

THE FIRST ROTATION:

(93.57) Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment (The “Hardy” Flag)

On June 8, 1993, a very special event took place in the Governor’s Offices in the newly-restored Michigan State Capitol. Father John Hardy (83) and his sister, Sister Frances Claire (97) of Monroe presented Governor Engler with the flag their father, Captain John Hardy, a color guard with the Second Michigan Infantry, carried during the Civil War. The flag was presented to their father over 130 years before, reportedly by Austin Blair himself, Michigan’s Civil War governor.

Hardy was little more than a boy when he volunteered with the Second Michigan Infantry, which would serve from April 1861 to August 1865--the only Michigan regiment to remain intact from the very beginning of the war to the very end. Recruited from Michigan’s southern counties, many boys came from Adrian, Hillsdale and Kalamazoo Colleges. The Second became one of the most distinguished regiments of the war, seeing action from Bull Run to Second Bull Run to the capture of Petersburg to Appomattox Court House. Promoted to the color guard, Hardy was wounded at least twice carrying his regiment’s flag.

During the siege of Petersburg, on March 25, 1865, he earned the title “The Hero of Fort Steadman.” Fort Steadman was one of the Union forts--really more of an earthwork--encircling Petersburg. The rebels tried to break through the Union lines that night. They succeeded in capturing Fort Steadman, turning its guns on the Union troops, including the Second Michigan nearby. Eventually the Confederates were routed, due in large part to young Hardy who captured 35 rebels single-handedly and helped capture 300 more. It was to be Robert E. Lee’s final offensive. The Second was one of the first two regiments (both from Michigan) to enter Petersburg when it fell, signaling the virtual end of the war.

This flag is not a regimental battle flag. It is cotton and appears to be hand made, not commercially made like most of the regimental battle flags. Its use is unknown. It may have been a personal flag carried by Hardy during the war. The Hardys were told that Governor Blair had presented the flag to their father personally. Whatever its purpose, it is part of the history of this regiment and of an extraordinary man who fought in it. And, as the Hardys closed a 130-year-old circle by presenting their father’s flag to Michigan’s current governor, Governor Engler, it became part of our history forever.

In August every summer, the largest Civil War reenactment event in the Midwest is held in Jackson. This year, the event will reenact the Battle of Fort Steadman. How appropriate to have the Hero of Fort Steadman’s flag on display at that time!