



Flags of Fort Sumter



Introduction

Flags: Patriotic symbols of a nation or distinct groups of people. In times of war, soldiers look to the flag flying at a fort or on a battleground for strength and courage. These flags represent those that flew over Fort Sumter during the Civil War. Presented below is also information about several other flags that are associated with Fort Sumter and the war, but do not fly over the fort today.

The 33-star United States Flag

This is the flag that flew over Fort Sumter on April 12-13, 1861. When the Civil War began, the United States flag had 33 stars: one representing each state in the Union. After the battle of Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln had to decide whether to leave all 33 stars on the flag or to remove those of the seceded states. Since Lincoln's mission was to preserve the Union, no stars were removed. Although the 34th state, Kansas, was admitted to the Union on January 29, 1861, its star was not added until July 4th of that year. This 33-star flag is now on display in the Fort Sumter museum.



The 35-star United States Flag

First raised over Fort Sumter on February 18, 1865, a 35-star flag represented the Union's presence again at the fort. West Virginia became the 35th state on June 20, 1863, and Nevada joined the Union on October 31, 1864. Nevada's star was not added until July 4, 1865, after the surrender of the Confederate army. Notice the difference in the way the stars are positioned. Star patterns varied on the United States flag until President William Howard Taft standardized the arrangement in 1912. Depicted here is the Medallion Pattern.



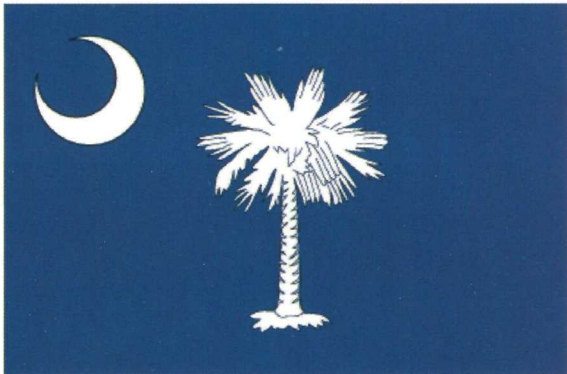
The Flag of the Palmetto Guard

As victorious Confederates entered Fort Sumter on April 14, 1861, John Styles Bird, Jr., a private in the South Carolina militia unit known as the Palmetto Guard, placed his unit's flag on the parapet facing Charleston. It became the first Southern flag to fly at Fort Sumter. The single star signified the independent Republic of South Carolina and the tree harkened back to the Revolutionary War. John Styles Ashe, the son of John Styles Bird, Jr., donated it to the National Park Service in 1979. This flag is on display in the museum at Fort Sumter.



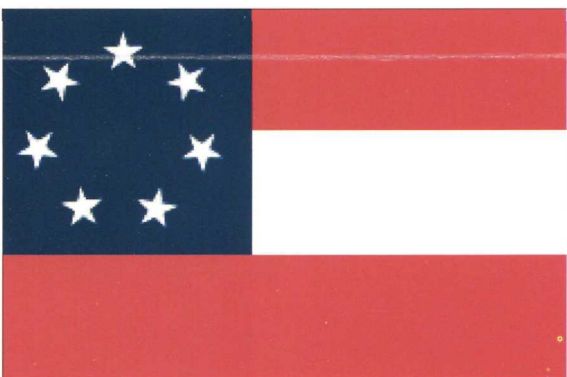
The South Carolina State Flag

The first and only official state flag of South Carolina was adopted on January 26, 1861, but its history dates back to the American Revolution. Patriot Colonel William Moultrie designed a blue flag with a crescent-shaped emblem in the corner. The blue signified the color of his regiment's uniforms and a crescent-shaped pin was worn on their hats. Some historians theorize that the crescent symbolizes the gorget, a medal ornament worn by officers at that time and originally a piece of armor that protected a soldier's throat in medieval times. On June 28, 1776, the Patriots defended an incomplete palmetto log fort, later named Fort Moultrie, on Sullivan's Island. After secession in 1861, the South Carolina General Assembly adopted Colonel Moultrie's flag with the addition of a palmetto tree in the center to commemorate the Patriot victory.



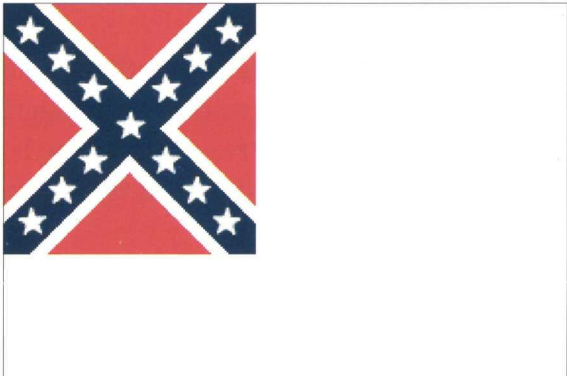
The Stars and Bars

The First National Flag of the Confederacy, or Stars and Bars, flew over Fort Sumter from 1861 to 1863. Although the Confederate Congress never officially approved this flag, it was first used in March 1861. The stars represent the first seven states that seceded from the Union: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas. Similarities between this flag and the United States flag caused confusion between Confederate and Union Soldiers in battle. In 1863 the Confederacy replaced the Stars and Bars with the Second National Confederate Flag.



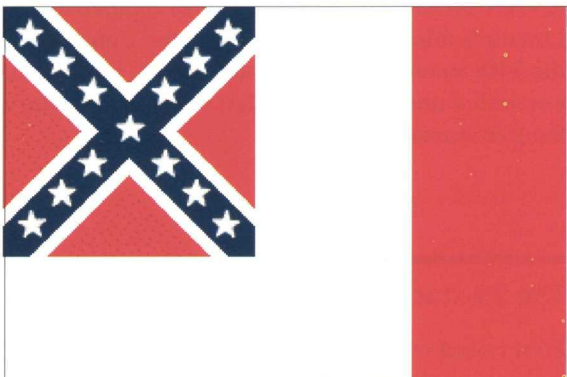
The Stainless Banner

The Second National Flag of the Confederacy, or Stainless Banner, was adopted on May 1, 1863. Four of the six additional stars represent the states that seceded after the battle of Fort Sumter: Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina. The two remaining stars represent Kentucky and Missouri, states that never officially seceded but were recognized by the Confederacy. This flag also caused confusion because its long white field often made it look like a surrender flag. It was replaced with the Third National Confederate Flag in 1865.



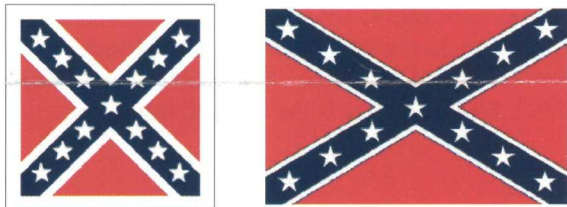
The Third National Confederate Flag

The Third National Flag of the Confederacy was adopted on March 4, 1865. A red stripe on its white end ensured that it could not be mistaken for a surrender flag. This flag was never used at Fort Sumter because the Union reoccupied the fort on February 18, 1865, before it was approved. Since this flag was adopted shortly before the end of the war, it was never produced in large numbers and saw very little use.



The Confederate Battle Flags

Mistakenly referred to as the Stars and Bars, the historic use of these flags can be confusing. Designed by General P.G.T. Beauregard and South Carolina Confederate Congressman William P. Miles, the square flag was primarily used by land troops in battle as a regimental standard. As carried by the Army of Northern Virginia, the square flag usually had a border of blue, yellow or white.



Other army units, most notably the Army of Tennessee, carried the rectangular flag. This flag was also used as a navy jack on Confederate naval vessels after May 26, 1863.

About Your Visit

Fort Sumter National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. The fort is located on an island in Charleston Harbor and is accessible only by boat. Daily concession-operated ferries leave from the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center in downtown Charleston and from Patriots Point in Mt. Pleasant. For more information call (843) 883-3123, visit us on the World Wide Web at www.nps.gov/fosu or write to:

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