

# “OH, COULD THEY BUT SPEAK...”

*The history and importance of Michigan's Civil War Battle Flags*

## GLOSSARY

*Here are some common terms you'll run across when reading about and studying Michigan's Civil War battle flags.*

**ARMY** A military formation composed of at least two corps (see below) and other attached units. Northern armies were usually named after rivers (Army of the Potomac, Army of the Cumberland, etc.) while Confederate armies were named for geographic areas (Army of Northern Virginia, Army of Tennessee, etc.)

**BATTALION** A unit of troops consisting of between two and nine companies. For purposes of field command, infantry regiments were referred to as battalions when officers issued commands.

**BATTERY** The usual name for a company of artillery, consisting of approximately one hundred soldiers and four or six cannons, commanded by a captain. Batteries were subdivided into two-gun sections.

**BATTLE HONORS** The names of the battles or engagements in which the unit fought. Often painted or sewn onto the unit's flag or displayed on attached banners.

**COLOR** In general, the flag of a military unit. Civil War-period literature often used the term "colors" to indicate either one or more flags. The term "stand of colors" was also used interchangeably to mean one or more flags.

**COMPANY** A unit of soldiers consisting of approximately one hundred officers and men, commanded by a captain.

**CORD** A length of two to four plied silk cords connecting two decorative tassels. The midpoint of the cord is usually tied around the finial base of the staff.

**CORPS** A formation consisting of two or more divisions (see below). Federal corps averaged three divisions plus attached artillery and cavalry units. A major-general was the usual officer commanding a corps, although Southern corps were usually led by lieutenant-generals.

**DIVISION** A formation of troops consisting of two or more brigades. Federal divisions usually contained three brigades, while Confederate divisions numbered up to six brigades. Major-generals or brigadier-generals commanded divisions.

**FIELD** The principal area of a flag, prior to any additions or embellishments. This is usually made up of a single fabric or several joined fabrics.

**FINIAL** The decorative ornament found on the top end of the staff. Federal Civil War colors usually contained a spearpoint or eagle as a finial device. The finial was normally made of metal.

**FLY** The length of the flag measured from the outer pole sleeve to the free edge. Also understood as the outer half of the flag.

**FRINGE** A woven band with decorative ends extending from one side. This serves as decoration and helps to accentuate the body and drape of the unfurled flag by weighting the light edges of the silk.

**GUIDON** The term applied to the type of flag carried by an artillery or cavalry company. Guidons were usually swallow-tailed in appearance, according to army regulations.

**MUSTER IN/OUT** The formal procedure of swearing recruits into or out of the government service. State volunteers first took an oath to defend their state, then were sworn into national service.

**NATIONAL** The term applied to any flag (color, regimental, or standard) displaying the national arms or a stars and stripes color which does not have any state emblems added.

**REGIMENT** A unit formed of an exact number of companies. Ten companies comprised an infantry regiment, while cavalry and artillery regiments consisted of twelve companies. A colonel was the field commander of a regiment.

**REGIMENTAL** The term applied to a flag consisting of a mono-color field with either national or state symbols added for identification.

**SLEEVE** The part of the flag usually reinforced and doubled over, through which the staff is slipped prior to attachment. The reinforcement is referred to as the "inner sleeve" while the doubled flag fabric is referred to as the "outer sleeve."

**STAFF** The wooden pole on which any type of military flag is attached. In specific Civil War military usage, the infantry staffs were termed "pikes" while cavalry regiments carried flags mounted on "lances."

**STANDARD** The type of flag carried by a cavalry regiment. It is smaller than the infantry and artillery colors.

**TASSELS** Two pendant ornaments connected by the cord. These are often made up of a tassel head and several layers of self-loop plied free ends.