

1862: Red, White, and Battered

Civil War Lesson Plan

Introduction and Objectives

This lesson plan accompanies the latest Civil War battle flag exhibition at the New York State Capitol entitled, “1862: Red, White, and Battered.” With this plan students will learn about the different types of flags used during the Civil War as well as their importance to the soldiers and their families at home. The students will also discover how a flag’s design and construction often conveyed a message, identified the soldiers, or provided encouragement.

The tour complements New York State Social Studies Core Curriculum allowing the students to:

- Identify the roles and contributions of individuals and/or groups
- Draw conclusions and understand the interconnections of people and events from a variety of perspectives

Historical Background

From 1861-1865, New York State played a pivotal role in the Civil War. New York contributed more soldiers, money, and materials to the Union cause than any other state. Records show that over 448,000 New Yorkers served and over 53,000 men died. The home front they left behind experienced untold hardship and grief as well.

As the state’s military forces organized for war, they rallied around their cherished regimental flags. The flags served as a practical tool for the soldiers to identify themselves and to mark their location on the march, in camp or on the battlefield. In addition, regimental flags reaffirmed group identity and enhanced morale. Beyond their practical military use, flags also symbolized a regiment’s local community, and expressed public and individual sentiments, ethnic identities and patriotism.

Primarily, however, battle flags served as an important tool for communication. On the often chaotic and confusing field of battle, soldiers “rallied” around their regimental flags in order to hold their correct position. From a distance, officers could see each regiment’s position on the battlefield by locating their flags. The utility and symbolism of regimental flags made them a prime target for the enemy. Flag bearers were more likely to be casualties than other soldiers. Many died carrying a flag in battle or as members of the color guard, in defense of the flag and its bearer. A large proportion of Civil War Medal of Honor recipients were flag bearers.

These banners were usually presented to each regiment with great ceremony. Often they were hand-made or commissioned by the women of the regimental families. Prominent local politicians also donated them. No matter their origin, the flags always represented the honor of the regiment. Losing a flag to the enemy was considered a disgrace. Today, they serve as a window to our past, and continue to teach us about the trials and sacrifices faced by New Yorkers during the Civil War.

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The New York State Battle Flag Collection and Flag Conservation

Even before the Civil War ended, New York State started to collect the flags borne by her native regiments to honor the service and sacrifices of its men, to commemorate the support provided by the local communities, and to recognize those responsible for the flags. Beginning in 1863, regiments were instructed to turn in their flags to the state's top military officer at the Capitol when they returned home or if a well-worn battle flag needed replacement. Because of this foresight and precedent, the New York State Battle Flag Collection is the largest publicly-held collection of Civil War battle flags in the nation. Approximately 900 Civil War flags are part of the collection that numbers over 2,000 in its entirety. The collection spans the history of New York State from the War of 1812 to the present day conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Originally housed in the first Capitol building in Albany, the Battle Flag Collection temporarily relocated to a local storage building soon after construction began on the current Capitol in 1867. The Battle Flag Collection moved into the "new" Capitol in 1881 as a fitting home amongst other Civil War commemoratives preserved in the seat of government.

For decades, the collection's Civil War flags have been furled tightly around their staffs and since 1887, crammed into glass-front, wood cases in the Capitol. Consequently, these flags in the "Flag Room" on the first floor have been damaged by gravity, lack of temperature control, and excessive light exposure.

Recognizing the collection's conservation needs, in 2000 the governor and the State Legislature began funding the New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project to conserve, properly store, and study the Battle Flag Collection. Between 2000-2009, textile conservators from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) inventoried all of the flags to determine their condition, type and dimensions. Over 25% of the collection has been conserved, (including nearly half of the Civil War flags) and stored in a secure, clean environment. In addition, State Parks, in partnership with the Division of Military & Naval Affairs (the state agency responsible for the flags), has installed an annual exhibition at the Capitol featuring conserved flags from the collection. The latest exhibition, "1862: Red, White, and Battered," opened in August 2012 and chronicles 1862, the first full year of the Civil War.

Student Materials and Resources

1. Reading: *Emblems of Devotion*
2. Activity: *It's All About the Flags*

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Student Reading: *Emblems of Devotion—New York State’s Civil War Battle Flags*

During the Civil War (1861-1865), nearly 450,000 New Yorkers served in the armed forces of this country to help reunite the nation. Army enlistees usually joined a local regiment alongside their neighbors and friends. Each regiment, at full strength, had over 1,000 soldiers including color bearers. Selected from among the regiment’s bravest, color bearers carried the regiment’s battle flags: a United States national flag, called a national color, and a New York State flag, called a regimental color. Both flags measured well over 6-foot in size. Sometimes, regiments carried smaller-sized flags in addition to the larger colors. The battle flags, regardless of type or size, symbolized the regiment and helped to keep the men aligned together while in battle, on the march, or in camp.

The regimental color usually featured the name and number of the regiment and, in some instances, symbols, slogans or other unique features to show regional pride and patriotism. Communities often presented their local regiments with unique battle flags to express themselves and their support. Such presentations often attracted large, enthusiastic crowds. In April 1861, when the Civil War began, battle flags and flags of all types and sizes were made and flown as a wave of patriotism swept through the country. This “flag mania” sensation established the flag as the preeminent symbol of the time and the most popular means of expression for citizens and soldiers. In a time before high-tech communications and social networks, flags became the most popular way for people to reveal their identities and emotions.

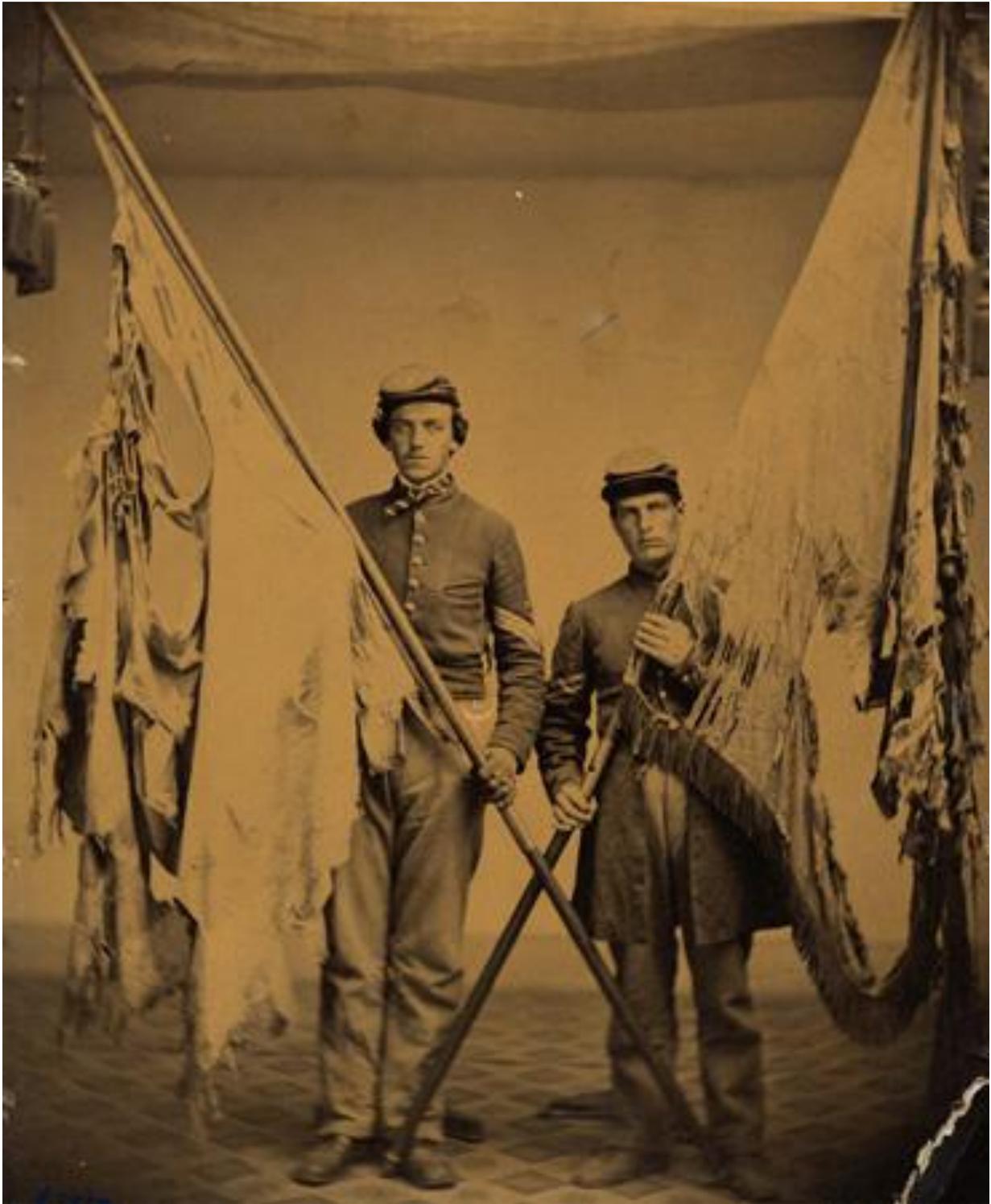
Each regiment pledged to defend their flag and the community it represented. Held in such high regard, the battle flags were fiercely defended on the battlefield. If a regiment had their flag taken by the enemy, the men felt humiliated. A soldier daring and heroic enough to capture an enemy’s flag was honored for his deed and in many instances received the nation’s highest military medal, the Medal of Honor.

Throughout four long years of war, the flag never lost its relevance or significance to soldier or civilian. Even though a battle flag may have been tattered or torn while in use by a regiment, or pierced by enemy fire, its value never diminished. As regiments returned home from war, the men brought back with them their beloved battle flags and left them with state officials so that they would remain as a lasting testament to the courage and suffering of the citizens and soldiers of New York State.

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Sergeant John Lyon (left) and Corporal Melvin Tucker (right), 16th New York Volunteers, with the regiment's war-torn, presentation colors, c. 1864. Tucker holds a Tiffany & Co. regimental color received from Eliza Woolsey Howland in June 1861. The bullet-riddled flag, its staff, and the regiment that followed the colors, bore the scars of many a hard-fought battle when they returned home in May 1863. New York State Military Museum

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Activity: It's All About the Flags

See what you can discover about each flag in the exhibition. Gather information from each flag image and its caption to answer the questions that follow.



Battery Flag, 7th Battery, New York Volunteers

The “Sons of Orange and Ulster,” citizens from Orange and Ulster counties, presented this silk flag, made by Tiffany & Co., to the 7th Battery on November 7, 1861. The 7th Battery originally formed as an artillery company within the 56th New York Volunteers. Known as the “Tenth Legion,” the 56th New York Volunteers included men from the state’s 10th congressional district.

The flag includes painted inscriptions and crossed cannons, a symbol for the artillery.

Who made this flag?

What inscriptions and images are included on the flag and why?

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National Color, 61st New York Volunteers

The 61st New York Volunteers received this wool national color in late 1861 and proudly followed the flag into battle throughout 1862. During the battle at Fair Oaks, Virginia, May 31–June 1, 1862, nearly 50 men died including the color bearer and four men from the color guard. One month later, during the battle at Malvern Hill, Virginia, color bearer Corporal Frank Aldrich died while carrying the flag. During the Battle of Antietam, Maryland, September 17, 1862, Corporal Hugh Montgomery barely survived as enemy fire reportedly pierced the flag 29 times and snapped its staff.

In February 1863, Colonel Nelson Miles sent the battle-scarred flag to Albany, New York, for the Battle Flag Collection. In an accompanying letter, Miles proudly described the flag as, “loaded with honor and brilliant with an unfading luster and glory of many a hard won battle-field.”

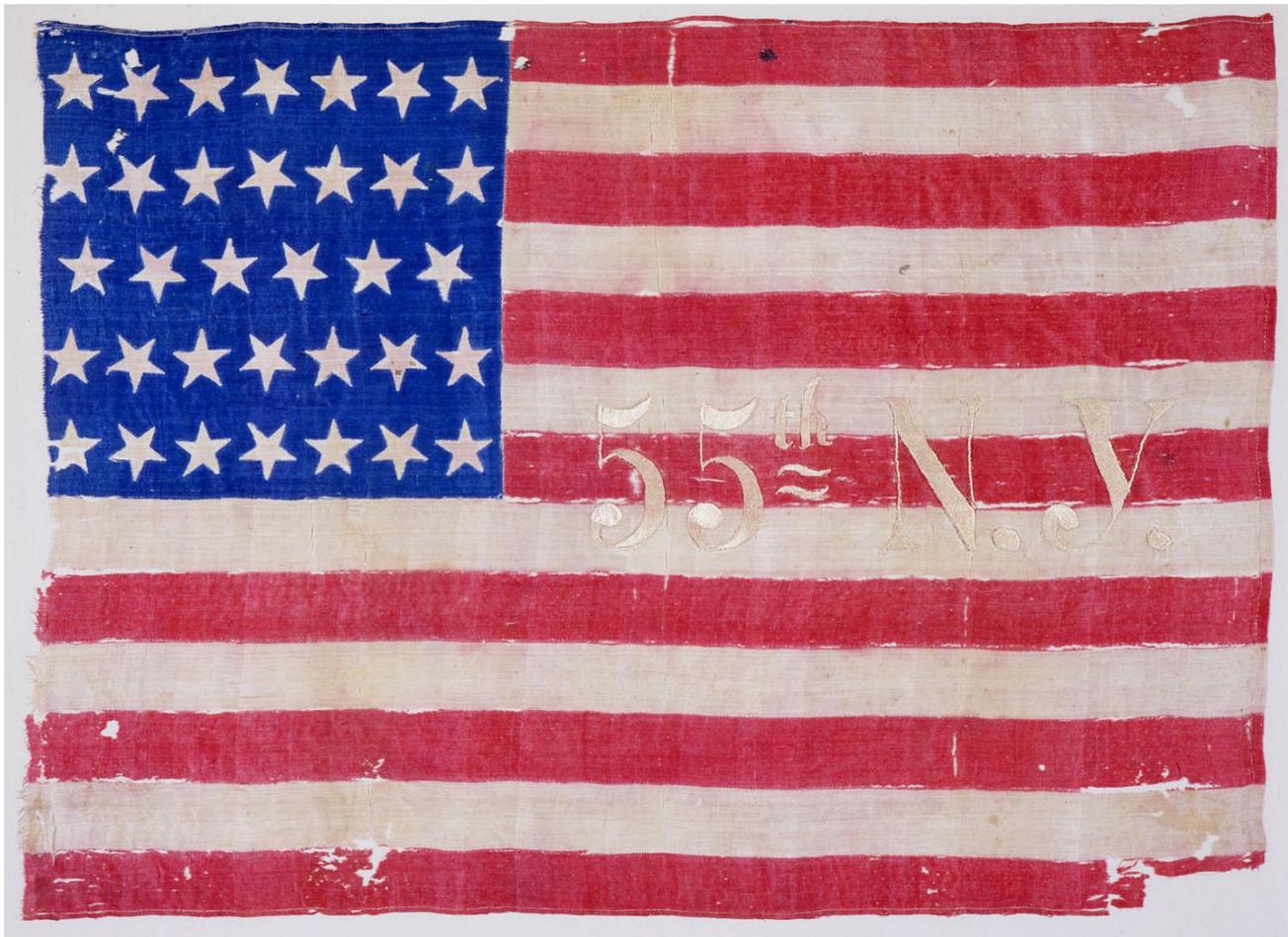
Who carried this flag at Antietam and what happened to him?

How did Colonel Miles feel about this flag?

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Flank Marker, 55th New York Volunteers

In February 1862, Colonel Regis de Trobriand asked his daughter Marie Caroline de Trobriand, known as Lina, to get two small American flags and to add "55th N.Y. Vol." on each. This silk flag, one from the pair given by Lina to her father, was used by the 55th New York Volunteers, a regiment with many French immigrants and led by de Trobriand, a French nobleman. The flag includes the regiment's number and state affiliation, "55th N.Y.," embroidered on the center stripes.

Who embroidered the regiment's name?

The regiment included many immigrants from what country?

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Signal Corps Battle Honor Flag

In March 1862, during the Battle of Winchester, Virginia, signal officer First Lieutenant David Taylor and his flagman, Oliver Temple, heroically operated one of six signal stations. The signal system used during the war instructed signal officers, with assistance from flagmen, to wave a signal flag to the left, right, or front to transmit information in code to other signal officers. Taylor received official credit for his signal service at Winchester and was allowed to add a star with "WINCHESTER" to his signal flags, including this red cotton flag.

The honor of placing a star on your signal flag recognized the important and sometimes deadly job signal officers performed during battle and made a once simple flag into a treasured trophy.

Who is David Taylor and what did he do to earn a star on his flag?

How did soldiers use flags to communicate?

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National Color, 5th New York Volunteers

On July 16, 1861, in New York City, nearly 100 new recruits from the 5th New York Volunteers received this silk national color from “some admiring ladies of New York.” Although some parts are missing, the flag’s canton, or the blue field in the corner with the white stars, does include many of its original stars and a large part of its painted inscription, “Above Us or Around Us.”

Color Sergeant Andrew Allison was killed while carrying this flag on August 30, 1862, in the Battle of Second Bull Run, Virginia. Over 100 men from the 5th New York Volunteers died during the battle, the greatest loss of life by any infantry regiment in a single day’s battle during the entire war.

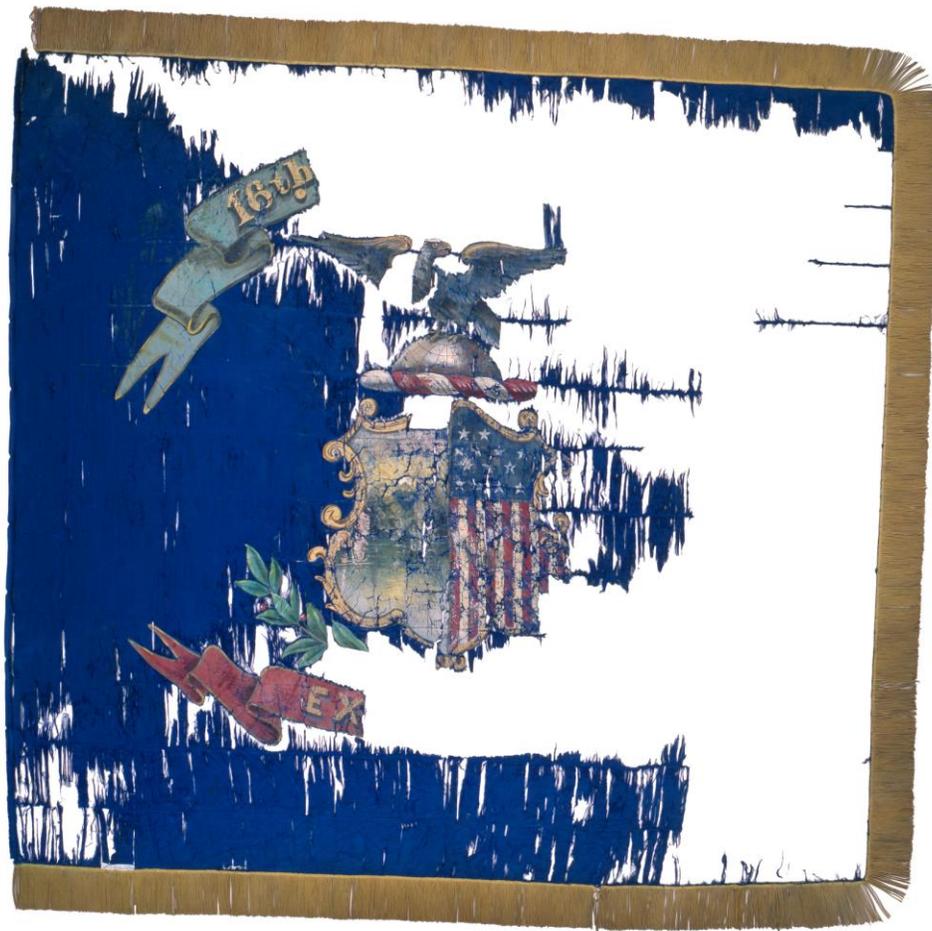
What slogan appears on the flag and why is it on the flag?

Who carried this flag on August 30, 1862?

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Regimental Color, 16th New York Volunteers

When the Civil War started in April 1861, Eliza Howland and her husband Joseph had just settled in at their country estate in present-day Beacon, New York. After her husband joined the 16th New York Volunteers, Eliza Howland asked Tiffany & Co. to make special flags for her husband's regiment.

On June 26, 1861, the 16th New York Volunteers received this Tiffany & Co. regimental color from Robert Hone, a New York City lawyer, on behalf of Eliza Howland. The regiment graciously accepted the flag and pledged to defend the banner in Howland's honor.

At Gaines' Mill, Virginia, June 27, 1862, after three color bearers were wounded, Private John Moffitt heroically carried the flag until wounded himself to earn the Medal of Honor.

Who made this flag and who commissioned the maker?

Who earned the Medal of Honor and why?

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Regimental Color, 9th New York Volunteers

On June 5, 1861, the 9th New York Volunteers marched to William and Julia Moffat's residence on Fifth Avenue in New York City where Reverend F.S. Wiley, on Mrs. Moffat's behalf, presented this silk regimental color to the men. The regiment's motto, "Toujours Pret," or "Always Ready," was painted to the front and back of the flag. The once-vibrant red flag has significantly faded due to excessive exposure to light and some parts are missing.

The 9th New York Volunteers carried this flag for two years, including September 17, 1862, at Sharpsburg, Maryland, during the Battle of Antietam. After the war, veterans from the 9th New York Volunteers kept the flag. By 1899, nearly 35 years after the war ended, the surviving veterans decided to give the flags to the state. On April 20, 1899, 25 veterans from the 9th New York Volunteers arrived in Albany, walked into the Capitol, and presented the flag to Governor and Spanish American War veteran Theodore Roosevelt.

What motto appears on the flag and what does it mean?

Who did the veterans give the flag to and what war did he serve in?

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Regimental Color, 88th New York Volunteers

In the autumn of 1862, Tiffany & Co. of New York City produced green regimental colors, known as “Irish Colors,” for each New York regiment in the “Irish Brigade,” including this flag for the 88th New York Volunteers. On December 15, 1862, the New York regiments received the prized flags during a presentation ceremony shortly after the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia. In early 1863, the beautiful banner returned to New York and served as a vital recruitment tool in the city’s Irish-born community.

This green silk “Irish Color” presented to the 88th New York Volunteers originally featured the regiment’s battles from 1862, Irish symbols, and a presentation inscription. Only a portion of these original design features remain today.

What inscriptions appear on this flag and why?

Why is the flag green and how was the flag used?

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General Guide Flag, 144th New York Volunteers

On September 26, 1862, at Camp Delaware, Delhi, New York, the 144th New York Volunteers received several flags, including this silk general guide flag, from the “ladies of Delaware County.”

The flag includes only 24 white, embroidered stars from the original 34-star pattern and the regiment’s designation, “144 N.Y.S.V.” embroidered in white with blue shadow effects. The silk fabric and embroidery yarns are greatly damaged. Select soldiers, called general guides, carried this small flag by inserting the bottom of the staff, turned to a smaller diameter, into the end of their guns.

Who presented this flag to the regiment?

Who carried this type of flag and how?

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