

**BATTLE COLORS HAD SPECIAL** significance for Civil War soldiers. In an era without radio or field telephone, the regimental colors served as a guide and rallying point in the noise, smoke, and general confusion of battle. These flags were also a powerful symbol of the unit itself and the state and nation it served. Regimental flags and the color sergeants who carried them were the focal point of a unit's esprit de corps; they were also targets in combat. If a flag bearer fell, a comrade would spring to his place and continue on, knowing the great risk to himself and the men who followed him. Few non-soldiers can fathom the deep emotional significance attached to these flags.

The Twenty-Eighth Virginia Infantry Regiment's battle flag was captured during Pickett's charge at the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 3, 1863, the encounter known as the high tide of the Confederacy. The flag bears only a few stains and tears, perhaps because it had been newly put into service or perhaps by luck alone. Some 48 by 45 inches in size and made of red wool bunting, it has 13 white cotton stars, one for each of the Confederate States of America plus Kentucky and Missouri, sewn onto the blue St. Andrew's cross (also known as a Greek cross or saltier).

After the Civil War ended in 1865, intense shared wartime experiences led veterans to participate in elaborate, often multiday reunions. On the fiftieth anniversary of the war's end, veterans attending the First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment's reunion in Excelsior donned an elaborate ribbon with gold braid. In the celluloid medallion below the gilt scrollwork pin is the cloverleaf insignia of the Second Army Corp's Second Division, in which the First Minnesota fought.

In recent months, Virginians have called for the Minnesota Historical Society to return the flag. For the remarkable tale of how the flag came into the MHS collections, turn to the article beginning on page 58.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER LATNER/MHS



**FRONT COVER:** Small in stature, soft-spoken, and a gentleman of firm resolve, Private Marshall Sherman visited St. Paul photographer Joel Whitney's studio to pose in front of the Twenty-Eighth Virginia Regiment's flag that he had seized in hand-to-hand combat at the Battle of Gettysburg. A member of Company C of the famed First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, Sherman reenlisted for service in 1864, lost his left leg in combat, and reportedly never talked about capturing the Virginia colors. Some three decades later friends displayed this flag and the First Minnesota's at his funeral.





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