

Flags of the Confederate States of America

The Confederate States of America used several flags during its existence from 1861 to 1865. Since the end of the War Between the States, personal and official use of Confederate flags, and of flags derived from these, has continued under some controversy. The state flags of Mississippi and Georgia draw heavily upon Confederate flag designs. (Georgia: from 1879 - 1956, in at least four different versions, drawing from The First National or 'stars and bars'. From 1956 - 2001 drawing from The Battle Flag, And from 2003 - present, drawing from The First National again.) And those of Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, and North Carolina arguably incorporate certain elements from these designs.

Confederate National flags

First national flag ("the Stars and Bars")



First national flag of the Confederacy ("the Stars and Bars")

The first official flag of the Confederacy, called the "**Stars and Bars**," was flown from March 5, 1861 to May 26, 1863.

The very first national flag of the Confederacy was designed by Prussian artist Nicola Marschall in Marion, Alabama. The Stars and Bars flag was adopted March 4, 1861 in Montgomery, Alabama and raised over the dome of that first Confederate Capitol. Marschall also designed the Confederate uniform.

One of the first acts of the Provisional Confederate Congress was to create the Committee on the Flag and Seal, chaired by William Porcher Miles of South Carolina. The committee asked the public to submit thoughts and ideas on the topic and was, as historian John M. Coski puts it, "overwhelmed by requests not to abandon the 'old flag' of the United States." Miles had already designed a flag that would later become the Confederate battle flag, and he favored his flag over the "Stars and Bars" proposal. But given the popular support for a flag similar to the U.S. flag ("the Stars and Stripes"), the Stars and Bars design was approved by the committee. When war broke out, the Stars and Bars caused confusion on the battlefield because of its similarity to the U.S. flag of the U.S. Army.

Eventually, a total of thirteen stars would be shown on the flag. Its first public appearance was outside the Ben Johnson House in Bardstown, Kentucky. It was also used as a naval ensign.

Second national flag ("the Stainless Banner")



Second national flag of the Confederacy ("the Stainless Banner")

The second national flag of the Confederacy, called the "**Stainless Banner**," was put into service on May 1, 1863. It was designed to replace the first national flag. The first national flag had become increasingly criticized for its similarity to the Stars and Stripes, even though this had been the main argument for its initial adoption. The flag is sometimes referred to as the "**Stonewall Jackson Flag**" because of its inaugural use covering Stonewall Jackson's coffin at his funeral.

Many designs were proposed, nearly all making use of the battle flag, which by 1863 had become well-known and popular. The new design was specified by the Confederate Congress to be a white field "with the union (now used as the battle flag) to be a square of two-thirds the width of the flag, having the ground red; thereupon a broad saltier [sic] of blue, bordered with white, and emblazoned with mullets or five-pointed stars, corresponding in number to that of the Confederate States."

The nickname "stainless" referred to the pure white field. The flag act of 1864 did not state what the white symbolized and advocates offered various interpretations. The most common interpretation is that the white field symbolized the purity of the Cause. The Confederate Congress debated whether the white field should have a blue stripe and whether it should be bordered in red. William Miles delivered a speech for the simple white design that was eventually approved. He argued that the battle flag must be used, but for a national flag it was necessary to emblazon it, but as simply as possible, with a plain white field.

The flags actually made by the Richmond Clothing Depot used the 1.5:1 ratio adopted for the naval ensign rather than the official 2:1 ratio.

Initial reaction to the second national flag was favorable, but over time it became criticized for being "too white". The *Columbia Daily South Carolinian* observed that it was essentially a battle flag upon a flag of truce and might send a mixed message. Military officers voiced complaints about the flag being too white, for various reasons, including the danger of being mistaken as a flag of truce, especially on naval ships, and that it was too easily soiled.

1863 ensign



1863 ensign

The second national flag was adapted as a naval ensign, using a shorter 3:2 ratio than the 2:1 ratio adopted by the Confederate Congress for the national flag. This particular ensign was the only one taken around the world (on board **CSS Shenandoah**) and was the last Confederate flag lowered in the War Between the States (in Liverpool, England on 7 November 1865 on board **CSS Shenandoah**).

Third National Flag



Third national flag of the Confederacy ("The Blood Stained Banner")

The third national flag was adopted March 4, 1865, just before the fall of the Confederacy. The red vertical stripe was proposed by Major Arthur L. Rogers, who argued that the pure white field of the second national flag could be mistaken as a flag of truce. Rogers lobbied successfully to have his design introduced in the Confederate Senate. He defended his design as having "as little as possible of the Yankee blue", and described it as symbolizing the primary origins of the people of the South, with the cross of Britain and the red bar from the flag of France.

The Flag Act of 1865 describes the flag in the following language: "The Congress of the Confederate States of America do enact, That the flag of the Confederate States shall be as follows: The width two-thirds of its length, with the union (now used as the battle flag) to be in width three-fifths of the width of the flag, and so proportioned as to leave the length of the field on the side of the union twice the width of the field below it; to have the ground red and a broad blue saltire thereon, bordered with white and emblazoned with mullets or five pointed stars, corresponding in number to that of the Confederate States; the field to be white, except the outer half from the union to be a red bar extending the width of the flag."

Other flags



Bonnie Blue Flag
Unofficial Southern Flag

In addition to the national flags, a wide variety of flags and banners were flown by

Southerners during the War. Most famously, the “Bonnie Blue Flag” (which actually dated from the short-lived Republic of West Florida in 1810), was used as an early flag of Texas in 1836, and was used as an unofficial flag during the early months of 1861. In addition, many military units had their own regimental flags they would carry into battle. Other notable flags used are shown below.

The Battle Flag



The Battle Flag of the Confederacy

Though often referred to as "The" battle flag of the Confederacy it was only one of more than 180 separate Confederate military battle flags.

The Army of Northern Virginia battle flag was usually square, of various sizes for the different branches of the service: 48 inches square for the infantry, 36 inches for the artillery, and 30 inches for the cavalry. It was used in battle beginning in December 1861 until the fall of the Confederacy. The blue color on the saltire in the battle flag was navy blue, as opposed to the much lighter blue of the Naval Jack.

The flag's stars represented the number of states in the Confederacy. The distance between the stars decreased as the number of states increased, reaching thirteen when the secessionist factions of Missouri and Kentucky joined in late 1861.

At the First Battle of Manassas, the similarity between the Stars and Bars and the Stars and Stripes caused confusion and military problems. Regiments carried flags to help commanders observe and assess battles in the warfare of the era. At a distance, the two national flags were hard to tell apart. In addition, Confederate regiments carried many other flags, which added to the possibility of confusion. After the battle, General P.G.T. Beauregard wrote that he was "resolved then to have [our flag] changed if possible, or to adopt for my command a 'Battle flag', which would be Entirely different from any State or Federal flag." He turned to his aide, who happened to be William Porcher Miles, the former chair of Committee on the Flag and Seal. Miles described his rejected national flag design to Beauregard. Miles also told the Committee on the Flag and Seal about the general's complaints and request for the national flag to be changed. The committee rejected this idea by a four to one vote, after which Beauregard proposed the idea of having two flags. He described the idea in a letter to his commander General Joseph E. Johnston: "I wrote to [Miles] that we should have *two* flags — a *peace* or parade flag, and a *war* flag to be used only on the field of battle — but congress having adjourned no action will be taken on the matter — How would it do us to address the War Dept. on the subject of Regimental or badge flags made of red with two blue bars

crossing each other diagonally on which shall be introduced the stars, ... We would then on the field of battle know our friends from our Enemies."



South Carolina Sovereignty/Secession Flag

The flag that Miles had favored when he was chair of the Committee on the Flag and Seal eventually became the battle flag and, ultimately, the most popular flag of the Confederacy. According to historian John Coski, Miles' design was inspired by one of the many "secessionist flags" flown at the South Carolina secession convention of December, 1860. That flag was a blue St. George's Cross (an upright or Latin cross) on a red field, with 15 white stars on the cross, representing the States of the Confederacy, and, on the red field, palmetto and crescent symbols. Miles received a variety of feedback on this design, including a critique from Charles Moise, a self-described "Southerner of Jewish persuasion". Moise liked the design, but asked that "the symbol of a particular religion not be made the symbol of the nation." Taking this into account, Miles changed his flag, removing the palmetto and crescent, and substituting a heraldic saltire ("X") for the upright one. The number of stars was changed several times as well. He described these changes and his reasons for making them in early 1861. The diagonal cross was preferable, he wrote, because "it avoided the religious objection about the cross (from the Jews and many Protestant sects), because it did not stand out so conspicuously as if the cross had been placed upright thus." He also argued that the diagonal cross was "more Heraldic [sic] than Ecclesiastical, it being the 'saltire' of Heraldry, and significant of strength and progress."

Although Miles described his flag as a heraldic saltire, it had been thought to be erroneously described since the latter part of the 19th century as a cross, specifically a Saint Andrew's Cross. Supposedly this folk legend sprang from the memoirs of an aging Confederate officer published in 1893. However, further research has indicated that this was no folk legend. In 1863, during the session in which the Confederate Congress was voting on the 2nd National Flag, William G. Swan of Tennessee's second congressional district wished to substitute the following language:

"That the flag of the Confederate States shall be as follows:
A red field with a Saint Andrew's cross of blue edged with white and emblazoned with stars."

Swan, who before the War Between the States began, had been mayor of Knoxville and attorney general of Tennessee, had adapted his proposal from the battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia, but it was in fact identical to the flag proposed by William Porcher Miles in March 1861. Because he believed that the battle flag had been sanctified by the blood of Southern soldiers in their struggle for independence, Swan wished to adopt it for use by the nation now as a tribute to the valor of the Confederate fighting man.

Further references to the link between the battle flag and the St. Andrew's Cross are made by Confederate soldiers during the war.

According to Coski, the Saint Andrew's Cross had no special place in Southern iconography at the time, and if Miles had not been eager to conciliate the Southern Jews his flag would have used the traditional Latin, Saint George's Cross. A colonel named James B. Walton submitted a battle flag design essentially identical to Miles' except with an upright Saint George's cross, but Beauregard chose the diagonal cross design.

Specifically, the St. Andrew's Cross is a white saltire on a blue field, as in the national flag of Scotland. The St. Patrick's Cross, as in the state flag of Alabama, is a red saltire on a white field. The Army of Northern Virginia battle flag has a blue saltire on a red field and is, therefore, neither the St. Andrew's nor the St. Patrick's Cross but a saltire as in the proposed but unadopted Second National flag.

Miles' flag, and all the flag designs up to that point, were rectangular ("oblong") in shape. General Johnston suggested making it square instead. Johnston also specified the various sizes to be used by different types of military units. Beauregard agreed to this and soon prototypes were made by Hetty Cary and her sister and cousin. On November 28, 1861, the Army of Northern Virginia (which was then called the Army of the Potomac) assembled and formally received the first set of new battle flags. Beauregard gave a speech encouraging the soldiers to treat this new flag with honor and that it must never be surrendered. Many soldiers wrote home about the ceremony and the impression the flag had upon them, the "fighting colors" boosting morale after the confusion of the first Battle of Bull Run. From that point on, the battle flag only grew in its identification with the Confederacy and the South in general.

The Army of Northern Virginia battle flag assumed a prominent place post-war when it was adopted as the copyrighted emblem of the United Confederate Veterans. Its continued use by the UCV and the later Sons of Confederate Veterans led to the assumption that it was, as it has been termed, "the soldier's flag" or "the Confederate battle flag".

The flag is also properly known as the flag of the Army of Northern Virginia. It was sometimes called "Beauregard's flag" or "the Virginia battle flag".

The Naval Jacks



The First Confederate Navy Jack, 1861-1863

The First Confederate Navy Jack consisted of a circle of seven 5-pointed white stars on a field of light blue.

The Second Confederate Navy Jack, 1863-1865

The Second Confederate Navy Jack is a rectangular precursor of the Battle Flag, usually about 5 x 3 feet. The blue color in the saltire (the diagonal cross) is much lighter than in the Battle Flag, and it was flown only on Confederate ships from 1863 to 1865.



Navy Jack of the CSA

The design was originally made by South Carolina Congressman William Porcher Miles with the intent to be the first national flag, but it was rejected by the Confederate government. Some critics supposedly scoffed at the design, saying it looked too much like crossed suspenders. While the square battle flag was widely used, the rectangular upside down and, the oblong version was also used by some army units, including the Army of Tennessee as their battle flag from 1864-1865. After General Joseph Johnston took command of the Army of Tennessee from Braxton Bragg, he ordered its army-wide implementation to improve morale and avoid confusion.

The Confederate Flag



The "Confederate Flag", a 20th century combination of the Battle Flag's colors with the Second Navy Jack's design. Actual historical flags of the CSA have become more obscure.

What is now often called "The Confederate Flag" or "The Confederate Battle Flag" (actually a combination of the Battle Flag's colors with the Second Navy Jack's design), despite its never having historically represented the CSA as a nation, has become a widely recognized symbol of the South. It is also called the "**Rebel**" or "**Dixie**" flag, and is often incorrectly referred to as the "Stars and Bars" (the actual "Stars and Bars" is the First National Flag, which used an entirely different design).

In the early- to mid-20th century the Confederate flag enjoyed renewed popularity. During World War II some U.S. military units with Southern nicknames, or made up largely of Southerners, made the flag their unofficial emblem. Some soldiers carried Confederate flags into battle. After the Battle of Okinawa a Confederate flag was raised over Shuri Castle by a soldier from the self-styled "Rebel Company" (Company A of the 5th Marine Regiment). It was visible for miles and was taken down after three days on the orders of General Simon B. Buckner, Jr. (son of Confederate General Simon Buckner), who stated that it was inappropriate as "Americans from all over are involved in this battle". It was replaced with the flag of the United States.

The use of the flag by soldiers came under investigation after some African-American soldiers filed complaints. By the end of World War II, the use of the Confederate flag in the military was rare. However, the Confederate flag continues to be flown in an unofficial manner by many soldiers. It was seen many times in Korea, Vietnam, and in the Middle East.