



1ST MICHIGAN COLORED INFANTRY/ 102ND UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS



Free and Equal

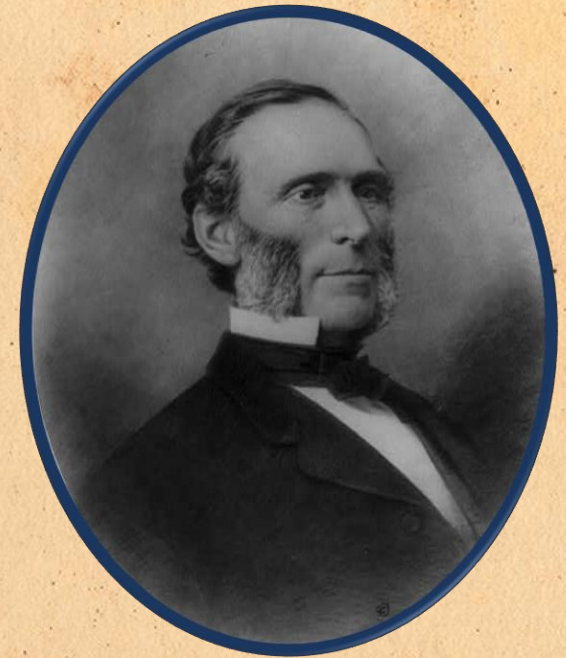
All Men are Born Free and Equal to Realize Which We Fight

Motto on the Presentation Flag

Henry Barnes, the editor of the *Detroit Advertiser & Tribune*, was determined to get authorization to raise a colored regiment for the State of Michigan. This, however, was a difficult task. The Michigan Constitution of 1850 specified that the militia for the state was composed of “able bodied white male citizens between the age of eighteen and forty-five years.”¹ In January of 1862, when the Michigan Legislature passed Public Act 16 of 1862 reorganizing Michigan's military, they did not make any provisions for recruiting colored regiments.²

Henry Barnes was a well-known Detroitier who had served a term in the State Senate before the outbreak of the Civil War. He started his career working for the *Detroit Free Press* and also became one of the founding members of the *Detroit Tribune*.³ The name later changed to the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* when the paper merged with *The Detroit Advertiser*. In addition to reporting on the war and events in Detroit and around the nation, Barnes used his paper to promote enlisting African American soldiers.⁴

In 1863, Barnes approached Michigan's Governor, Austin Blair, for permission to organize a colored regiment.⁵ Austin Blair had a long history of support for the African American community. While serving in the Michigan House of Representatives in the 1840's he was on the Judiciary Committee and wrote a report advocating for “the



Governor Austin Blair





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extension of the right of suffrage to colored persons.”⁶ Earlier in the war, Blair had tried enlisting colored troops but had been deterred by the War Department. The government did not accept colored troops until June of 1862. Because the war department denied the troops previously, Blair believed that he was not authorized to grant permission and denied Barnes’ request.⁷ Barnes was not deterred by Blair’s response and and appealed directly to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. A few months later, Stanton sent orders to Austin Blair:

WAR DEPARTMENT
Washington, July 24, 1863.

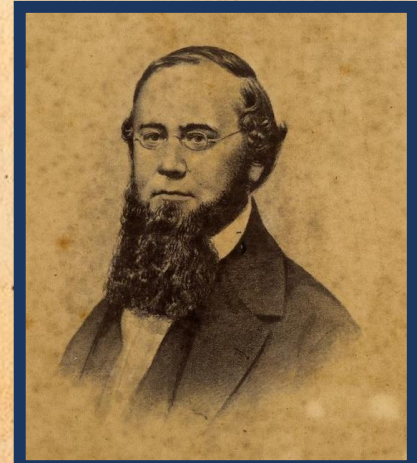
GOVERNOR, H. Barnes, Esq., of Detroit, had applied to this department for authority to raise a regiment of colored troops in your State. The department is very anxious that such regiments should be raised, and authorizes

you to raise them by volunteering under regulations of the department, a copy of which is submitted to you by the chief of the bureau, and it would be gratifying if you would give such authority to Mr. Barnes. It seems to me that there had been some misunderstanding upon this subject, and I am informed that you were under the impression that the department would not authorize it. Until suitable arrangements could be made for the organization of the bureau, it was not deemed advisable to raise such troops, but the organization of colored troops is now a distinct bureau in the department, and is fully recognized as

any other branch of the military service, and every encouragement is given by the department to the raising of such troops.

Yours truly,
EDWIN M. STANTON
Secretary of War⁸

On August 12, 1863, Michigan Adjutant General, John Robertson, informed Barnes that he was authorized to raise a colored regiment:



Secretary of War
Edwin Stanton

Sir – The Governor of this State has been requested by the Secretary of War, in a letter under date of 24th ultimo, to give you authority to raise a regiment of colored troops in this State. I am instructed by the Governor to inform you that you are fully authorized and empowered to raise and organize such a regiment, under the instructions from the War Department, which are herewith enclosed, and under such restrictions as the Governor may deem proper to enjoin you.⁹

A separate letter from C. W. Foster, Assistant Adjutant General for the War Department written to Austin Blair, outlines some of the restrictions for this new regiment:





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Sir – I am instructed by the Secretary of War to inform you that you are hereby authorized to raise one regiment of infantry to be composed of colored men, to be mustered into the United State service for three years, or during the war. To these troops no bounties will be paid. They will receive ten dollars per month and one ration per day, three dollars of which may be in clothing.¹⁰

The letter also outlined a timetable for the appointment of officers and the terms of pay. It is noteworthy that the pay was lower than that for soldiers in white regiments. Privates in other infantry regiments were typically paid thirteen dollars a month. Soldiers in colored regiments were to be paid ten dollars a month with a three-dollar deduction for clothing.¹¹ Additionally, these men were not eligible for the substantial enlistment bonuses their fellow soldiers were receiving. One other regulation for the regiment required all officers of the regiment to be white. Colored soldiers could be noncommissioned officers but the highest rank they could achieve was Sergeant Major.¹²

Recruitment for the First Michigan Colored Infantry Regiment began August 12, 1863. The appointed officers came from multiple states including Ohio, Illinois, New York, Georgia, and South Carolina. Michigan communities were also represented in the officer ranks as there were officers from Marshall, Grand Rapids, Alpena, Bath, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Detroit.¹³



Historical Marker located at the site of Camp Ward

The camp for the regiment, known as Camp Ward, was located on land that was originally a farm owned by A. Campau and used as a training site for the Fifth Michigan Cavalry. This location was east of Elmwood cemetery between Clinton Street and Cohan Streets. The camp was under the direction of Captain Orson W. Bennet.¹⁴

While no picture of Camp Ward is known to exist, descriptions provide an idea of what the property looked like. The ground had good

drainage and several structures had been constructed including a Commissary store/Quartermasters department, guardhouse, sutlers shop, and several buildings for company quarters. There was no fence around the property, but the guardhouse provided a military feel.¹⁵ The buildings for housing the soldier were made of wood, had two stoves, and supplies necessary for cooking¹⁶ The kitchen was the only room to have a floor. The rest of the floors





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The Statewide Tour and Regimental Band

In December of 1863, the First Michigan Colored Infantry was furnished with instruments and formed a fifteen-member regimental band. The band contained several coronets, other brass instruments, cymbals, and two drums.¹⁷ Within a matter of weeks, they were being praised by newspapers for their playing ability.

Just a few days after the band was formed, about 250 men of the regiment began a tour through the state organized by Colonel Barnes. Barnes arranged the trip to show off the regiment, encourage recruitment, and to increase support for colored regiments. During this trip, the First Michigan Colored infantry visited Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Marshall, Kalamazoo, Dowagiac, Cassopolis, and Niles.¹⁸

At each location, the regiment was greeted by a crowd of people. They were typically fed a meal and the regiment performed maneuvers, and the band played. When the regiment reached Jackson, Governor Austin Blair addressed the group and Mrs. Sarah Blair helped provide the refreshments.¹⁹

Overall, the tour was a success. After their second stop in Ann Arbor, the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* stated, "Even thus far a manifest change is perceptible in the general tone of people relative to colored soldiers."²⁰ By the time the regiment reached Kalamazoo, they had added over 50 men to the ranks.²¹

were dirt. Forks and knives were kept in racks, plates on shelves, and tin-cups on nails on the wall. Provisions were stored in a larder and doled out for the daily rations the men received.²² Despite what the letter outlining the regulations for the regiment might suggest, the enlisted men were given regular army rations.²³ The *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* noted, "the whole appearance of the camp indicated neatness and order."²⁴

Articles from the time of organization also tell of the schedule followed at Camp Ward: 5:00 Reveille, 5:00-6:00 Policing, 6:00 Sick Call, 7:00 Breakfast, 8:00 Drill for noncommissioned officers, 9:00 Guard mounting, 10:00 Squad drill, 11:30 Recall, 12:00 Lunch, 2:00 Drill for noncommissioned officers, 5:00 Dress Parade, 8:00 Tattoo, 8:30 Taps.²⁵

During the early winter of 1864, cold weather began to impact the regiment. Camp Ward became nearly uninhabitable due to poor conditions. The *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* expressed their outrage at the poor conditions of the colored soldier's barracks.²⁶ *Negroes in Michigan During the Civil War*, a book written for the centennial of the war, summarizes the complaints from the Journal of the prosecution of the war. Criticisms of Camp Ward included: "no tar paper on the roof, leaky roofs, no flooring, crevices in the side of the buildings large enough to allow for snow drifts, sacks of straw in lieu of beds, and poor ventilation."²⁷

Dr. Charles S. Tripler, Surgeon U.S. Army, came to Camp Ward to inspect the situation in December after a request from Lieutenant





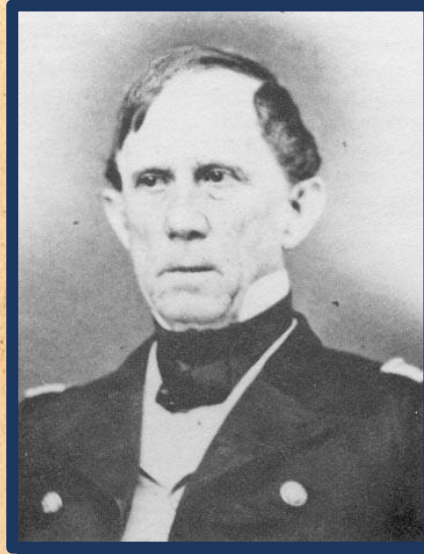
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Colonel B. H. Hill, Adjutant General in Detroit.

After completing an inspection Dr. Charles S. Tripler stated:

I should recommend all the buildings to be furnished with plated board floors, raised at least eight inches from the ground, the walls to be lined inside; all the joints battened. The roof to be covered with tarred paper and card (composition roof) more windows to be introduced, and such as may be opened at will for ventilation: more rooms to be built so that the men cannot be compelled to eat and sleep in the same apartments: decent and comfortable bunks to be put up and furnished with bedsack: one blanket to a man, is not sufficient to the climate in the winter season . . . in my opinion these quarters are utterly unfit for either officers or men.[28](#)



Charles S. Tripler,

Several days later, the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* repeated these complaints writing:

Whoever the shoe may fit, we have no hesitation in saying that the treatment of the Colored regiment in the matter of the barracks has been brutally inhuman. There is not a barn or pigsty in the whole city of Detroit that is not more fit for the habitation of a human-being than the quarters at Camp Ward.[29](#)

In mid-January 1864 the U.S. Army Quartermaster Department ordered Captain G. W. Lee to make the needed repairs to Camp Ward.[30](#) However, before the repairs were made twenty-five men had died and even more fell ill. Additionally, the poor conditions affected morale and most of the regiment's desertions (approximately 65% of the total) came during this time.[31](#)

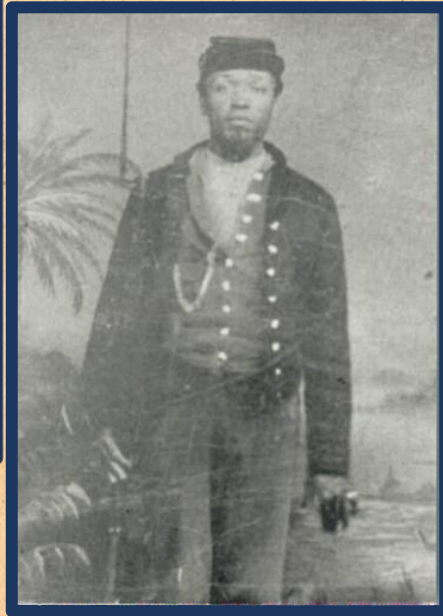
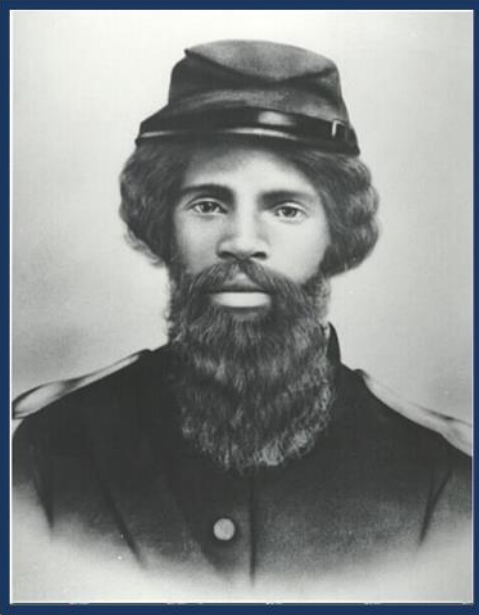
On January 5th, 1864, at 2:00 p.m. a large crowd gathered for a special ceremony at Camp Ward. The regiment was formed into a hollow square surrounding the attendees. John D. Richards presented the First Michigan Colored Infantry a regimental flag on behalf of the Colored Ladies Soldiers Aid Society of Detroit.[32](#)

During the ceremony, John Richards made these remarks:

Officers and soldiers of the First Colored Regiment Michigan Volunteers – The Ladies of the Colored Soldiers' Aid Society have requested me to present you this beautiful banner, as an evidence of their admiration of the part you have assumed in the stirring scenes of the day. It is a glorious thing to be an American soldier, but thrice glorious when you know that every blow you strike will help you unrivet the chains with which



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Few pictures were taken of colored regiments during the Civil War. Kinchen Artis (left) from company H, and Samuel Lett (right) of company G are the only confirmed pictures of men who served the First Michigan Colored Infantry. There are no known pictures of the entire regiment.

centuries of prejudice have bound us. You have hoped and prayed for the day when, under the good old flag of the Union, you could take up arms in its defense, and prove to the oppressors of our race, that although they have wronged us, still we could forgive — that although they had brutalized us as far as human agencies could accomplish it, we still have sufficient of manhood and love of liberty left to strike, when by striking we could be free — that although you have been degraded to the level of the brute, although your minds have been shrouded in the gloom of the artificial night, yet the idea that you were born to be free has survived it all [Cheers.] As this beautiful banner floats above our heads, my mind wanders to distant fields of strife upon which it shall proudly borne aloft, a witness of the bravery and daring of the only race among whom there are no traitors to the Union [Loud cheering.] Emblazoned on the folds of this banner is an eagle guarding the Stars and Stripes — that sacred emblem of American Liberty — and as I deliver it into your hands, I only hope and trust that you will exercise for it the same sleepless vigilance — the same matchless devotion — the same undying affection.

The contest between freedom and oppression is as old as the world, and has culminated on this continent in the great rebellion now raging in the land. You are called upon for the first time in our history, in common with other men, to play a part in this drama, and to assist in working out upon this





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The reverse (left) and obverse (right) of the regiment's presentation flag (SC-109-90) after conservation. Most of the painted area is missing because the paint made the silk more fragile and susceptible to loss. Fortunately, reporters described what the flag looked like when it was presented.



continent the destiny of the human family. God seems to be carrying the nation through the fire of purification, that they may exhibit to the world a hate free Republic, in which all men are truly free. Take this banner, then, and let it ever wave in honor above you, and when in the heat of the contest your eye shall see its eagle proudly borne aloft, let it nerve your hearts, and remember that upon you are turned the eyes of the world, and upon you rest the hope of humanity [Loud Cheering.]³³

Miss Betty Martin then handed the flag to Colonel Henry Barnes and the chaplain of the regiment, Mr. William Warring, presented a sword, sash and belt to Lieutenant Colonel William T. Bennett.³⁴

The flag presented that day was a regimental flag painted by Robert Hopkin of the firm Laible, Wright, & Hopkin. This flag was made of blue silk with a yellow fringe around the edge. Attached to the staff were tassels of red and white and blue. One side of the flag was painted with the State coat-of-arms, with the words "Presented by the Colored Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society of Detroit to the First Colored Regiment Michigan Infantry, 1863" within the scroll. On the other side was the representation of an eagle guarding the banner





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of the Union. This side bore the motto “All men are born free and equal, To realize which, we fight.” Before being presented to the regiment the flag was on display at Laible & Co’s salesrooms, on Jefferson Ave.³⁵ This flag is now in the Michigan State Battle Flag Collection and is designated SC-109-90.

After the flag presentation, the regiment remained in Detroit for several more months before they were sent to the field of battle. Local newspapers continued to comment on the state of the regiment and the suitability of the men. The two major newspapers in Detroit had different political leanings and likewise treated the regiment differently in their coverage. In February the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* reported on an incident involving a small group of men in a saloon. A month later the *Detroit Free Press* reported on a similar incident, but their coverage couldn’t have been more different.

The February 21 edition of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* reported that several men of the regiment had “become quite noisy” at a saloon refusing the order of their lieutenant who tried to calm the situation. The men causing the disturbance were disciplined by their officers and the paper made sure to mention that “The regiment as a general thing, is composed of good fighting material, are very peaceable, and if there be any among them that are not willing to learn military discipline, they should, for the good of the organization, be taught it in a summary manner.”³⁶

Sojourner Truth’s Visits to the First Michigan Colored Infantry



On November 23, 1863, noted activist Sojourner Truth visited the First Michigan Colored Infantry at Camp Ward. During her visit, she brought gifts for the men from the citizens of Battle Creek. She gave a speech and formally presented the gifts. Then she met individually with a number of the soldiers. The following day, Truth again addressed the regiment promising continued support.³⁷ In her autobiography, Truth prints a song she said she wrote for the First Michigan Colored Infantry.³⁸ This song modifies the lyrics to John Brown’s Song

(Battle Hymn of the Republic) and is similar to a song written for the First Arkansas Colored Regiment.³⁹





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By contrast, the *Detroit Free Press* on March 25, graphically described all the injuries sustained by white patrons resulting from a barroom fight. The paper used derogatory language to refer to the men of the regiment and paints them as a thieving mob.⁴⁰ This article shows some of the racism they faced, even while serving in uniform in a northern state.

According to John Robertson, Michigan's Adjutant General during the war, the regiment was officially mustered into service on February 17, 1864.⁴¹ An article in the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* states that the swearing in took place in March, but also explains that "a large number of the men were previously mustered, but this time the whole regiment was sworn in."⁴² Several days later, on March 28, the regiment with a total strength of 895 men were ordered to leave Camp Ward for Annapolis, Maryland.⁴³ The time had finally come for the men of the First Michigan Colored Infantry to head off to war and the men were thrilled with the news. The regiment was brought to formation and made their way down Jefferson Avenue to the Michigan Southern Railroad depot.⁴⁴

The regiment traveled first to Toledo, where they were scheduled to change trains. Upon reaching Toledo, they found that Quartermaster Lee failed to arrange the necessary transport and it would take several hours until new train cars could arrive from Cleveland. While the regiment waited, they held a dress parade for the citizens of Toledo. An article from the *Toledo Blade* reprinted in

the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* describes the reaction of the crowd, "A large part of our citizens were at the parade, and all appeared pleased with the proficiency of the men in the school of the soldier. With a few exceptions the men demeaned themselves in a very credible manner, showing that their drill-master, Lieut. Col. Bennett, had applied himself diligently to the work of preparing the regiment for usefulness in the field."⁴⁵ After the dress parade and once the new train cars had arrived, the First Michigan Colored Infantry began their journey toward Annapolis.

Upon reaching Annapolis, Colonel Barnes, resigned from his position in the regiment. The *Toledo Blade* explained this decision, "Col. Barnes is not a military man, and accepted a commission to organize the regiment for the reason that he was satisfied colored men were willing and felt it a duty to bear a part in the conflict which was to result in disenthraling millions of their brethren or in reducing themselves to bondage."⁴⁶ After Colonel Barnes resigned, Henry L. Chipman, a captain in the regular



Henry L. Chipman



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Henry Laurens Chipman

Henry Laurens Chipman was a civil engineer and banker before enlisting in the Second Michigan Infantry.⁴⁷ He served in several units in both the volunteer and regular army. The *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War, 1861-1865* describes his service:

“Entered service in Second Infantry, at organization as Lieutenant Colonel, for 3 years, age 38. Commissioned April 25, 1861. Mustered May 25, 1861. discharged June 24, 1861. Captain Eleventh U.S. Infantry May 14, 1861. Colonel First Michigan Colored Infantry April 15, 1864. Brevet Brigadier General Volunteers March 13, 1865, for gallant and meritorious services during the war. Colonel 102d U.S. Colored Infantry April 15, 1864. Mustered April 15, 1864. Mustered out at Charleston, S.C., Sept. 30, 1865. Transferred from Eleventh to Twenty-ninth U.S. Infantry Sept. 31, 1866. Transferred to Eleventh U. S. Infantry April 25, 1869. Major Third Infantry Oct. 29, 1873. Retired Feb. 1, 1887. Brevet Major May 3, 1863, for gallant and meritorious service in the battle of Chancellorsville, Va. Lieutenant Colonel July 2, 1863, for gallant and meritorious service in the battle of Gettysburg, Pa.”⁴⁸

army was commissioned colonel of the regiment.⁴⁹

On the same day that Henry Chipman was commissioned, the regiment became federalized and were renamed the 102nd United

States Colored Troops.⁵⁰ The redesignation was due to War Department General Order No. 143 which established a procedure for enlisting African Americans into the armed forces. The order created the Bureau of Colored Troops which designated African American regiments as United States Colored Troops (USCT).⁵¹

At the time the order went into effect in May of 1863, there had been some African American regiments operating under state designations and there were a few regiments stationed near New Orleans in the Department of the Gulf who were designated as Corps d’Afrique. All of these regiments were folded into the USCT.⁵² This different treatment of African American soldiers meant that the 102nd USCT was the only Michigan regiment to lose their state designation.

After their redesignation, the 102nd was sent to South Carolina where they performed picket duty near Hilton Head, St. Helena Island, Jenkins Island, Seabrook, and Spanish Wells before being sent to Port Royal. They spent a little over a month in Port Royal before being sent to Jacksonville, Florida.⁵³

On August 11, 1864, a portion of the men experienced their first encounter with the enemy in Baldwin, Florida. Several companies of the 102nd were on picket duty and tearing up railroads when a group of confederate calvary attacked. The men of the 102nd were able to easily scatter and repulse the enemy.⁵⁴

Several days later, the regiment set out on an expedition through





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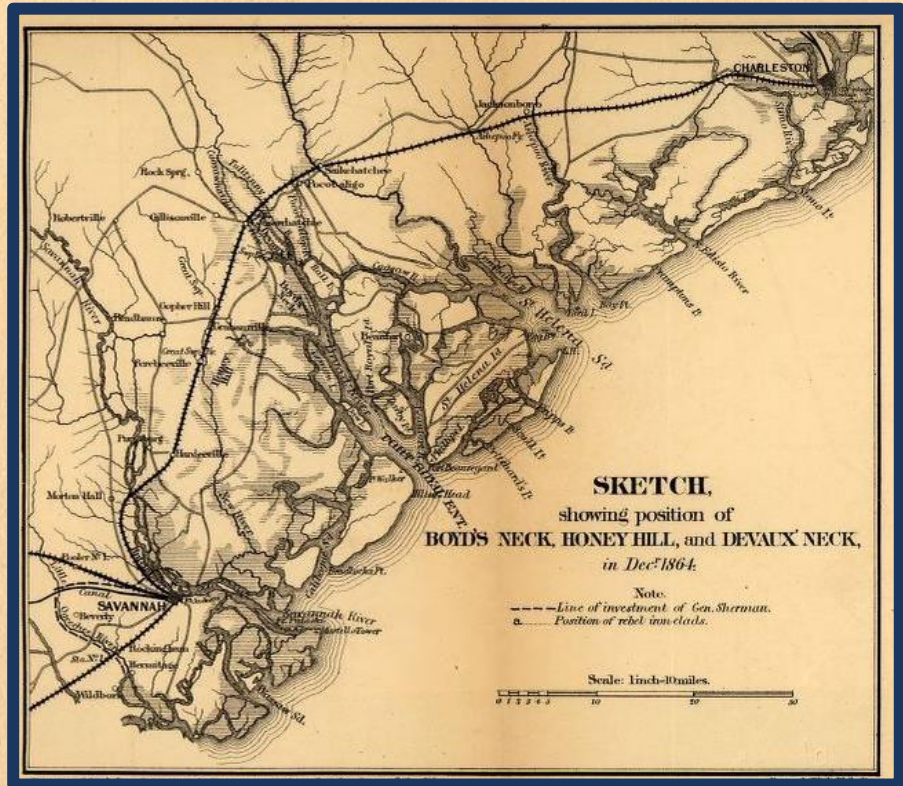


Florida and by the end of the month, they were back in South Carolina.⁵⁵

Over the next several months the regiment was split up and performed picket duty in multiple locations including Port Royal, Lady Island, and Coosa Island. During this time, the 102nd was headquartered at Beaufort, S.C. On November 28, three companies of the 102nd left Beaufort and joined General Foster at Boyd's Landing, to participate in action up the Broad River.⁵⁶

Poor weather and navigation problems delayed the 102nd and allowed Confederate troops to entrench at Honey Hill. The battle of Honey Hill began the morning of November 30 before the 102nd could arrive. The battle commenced with an exchange of artillery fire between Georgia troops and the Third New York Artillery. By noon, fierce fighting broke out and before the 102nd arrived, Union forces had fallen back. During their retreat, the Third New York Artillery was forced to abandon all but one of their cannons. Upon their arrival, the 102nd was tasked with retrieving the other cannons.⁵⁷

Men under the command of Lieutenant [Orson W. Bennett](#) rushed forward and hauled the cannons off by hand. Years later, Lieutenant Bennett was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at Honey Hill.⁵⁸ Following the battle, the entire 102nd received great praise for their actions. An unnamed correspondent, who was most likely an officer with the regiment, wrote about the



engagement, "In this affair the 102nd covered themselves in glory. It is acknowledged without a stint on all hands that our regiment maintained the steadfast line of battle and fought with the greatest determination of any troops on the ground."⁵⁹ After rescuing the cannons, the 102nd moved to Bull's Neck where they were likewise engaged. The same correspondent praised their actions in this



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Orson W. Bennett

Orson Bennett was born in Michigan, but was living in Iowa and enlisted in the First Iowa Volunteers at the beginning of the war. He was injured during the Battle of Wilson's creek and after his recovery, he enlisted in the Twelfth Wisconsin Infantry. Ultimately he tested to become an officer of Colored Troops and was commissioned as a first Lieutenant for the 102nd USCT. He rose through the ranks of the 102nd and was Brevetted Major of U.S. Volunteers by the end of the war.⁶⁰ In 1887, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for the action at Honey Hill. His commendation read:



After several unsuccessful efforts to recover three pieces of abandoned artillery, this officer gallantly led a small force fully 100 yards in advance of the Union lines and brought in the guns, preventing their capture.⁶¹

location as well:

Here again they had several skirmishes and one severe fight, where the 102d fought as well as any troops ever fought, no other Michigan regiment excepted. There were men in my company who were shot through and through the fleshy part of the arm who have not gone to hospital, but after having their wounds dressed have come to their company quarters, remained there, and seemed scarcely to notice their wounds. If such a thing had occurred in the regiment I formerly belonged to, such a wound would have been good for a three-months' stay in some hospital at Philadelphia or Baltimore. There are others who are wounded in the neck and side, but have full use of their limbs, who would go back to the field at once if they were permitted to do so. The same is true of every company of the regiment. Now such bravery I never saw before. I have known men to fight as well and bravely as men ever fought, but never before have I known men to fight on after being severely wounded, and anxious to return to the field of battle as soon as their wounds were dressed. After having been three and a half years in the field and participated in sixteen different engagements, I never before saw men exhibit such unyielding bravery in battle.⁶²

Following the battle at Honey Hill, the 102nd participated in several small skirmishes throughout South Carolina. In most of these engagements they fought as detachments made of several



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companies of the regiment. Rarely did the 102nd fight as a unified regiment. For a time during March of 1865, the regiment was stationed near Savannah Georgia, but by April they were back in South Carolina.⁶³ The regiment participated in several skirmishes against Confederate forces even after Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, which is traditionally seen as the end of the war. On April 18th the 102nd joined a battle against rebel force at Boykins, South Carolina.⁶⁴ While on the way to this battle, First Lieutenant [Charles Barrell](#) undertook a dangerous mission which would later earn him the Medal of Honor. The regiment was attempting to meet up with General Potter but did not know where he was located. Colonel Chipmen sent Barrell to scout ahead and find Potter. Barrell came upon a Confederate officer and orderly. He captured the orderly and forced him to direct him through the Confederate lines. Barrell was able to make contact with General Potter and bring reinforcements back to his regiment.⁶⁵ In 1891, the Medal of Honor was awarded to Barrell



Charles Barrell

for this action. The citation simply reads, "Hazardous service in marching through the enemy's country to bring relief to his command."⁶⁶ Action against Confederate forces continued for a couple more days after this. On April 21, a force of two hundred Confederates attacked Company A of the 102nd and the company fought back. Later that day, soldiers in the area were informed that the war had ended.⁶⁷

After hearing the news of the end of hostilities, the 102nd were assigned to guard duty at different locations around South Carolina. The regiment was mustered out of service in Charleston on September 30, 1865. They arrived back in Michigan on October 17.⁶⁸

Several months later, on July 4, 1866, the 102nd USCT joined the other Michigan regiments in a grand ceremony held in Detroit. During this ceremony, the regiments marched in a grand parade before handing their flags over to the care of the State of Michigan. During the flag return ceremony, the First Michigan Colored Infantry/102 United States Colored Troops handed over three flags.⁶⁹

These three flags were designated as SC-107-90, SC-108-90, and SC-109-90. SC-107-90 is a national silk flag with 35 stars. While we do not know when the regiment received this flag, it was likely in use at the end of the war. The flag has a black piece of crepe attached to the staff. Black crepe was commonly used in Victorian mourning



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SC-107-90 pre-conservation (top left), during the encapsulation process (above), and after conservation (bottom left).

rituals and was most likely added to the staff in remembrance of President Abraham Lincoln after his assassination on April 15, 1865. In 2011, the flag was conserved by Fran Faile through The Henry Ford. The flag was cleaned of loose debris, humidified, fragments were realigned and encapsulated between layers of netting.⁷⁰

The regiment's presentation flag, SC-109-90, has also been conserved using modern conservation methods. Prior to

conservation, the flag was twisted and the paint on some areas of the flag had stuck together. In 2020 Textile Preservation Associates cleaned, humidified, and encapsulated the flag.⁷¹



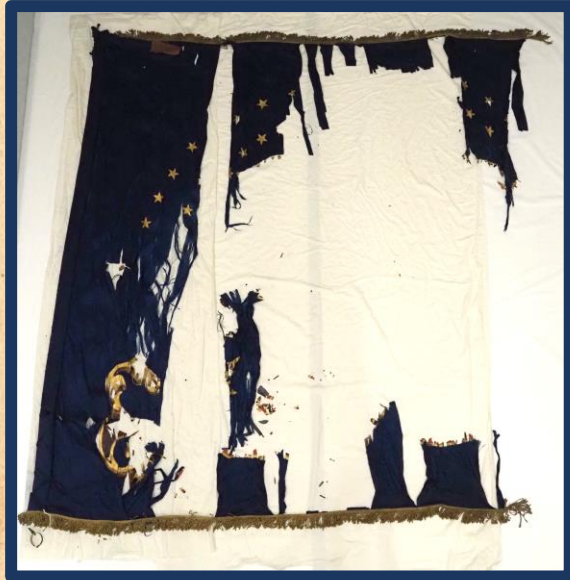
SC-109-90 pre-conservation (above), after conservation (top right), and during humidification and flattening (right).



The third flag, SC-108-90, has not been conserved using modern conservation methods and is very fragmentary. This flag is a silk regimental that most likely featured the coat-of-arm of the state of



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SC-108-90

regiment and a possible fourth flag. In 1890 the *Owosso Times* published an article stating:

Gov. Luce will make an effort to secure the old battle flag of the First Michigan Colored Regiment in order that it may be given a place of honor in the state armory. This action is taken at the sollicitation [sic] of Maj. O. W. Bennett, of Philadelphia, a captain in the regiment who has learned that the flag is stowed away in the garret of one of the public buildings at Washington”[72](#)

Michigan or the coat-of-arms of the United States. Since the regiment was not organized until after West Virginia joined the union, this flag would likely have had thirty-five stars above the coat-of-arms. There is no known information about where and when this flag was created or used.

One additional mystery involving the flags of the

Certain elements of this request line up with the historic record. At the end of the war, some flags ended up in Washington D. C. and were initially stored in a room used by clerks for the Auditor General. In 1867 these flags were moved to a room used by the War Department. In response to claims that the flags were not on public display, the Secretary of War ordered that some of the flags be placed on public display at the Ordinance Museum in Washington D. C. Then, in 1882, the Secretary of War had all the flags boxed up and stored in the subbasement of the State, War and Navy Building. In this space, the flags began to deteriorate quickly and they were moved to the upper floor of the building.[73](#)

The record of these flags' movements line up with the rumors of a flag being stored in the “garret of one of the public buildings at Washington.”[74](#) However, two years before the article was written, the Secretary of War was ordered to make a survey of the flags in the custody of the War Department. No flags from the 102nd were listed in his report.[75](#) Additionally, no further communication about this issue has been located and no additional flags were added to the state’s collection.

After the end of the war, some of the veterans of the 102nd returned to their former lives, while others who had enlisted after being freed from slavery had to build new lives. Despite the accomplishments of these men, some faced intense discrimination after the war. The story of John Taylor is an example of this (see sidebar on next page).





1ST MICHIGAN COLORED INFANTRY/ 102ND UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS



The Lynching of Veteran John Taylor

John Taylor was born into slavery in Kentucky. During the war Taylor encountered the union army and became a servant for an army chaplain from Hillsdale, Michigan. In August of 1864, Taylor enlisted in the First Michigan Colored Infantry. He survived the war and returned to Jackson, Michigan under the direction of a guardian appointed by the army. The guardian was ordered to hold Taylor's \$500 bounty until he turned twenty-one.[76](#)

Taylor eventually left his guardian and went to work for a farmer named John Buck. After Buck refused to pay Taylor's wages, there was an argument.[77](#) Rumors spread quickly through the area that Taylor had injured or killed one, or multiple female members of the Buck family and Taylor was arrested. Newspaper reports from the time are equally contradictory about the crime that led to his arrest.[78](#)

One thing about the situation that isn't under contention is what happened to Taylor. A few days after his arrest, a mob of one to two hundred people broke down the door to the jail and Taylor was hauled out by the crowd and lynched. Despite indictments against five men, nobody was held accountable for the death of Taylor.[79](#)

In 2018 when this story was rediscovered, Dead Man's Hill Park, a site long rumored to be the location of the hanging, was renamed John Taylor Memorial Park and a Michigan Historical Marker was placed on the site telling Taylor's story.[80](#)

Despite this discrimination there were some advantages to being a Union veteran. Many of the men of the 102nd were involved in the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R), a Civil War veteran's organization. This organization lobbied for veteran causes and legislation and provided a space for veterans to meet and talk about their experiences. Unlike many groups at the time the G.A.R. was an interracial organization, though there were some segregated posts. Men from the 102nd can be found on the rolls of several Michigan G.A.R. posts. These men, like their white counterparts also participated in reunions and veteran parades.[81](#)



James McConnell of Company D and Arthur L. Hammond, two Civil War Veterans in Saginaw, Michigan.



COLOR COMPANY THE FLAG BEARERS



By regulation, every infantry regiment was to be issued a stand of colors, consisting of two flags: a national (the familiar “Stars and Stripes”) and a regimental (similar to the Michigan state flag, except that Michigan’s coat-of-arms was usually replaced by the federal coat-of-arms, its outstretched eagle a powerful symbol of the Union the regiment was fighting to preserve). Measuring six and one half feet by six feet and borne on ten foot staffs, bearing the regiment’s name emblazoned on them, and made of brilliant silk fringed and tasseled, these huge banners were designed to be easily seen and instantly recognized by every man of the regiment.

One company (approximately 100 men) was designated as the color company and was charged with the primary responsibility of guarding and carrying the flags into battle. From within the color company, the color bearers (who were most often noncommissioned officers) were selected for their military bearing, their exemplary moral character—and their bravery. The color company was placed in the center of the battle line and set the pace and direction of the regiment, with hundreds of men “guiding on the colors.” During the noise, confusion and smoke of battle, the flags were in the thick of the action. Men caught up in the melee looked to their colors to maintain their position and to prevent becoming separated from their regiment. Thus, the size and brilliance of the flags is easily understood: they had to be highly visible and instantly identifiable. Held aloft where all could see them, flags rallied the regiment in moments of confusion and despair and infused them with renewed determination.

Both Union and Confederate flags became instant targets of fierce enemy fire as each side realized that the simplest way to demoralize and disorient an opposing regiment was to shoot down its flag—or the person carrying it. The greatest casualties of the war both north and south—were suffered by those who carried the flags in battle. It was not unusual for a flag to be shot to tatters in a single engagement, its staff struck and shattered, and bearer after bearer killed or wounded. Every member of the color company—and, indeed, every member of the regiment— was expected to sacrifice his life, if necessary, to prevent the loss of the regiment’s flags in battle. Unimaginable acts of heroism were associated with their defense. The loss of a flag to the enemy meant humiliation and disgrace for the regiment. Conversely, capturing an enemy flag brought honor and fame. The Medal of Honor was instituted during the Civil War to reward Union troops for acts of extreme bravery. Sixty-nine Michigan men eventually received the medal—most through petition long after the war was over—for a variety of heroic actions. Only thirteen received it during the war, all for the capture of an enemy flag.





COLOR COMPANY THE FLAG BEARERS



The following individuals can be documented as having served in the regiment's color guard. Their names appear in the Civil War Service Records Collection at the Archives of Michigan and on Michiganology website <https://michiganology.org/civil-war/>

Nelson Brooks "Enlisted in company A, First Colored Infantry, as Sergeant, Sept. 16, 1863, at Detroit, for 3 years, age 40. Mustered Oct. 9, 1863. Color Guard May, 1865. Mustered out at Charleston, S. C., Sept. 30, 1865." [82](#)

William L. Davis "Enlisted in company D, First Colored Infantry, as Corporal, Nov. 8, 1863, at Adrian, for 3 years, age 19. Mustered Nov. 19, 1863. Sergeant March 12, 1864. Color Guard July 1865. Mustered out at Charleston, S. C., Sept. 30, 1865." [83](#)

Isaac N. Kauffman "Enlisted in company A, First Colored Infantry, as Sergeant, Oct. 11, 1863, at Detroit, for 3 years, age 38. Mustered Oct. 17, 1863. Color Bearer April, 1864. Mustered out at Charleston, S. C., Sept. 30, 1865." [84](#)

Henry Shelby "Enlisted in company E, First Colored Infantry, as Corporal, Nov. 26, 1863, at Detroit, for 3 years, age 21. Mustered Dec. 17, 1863. Color guard May, 1865. Mustered out at Charleston, S. C., Sept. 30, 1865." [85](#)

George A. Southworth "Leoni. Enlisted in company I, Second Infantry, April 22, 1861, at Kalamazoo, for 3 years, age 19. Mustered May 25, 1861. Sergeant. Color Bearer. Discharged Oct. 2, 1863, to enable him to accept commission in U. S. Colored Troops. Commissioned Second Lieutenant, company A, First Colored Infantry, at organization Nov. 5, 1863. Mustered Nov. 5, 1863. Commissioned First Lieutenant, company G. Nov. 15, 1864. Mustered out at Charleston, S. C., Sept. 30, 1865." [86](#)

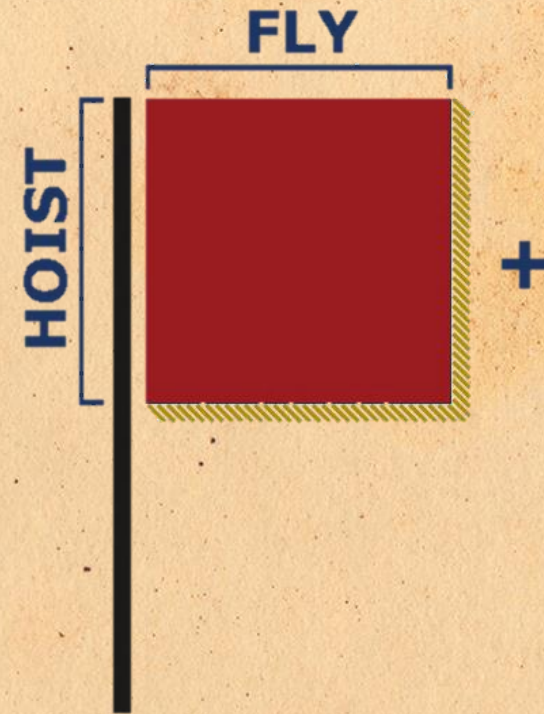


THE FLAGS



Note on Measurements: All dimensions give the height of the flag (called the “hoist” and measured along the staff side of the flag) first, followed by the width (called the “fly” and measured from the outside edge of the sleeve to the flag’s free edge). Measurements exclude the fringe, which is measured separately. All measurements are in inches. A plus symbol (+) following a measurement means the flag is fragmentary and once extended further in that direction.

Note on Catalogue Numbers: “**SC**” refers to the State Capitol (the flags are State Capitol artifacts). The two-digit number at the end refers to the year the flags were catalogued and accessioned by the Michigan Historical Museum.





THE FLAGS



SC-107-90: *Silk national.* ▪ *Dimensions: 72.5"75"* ▪ *Silk Fringe: 2"*

This gold painted, thirty-five-star national flag is made of a single layer of silk. The stars are arranged in five rows of seven stars. The canton is mostly intact, but there is a lot of loss of the fly end and among the white stripes on the flag. The fabric on the hoist end of the flag was fashioned into a sleeve for attachment to the staff. A 2" silk fringe is attached to the top, bottom and fly end of the flag. A leather label is attached to the flag on the top red stripe. The label reads "102nd Regt. U.S. Cold. Infantry."

The staff, which measures 104.5" by 1.25" and is topped with a regulation spade finial. The staffs of flags returned to the state at the 1866 Detroit ceremony all bear identical brass plaques. The brass plaque reads in Spencerian script "1st Colored Infty."

The flag has a 126" blue and white cord with two blue and white tassels measuring 6.5" in length. Additionally, a 47" length of black crepe was attached to the flag. This was probably added as a symbol of mourning after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

In 2011, the flag was sent to Fran Faile, a textile conservator working at The Henry Ford for conservation. The flag was realigned, humidified and flattened before being encapsulated between layers of fine nylon tulle.



THE FLAGS



SC-108-90: *Silk regimental.* ▪ *Dimensions: 69.5"x67+"* ▪ *Silk Fringe: 2"*

This silk regimental flag is in a very fragmentary condition. The flag likely featured the national coat of arms on a blue background with the regimental designation below the coat of arms and thirty-five stars above the coat of arms. Most of the painted areas are missing as is the majority of the fly end of the flag. There is evidence of some battlefield repairs to the flag. Attached to the top and bottom of the flag is a 2" silk fringe. A leather label is attached to the top of the flag. The label reads "102nd Regt. U.S. Cold. Infantry."

The staff measures 93.25" by 1.25" in diameter. A ferrule is attached to the top of the staff, but the finial is missing. The staffs of flags returned to the state at the 1866 Detroit ceremony all bear identical brass plaques. The brass plaque reads in Spencerian script "1st Colored Inftry."



THE FLAGS



SC-109-90: *Silk regimental.* ▪ *Dimensions: 73.5"x76"* ▪ *Silk and Cotton Fringe: 3"*

This two-piece silk regimental flag was painted by the firm Liable, Hopkins, and Wright. The obverse featured an eagle over the flag of the United States with the word "All men are born free and equal, To realize which, we fight." The reverse was painted with the state coat of arms with the words "Presented by the Colored Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society of Detroit to the First Colored Regiment Michigan Infantry, 1863." Most of the painted areas on the flag have been lost. This, unfortunately, is a common side-effect of the paint making the silk of the flag more rigid. All that remains of the painted area is the ribbon at the top with a few letters. On the obverse "All - are bor- Fre-" and on the reverse "- Soldi-s Aid Soc- - roit" The flag is made of blue silk and the fabric on the hoist end of the flag was fashioned into a sleeve for attachment to the staff. A 3" silk fringe is attached to the top, bottom, and fly ends of the flag.

The staff, which measures 90" by 1.25" in diameter is topped with a spear finial. The staffs of flags returned to the state at the 1866 Detroit ceremony all bear identical brass plaques. The brass plaque reads in Spencerian script "1st Colored Infty."

The flag has a 110" red, white, and blue cord with two red, white, and blue tassels measuring 10" in length. The tassels are formed on a wood core with a 2.25" diameter.

In 2020 the flag was sent to Textile Preservation Associates for conservation. The flag was vacuum cleaned, aligned, humidified, and flattened. During conservation, it was discovered that painted areas had become stuck together. These were carefully separated. The flag was then encapsulated between layers of Stabiltex, a sheer polyester fabric. The fringe was combed and the flag was placed between layers of Mylar.



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