Dan Shurtz.



I'm Proud to Be an American Song at the Gala Banquet



CASSAR Color Guard presents the Colors at Fresno Grizzlies Baseball Game



Thomas Jefferson Chapter Contingent at Chukchansi Park to watch the Fresno Grizzlies

MAY 2026

REGULAR MEETING

Saturday, May 16, 2026

the old spaghetti factory

1955 Mount Diablo Street, Concord, CA

11:30AM—Pre-Meeting
Social



Noon to 2:30PM—Meeting

Programme:

Author Jerry Whiting. Jerry Whiting will speak on his book, *Red Tails and Liberators*, about Black fighter pilots called “Red Tails,” who escorted American bombers in World War II. His father was a tail gunner on a Consolidated B-24 Liberator bomber, flying out of Italy, and often told him stories of the Red Tails. Come join us for a great meeting!

MENU

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

Deadline: 13 May 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 Macauley.*



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