

1863: Loyal till death

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, “1863: Loyal till death.” The exhibition presents inspirational flags provided by, and representing, local communities; chronicles the fearless color bearers; and spotlights the men and women responsible for the flags. With this plan students will learn about the different types of flags used during the Civil War and their designs, including a unique flag with the inscription, “Loyal till death.,” from which the exhibition draws its name. The students will also discover the prevailing attitudes expressed by the soldiers and their dedicated patrons.

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.

Many banners were presented to regiments with great ceremony. Such flags were often 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.

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. Since 2000, textile conservators from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) have inventoried all of the flags, conserved over 25% of the entire collection, including nearly half of the Civil War flags, and placed the preserved flags 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, "1863: Loyal Till Death," opened in July 2013 and chronicles 1863, a key turning point during the Civil War.

Student Materials and Resources

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

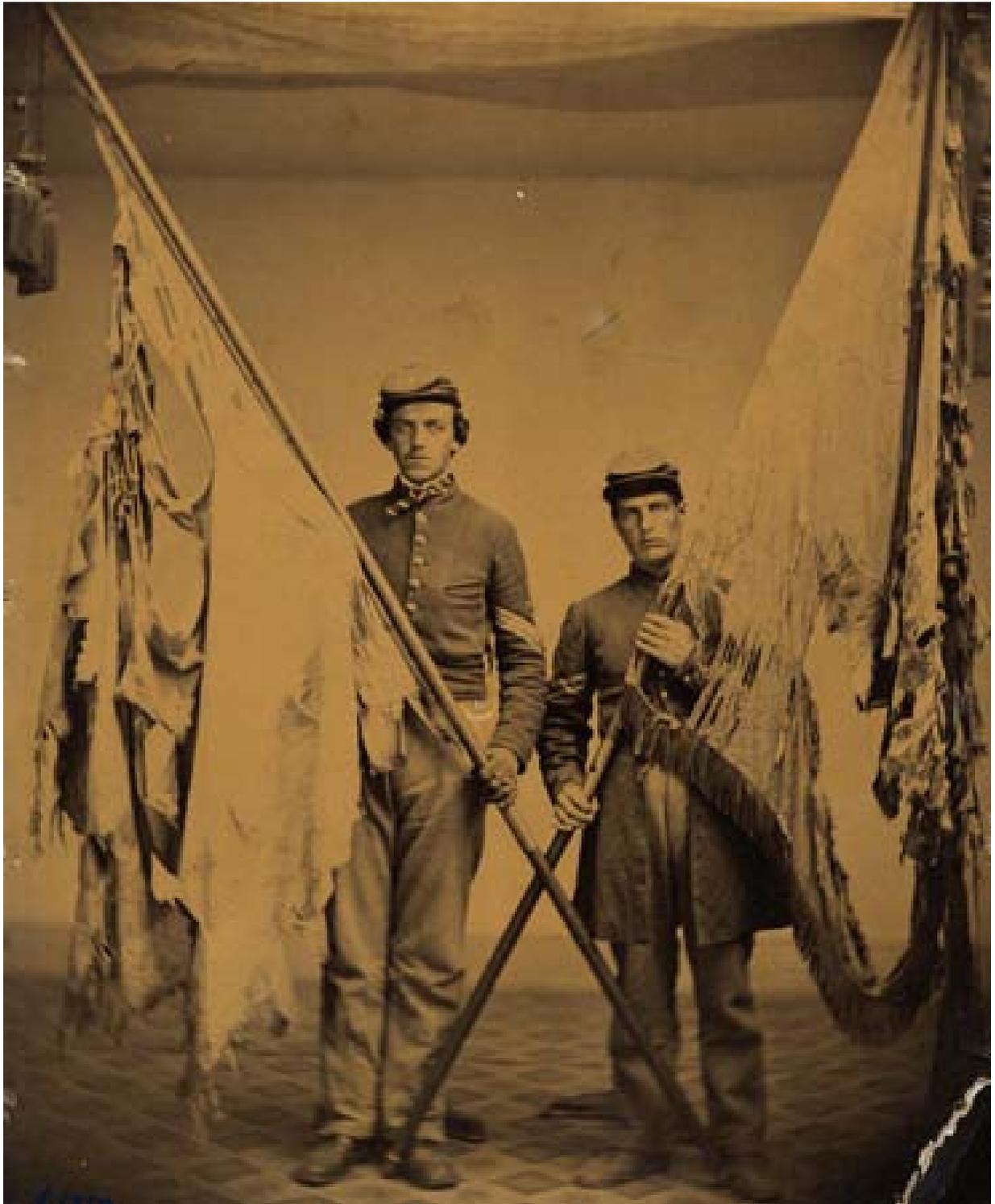
Student Reading: *Emblems of Devotion – New York State’s Civil War Battle Flags*

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.



Sergeant John Lyon (left) and Corporal Melvin Tucker (right), 16th New York Volunteers, with the regiment's war-torn battle flags, c. 1864. Tucker holds a Tiffany & Co. regimental color received from Eliza Woolsey Howland in June 1861. These bullet-riddled flags 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

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.



National Color, 27th New York Volunteers

In April 1861, one hundred men left Angelica, Allegany County, for Elmira, New York, to eventually muster into service with the 27th New York Volunteers. En route, the men stopped at Villa Belvidere, home of siblings Richard and Elizabeth Church in Belvidere, New York. There, Elizabeth Church, great granddaughter of noted Revolutionary War patriot Philip Schuyler, presented the men with this silk national color.

The 27th New York Volunteers proudly carried the flag into battle for two years. During the Battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia, May 1863, enemy fire tore a star from the flag's canton. The color bearer, Sergeant Arch Van Ness, picked up the star and later donated it to New York State when the regiment returned home and turned in the flag to state officials.

Who provided this flag to the regiment and what was her connection to the Revolutionary War?

What happened to the flag at Chancellorsville, Virginia?



Guidon, 11th Independent Battery, New York Volunteers

The 11th Independent Battery, New York Volunteers, or “Havelock Battery,” formed in January 1862 in Albany, New York, with support from the local Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The “Havelock Battery,” named for British General Sir Henry Havelock, served with distinction most notably in August and September 1862 during the Second Bull Run Campaign, Virginia, and in May 1863 at Chancellorsville, Virginia.

During the winter of 1863–1864, many soldiers from the battery reenlisted and returned home to the Albany area for rest. This is when the veterans most likely commissioned the additions to the flag: the crossed cannons, the symbol for artillery, with the battery’s unofficial designation, “11th. N.Y. VETERANS,” appliquéd in the canton and the battle honors commemorating the battery’s service from August 1862–December 1863 painted on the stripes.

What additions appear on the flag and why were they added to the flag?

What local organization helped organize the battery?



National Color, 91st New York Volunteers

On December 21, 1861, as the 91st New York Volunteers prepared to leave Albany, New York, for service during the war, the regiment assembled outside Alderman John W. Harcourt's residence where Mrs. Harcourt presented the home town regiment with this national color.

During the first assault at Port Hudson, Louisiana, May 27, 1863, enemy fire reportedly tore the flag and severed the top of its staff. Corporal Patrick Garrity retrieved the fragment and gave the broken top to the colonel who delivered it to Mrs. Harcourt. During the second assault on Port Hudson, June 14, 1863, color bearer Private Samuel Townsend, a former Confederate soldier, received several gunshot wounds, including one reportedly from his brother, a soldier with an Alabama regiment. Townsend died from his wounds and died on August 1, 1863.

In July 1864, when the regiment returned home for rest, the veterans presented the damaged flag and its staff to Mrs. Harcourt who turned the flag over to state authorities soon thereafter.

Who provided this flag to the regiment?

When the regiment returned home in 1864, what did they do with the flag?



Standard, 9th Cavalry, New York Volunteers

On March 7, 1863, at Pleasanton's Landing along the Aquia Creek in Virginia, Congressman and future Governor Reuben Fenton presented this standard to the 9th Cavalry on behalf of the residents of Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties, the unit's home. The flag was made by Tiffany & Co. of New York City and cost \$ 110.00, a sum raised by Fenton and local residents. The unit carried the flag until July 1864, including at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1–3, 1863.

The flag's blue silk fabric is badly damaged, but still retains the embroidered State Coat of Arms, and the unit identification. Standards, similar to regimental colors but smaller in size, were used by cavalry units mounted on horseback.

Who presented the flag to the unit and who paid for it?

What emblem appears on the flag?



Regimental Color, 119th New York Volunteers

On September 5, 1862, the 119th New York Volunteers assembled outside Dr. Charles Brueninghausen's residence in New York City to receive the regimental color seen here. Made by Ball, Black & Company of New York City, the embroidered color featured the State Arms and the inscription, "5th SENATORIAL DISTRICT," for the unit's political home territory in New York City.

On July 1, 1863, during the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, two color bearers from the 119th New York Volunteers were killed in action and a Confederate regiment, the 13th Georgia Infantry, captured this flag.

The 13th Georgia kept the flag until the late 19th century when surviving veterans offered the flag to Benjamin Willis, a veteran who served with the 119th New York Volunteers at Gettysburg. Willis received the flag from the Georgia veterans, and in 1967, Willis's daughter, Porta Willis Fitzgerald, turned the cherished flag over to state authorities.

What nickname did the regiment add to the flag and why?

What happened to the flag during the Battle of Gettysburg?



Regimentsal Color, 146th New York Volunteers

Organized in 1862 in Rome, Oneida County, New York, the 146th New York Volunteers was known as the "Halleck Infantry" after Oneida County native Major General Henry Halleck. The regiment customized their regimentsal color by painting their nickname on it. The blue silk flag, featuring the Arms of the United States, accompanied the 146th New York Volunteers from the unit's first engagement at Fredericksburg, Virginia, December 1862, through Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863.

The 146th New York Volunteers received a new flag in late October 1863 and soon thereafter sent this regimentsal color to state officials for deposit in the New York State Battle Flag Collection. On November 1, 1863, Colonel David Jenkins expressed his emotions regarding the flag,

To some it may bring a tear of remembrance for the brave dead who have fallen in its defense. It will never cause a cheek to blush with shame.

What did the regiment do to personalize the flag?

How did Colonel Jenkins feel about this flag?



Battery Flag, 13th Independent Battery, New York Volunteers

The 13th Independent Battery organized in New York City in October 1861. The battery received this blue silk flag in May 1862 while in camp at Franklin, Virginia. The flag was made by Mary Wheeler, a cousin of first lieutenant, later captain, William Wheeler.

When Wheeler received the flag, the grateful lieutenant wrote his cousin Mary,

*You will not regret one toilsome hour spent over that beautiful work; indeed not one stitch can be looked upon as taken in vain . . .
.. The motto is exactly what I would have chosen if I had been wise enough to think of it, 'Loyal till Death' . . .*

The flag features an eagle in flight with a red ribbon flowing from its beak. The ribbon includes New York State's motto, "EXCELSIOR." The unique and inspirational motto, "Loyal till death.," is embroidered below. The battle honors, added later, commemorate the battery's service throughout 1862 and 1863 including at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1–3, 1863.

Who made this flag and how is it unique or different than other flags?

How did William Wheeler feel about the flag?



National Color, 64th New York Volunteers

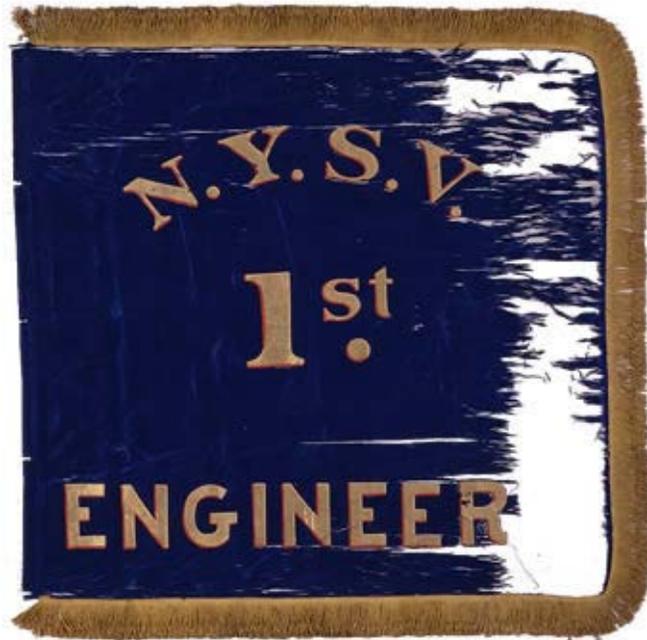
The 64th New York Volunteers formed in December 1861 with men mostly from Cattaraugus County and others from Allegany, Tioga, and Tompkins counties. Known as the “First Cattaraugus Regiment,” the 64th New York Volunteers received this national color from the Cattaraugus County Board of Supervisors. The silk flag includes the unit’s name in gold-colored paint.

The 64th New York Volunteers first used this flag during the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1–3, 1863. During that battle Corporals Thomas Zibble and Albert Empy were wounded while carrying this flag.

At some point during the flag’s use during the war, a skilled seamstress repaired damage to the upper left corner of the flag. The seamstress stitched a piece of lighter blue silk cloth to replace the original upper left corner of the flag.

Who provided the flag to the regiment?

Who repaired the flag and how was the repair made?



Flank Marker, 1st Engineers, New York Volunteers

Edward Serrell, an engineer who moved with his family from England to New York City in 1831, organized the 1st Engineers, or “Serrell’s Engineers,” in the fall of 1861. Serrell recruited experienced mechanics in New York City, Brooklyn, and throughout the state to form the regiment. Its responsibilities included constructing fortifications, removing obstacles on battlefields and roadways, and building obstructions. Known as “sappers” or “miners,” engineers also dug trenches, or “saps,” and built floating pontoon boat bridges.

“Serrell’s Engineers” primarily served along the Atlantic coast, including during the bombardment of Fort Pulaski, Georgia, on May 10–11, 1862, and at Charleston, South Carolina, July 10–September 6, 1863.

This silk flank marker, used to mark the extreme right and left sides of a regiment in formation, includes a painted inscription and yellow, silk fringe.

What special jobs did engineers do during the Civil War?

What kind of flag is this and how was it used?



National Color, 48th New York Volunteers

Colonel James Perry, pastor at the Pacific Street Methodist-Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, New York, organized the 48th New York Volunteers at Fort Hamilton in New York City's harbor during the summer of 1861.

In early October 1861, the regiment arrived at Annapolis, Maryland, the capital city of a state where citizens supported both the Union and the Confederacy. The regiment received this silk national color on October 16, 1861, at St. John's College in Annapolis from Maryland Governor Thomas Hicks. The flag presentation ceremony and the flag itself provided Governor Hicks with the political opportunity to publicly show his devotion to the Union.

During the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, July 18, 1863, at least two color bearers were killed in action, Corporal Alonzo Hilleker and Corporal Sidney Wadhanis.

Who gave the flag to the regiment and where did the presentation take place?

Why was this flag important to Governor Hicks?