

The Battle of Plattsburg Flag 1814



Veteran Exempts Flag

The Veteran Exempts, commanded by a Captain Melvin L. Woolsey, was a local New York militia company, formed in July of 1812, which was made up of veterans of the American Revolution who were otherwise exempt from military service because of their age. Many of the settlers in upstate New York (and Ohio) were veterans of the Revolutionary War and had been paid by grants of lands on the frontiers. By forming militia units they enabled the younger militia men to go off to war while they stayed to protect the local settlements. Like the Home Guard in Britain during the Second World War, they did provide a valuable reserve in a time of crisis.

This Veteran Exempts flag may have been used at the Battle of Plattsburgh in upper New York. The Battle, also known as the Battle of Lake Champlain, ended the final British invasion attempt of the northern United States during the War of 1812. Fought shortly before the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, the American victory denied the British leverage to demand exclusive control over the Great Lakes and any territorial gains against the New England states. Little other information is available on the activities of the Veterans Exempts during the War of 1812.

The Veterans Exempt flag was described in the Plattsburgh Republican, July 31, 1812, as having "...a black ground with 13 stars for the Union of White, wrought in silver. That in the centre of the Flag there he a Death's Head, with cross bones under, intimating what must soon, according to the course of nature, be their promiscuous fate, and the immediate one of any enemy who shall venture to contend with them. Under these an open wreath, with this motto, 'Thy will he done.' Over the Death's Head, surmounted as a crest, a Rattle-Snake with Thirteen rattles, coiled, ready to strike, with this motto in a similar wreath inverted over it, 'Dont tread on me.'"