



By **MARCUS E. HOWARD**  
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KENNESAW, GA — A rare Confederate battle flag recently returned home to Cobb County following repairs in West Virginia. In February 2010, the 65th Georgia Infantry flag — complete with 41 bullet holes and blood stains — first came into the possession of Kennesaw's Southern Museum of Civil War & Locomotive History. After a thorough conservation process over 13 months, the flag is now being prepared for public viewing.

"It went through quite an ordeal to be restored and conserved to come back to us," said Melinda Senn, the



*Above: John Davis (right) holds the 65<sup>th</sup> Georgia battle flag in the early 1900's*

*Below: Curator Melinda Senn (left) holds the same flag restored in 2012.*

museum's curator. An exhibit featuring the flag, and an accompanying history of battle flags, will be unveiled at the museum on July 23. Dr. Richard Banz, museum executive director, said the flag will serve as the centerpiece of an ongoing dialogue about the causes and outcomes of the Civil War.

The conservation process was handled by Textile Preservation Associates, which specializes in historic artifacts, in Ranson, W.Va. "Over time, the flag had undergone multiple repairs using different fabrics sewn together with the flag," said Senn. "Sometimes the repairs had caused the flag to crease up." As part of the conservation treatment, a humidifier was used to remove the creases and some previous repairs were removed. The flag was also vacuumed, flattened with glass weights and air-dried before being placed in a custom-built frame designed to preserve it.

While undergoing this process, the flag significantly increased in size, up to 6 inches in some areas, Senn said. She said an intensive analysis was also conducted, including a blood test. The entire restoration project and display is estimated to cost \$15,000. About \$5,800 has already been raised. The museum will recognize contributors of \$350 or more within the new display.

The flag was donated to the museum by members of the Davis family of Alabama. It had been passed down for 145 years through generations of the family since their great-great-grandfather, 65th Georgia Infantry color bearer Private John Davis, brought it home from the Civil War. Siblings Don Davis, Pete Davis, both of Alabama, and Rhonda Davis of Tennessee, donated the flag to the museum in downtown Kennesaw because they thought it was appropriate to share it.

Through a telegram and soldiers letters, Gregg Biggs, a Tennessee historian of Civil War flags, pinpointed the flag's birth to Augusta in January 1864. Interestingly, although the Confederacy lost the war, the flag was not surrendered. John Davis carried it rolled up and tucked into his boot to save it from capture or destruction, according to historians.

The flag had been carried by its unit throughout the Atlanta campaign, traveling with the Confederacy's principal army in the western theater, the Army of Tennessee, after the fall of Atlanta



to the Union. The 65th Georgia regiment, which was part of the Army of Tennessee, would have been composed of about 1,000 soldiers. It was also carried on November 30, 1864, at the Battle of Franklin in Tennessee, an engagement in which one-quarter of the 27,000-man army was killed or wounded in three hours, including six generals.

John Davis was the final color bearer for the flag at the Battle of Franklin. But the blood stains are believed by historians to have come from its first color bearer, William Martin. When Martin was killed at Franklin, the regiment's commander, Capt. William G. Foster, picked up the banner and was quickly wounded. That's when Davis is said to have taken it up.

To carry such a flag in war was a unique honor, said Dr. Keith Bohannon, a University of West Georgia associate professor of history. He said the regimental flag would have been a symbol of a unit and served practically as a rallying point during the chaos of war, amongst the fighting soldiers and smoky battlefield.

"Only an individual who was known for bravery would be allowed to carry the flag and the flag bearer was someone who ran great personal risk in battle because it was pretty typical for flag bearers to get shot," said Bohannon, who specializes in southern history.

Given its difficult journey through history, the 65th Georgia Infantry flag is indeed rare and valuable, Bohannon said. Many Confederate units would tear their flags into pieces and distribute them, as opposed to surrendering them, he said. "This flag always has been and always will be a very divisive symbol and it means very different things to different people today," Bohannon said. "For some white Georgians, it's a symbol of history and their ancestor's sacrifices. But for many other people, particularly African-Americans or people who might have moved to Georgia, it doesn't have the same kind of symbolism. And it's instead a symbol of slavery, racism, Jim Crow, the (Ku Klux) Klan and all that. But it's an extraordinary powerful symbol regardless of the way that you look at it."