

# FLAGS ALONG THE RIO GRANDE

*While the colors were intended to help identify regiments in the chaos of the battlefield, they also embodied the soldiers' pride in their state and their cause. Each regiment had a "color guard" made up of two "color bearers" with the rank of sergeant, and eight armed corporals whose sole duty in battle was to protect the flags. The soldiers selected for this prestigious duty were usually the most distinguished and courageous in their regiment. In battle, each side often targeted the other's color guard, hoping to break the morale of the enemy or even capture their flags. It was considered a great dishonor to allow one's colors to fall into enemy hands, and soldiers went to great lengths to prevent it. In July 1863, at Gettysburg, the color guard of the 16th Maine Infantry tore their silk colors into small pieces and stuffed them into their pockets before they were overwhelmed by Confederate forces. Likewise, capturing the flag of an enemy unit was a glorious feat of arms. Still noticeable today on many surviving Civil War flags is the blood of the soldiers who carried them, a poignant reminder of the brave men who were severely wounded or sacrificed their lives on Civil War battlefields.*

## U.S. NATIONAL FLAG



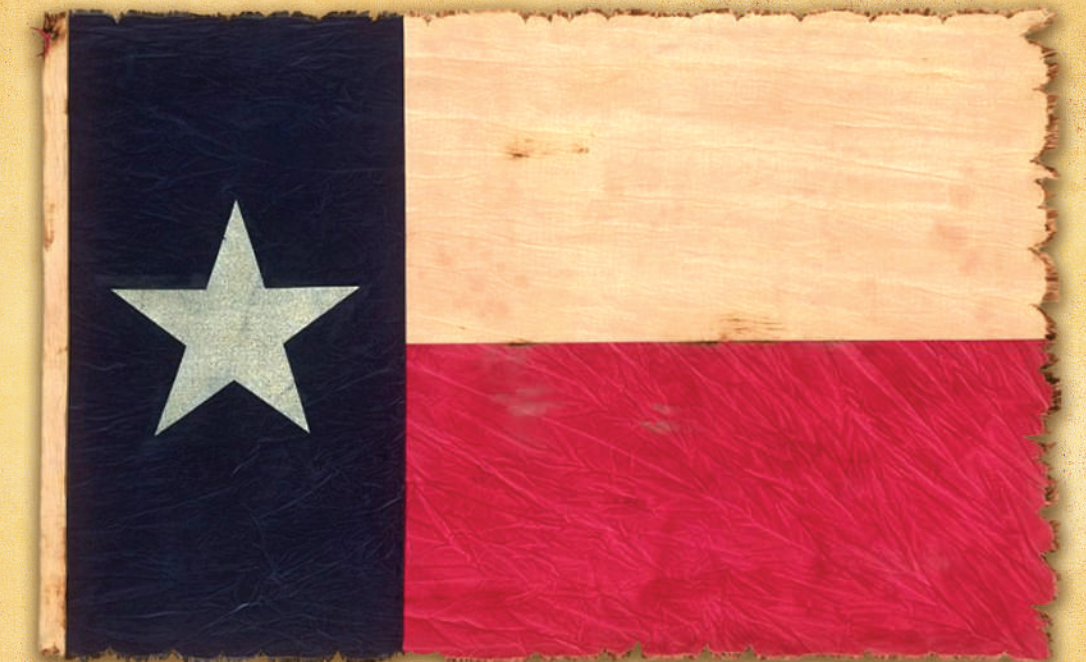
1861 regulations permitted each infantry regiment to carry a national flag, plus another identifying the regiment. These flags were made of silk or cotton, each nearly 6 feet square. Early in the war, many flags were carefully crafted by groups of patriotic women and presented at grand ceremonies.

## CONFEDERATE NATIONAL FLAG (STARS & BARS)



The first flag of the Confederacy, the "stars and bars", which the women of many towns across the South lovingly sewed and presented to volunteer companies leaving for the war. Based on the original US flag, it was hard to distinguish from the colors carried by Federal troops. A new battle flag, or guidon, was designed for army units. The field was red to be distinctive and easily visible from a distance or in low light, with a blue St. Andrew's cross in the center, lined with a star for each Confederate state. Sadly, in the 20th century, the flag became associated with bigoted groups, but to the men who originally fought under it, it was an inspirational symbol of liberty and hope.

## STATE OF TEXAS



The Lone Star Flag was adopted by the Texas Congress in 1839: "[T]he national flag of Texas shall consist of a blue perpendicular stripe of the width of one third of the whole length of the flag, with a white star of five points in the center thereof, and two horizontal stripes of equal breadth, the upper stripe white, the lower red, of the length of two thirds of the whole length of the flag." The Lone Star Flag was the legal national and state flag from January 25, 1839, to September 1, 1879.

## IMPERIAL MEXICO



In 1862, French Emperor Napoleon III maneuvered to establish a client state in Mexico, and eventually installed Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, as Emperor of Mexico. Stiff Mexican resistance caused Napoleon III to order French withdrawal in 1867, a decision strongly encouraged by a United States. Earlier, during the Civil War, US Secretary of State William Henry Seward followed a more cautious policy that attempted to keep relations with France harmonious and prevent French assistance to the Confederacy.

## REPUBLIC OF MEXICO



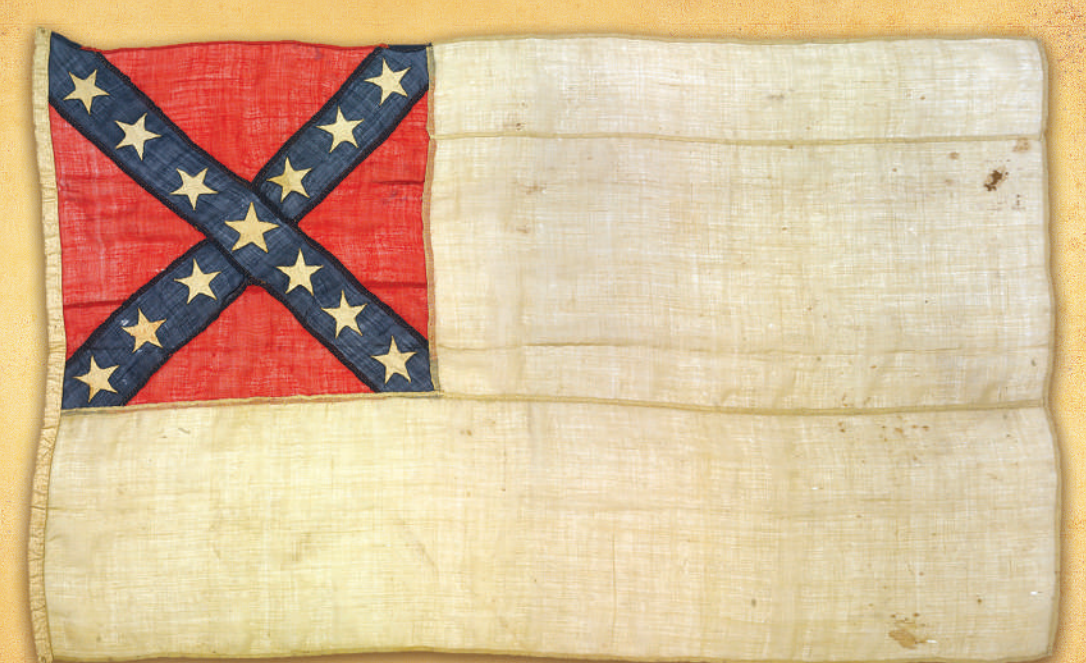
In 1857, Mexico became embroiled in a civil war that pitted the forces of Liberal reformist Benito Juárez against Conservatives led by Félix Zuloaga. The United States recognized the Juárez government in 1859, however, accumulated foreign debt destabilized that regime. With no other options, Juárez suspended payments on Mexico's debt. In response, the Spanish, French, and British governments agreed to intervene in Mexico. Napoleon III was interested in reviving his uncle's global ambitions. French forces eventually captured Mexico City and Napoleon III invited Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, to become Emperor of Mexico. The end of the American Civil War in 1865 coincided with the beginnings of success for Juárez's forces against Maximilian's. On January 31, 1866, Napoleon III ordered the withdrawal of French troops. Maximilian refused to surrender; he was executed by firing squad on June 19 1867.

## 84<sup>TH</sup> REGIMENT U.S. COLORED INFANTRY



Early in 1863, Abraham Lincoln observed, "The colored population is the great available yet unveiled of force for restoring the Union." Two months later, the War Department issued General Order #143 sanctioning the creation of the United States Colored Troops. In April of 1864 the 84th Regiment of U.S. Colored Infantry was formed from the Louisiana-based 12th Corps d'Afrique, which earlier was the all-black Louisiana Native Guard created by Major General Benjamin F. Butler in 1862. In 1863 and 1864, the regiment and its antecedents served exclusively in Louisiana at Port Hudson, Pleasant Hill, Monsura, and Bayou de Glaise. In May 1865, they arrived at Brazos Santiago, Texas as part of the 25th Corps. There they joined the 62nd, Regiment of U.S. Colored Infantry for service at Palmito Ranch and White's Ranch. Later in 1865, the 62nd and 84th Regiments were relieved, Arriving from City Point, Virginia during the siege of Richmond and Petersburg, the 116th and 117th Regiments of U.S. Colored Infantry garrisoned Forts Brown, Ringgold, McIntosh, and Duncan on the Rio Grande. The 117th U.S. Colored Infantry left the Rio Grande Valley in July 1867.

## 2<sup>ND</sup> NATIONAL FLAG "THE STAINLESS BANNER"



Pictured above is the regimental flag of the 33rd Texas Cavalry headed by Col. Santos Benavides. Benavides became the highest ranking Tejano to serve the Confederacy. This regiment achieved its greatest triumph on March 19, 1864 when it drove back more than two hundred Union soldiers from Laredo. It also participated in the last land battle of the Civil War at Palmito Ranch near Brownsville on May 13, 1865.

## 34<sup>TH</sup> REGIMENT OF INDIANA VOLUNTEERS



Organized in September of 1861, the Thirty-Fourth Regiment of Indiana Volunteers served in Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and ultimately in Texas at the last battle of the Civil War at Palmetto (known today at Palmito) Ranch where Private John Jefferson Williams earned the sad distinction of becoming the final battlefield fatality in American's bloodiest war. This is a reconstruction of the tattered hand-painted blue silk original colors of the Thirty-Fourth Regiment of Indiana Volunteers housed at the Indiana War Memorial in Indianapolis. Each thousand-man regiment was comprised of ten companies, lettered A-K, of one hundred men each. Union regimental flags were emblazoned with an eagle in a standardized format but were further distinguished by each regiment with their unique battle honors.

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