

48 Star American Flag from Y-12 Plant in 1943

Y-12's history is full of examples of patriotism and a strong patriotic spirit has prevailed in all work areas. Today it is common to see American flags flying from many shops and work areas.

From its very beginning, Y-12 workers have held fast to the knowledge that they were dedicating their efforts to preserving the freedom of the nation and many times even the freedom of many other nations of the world. From the Manhattan Project to the Cold War to now waging the War on Terror, Y-12 has served a central role in supplying critical components for our nuclear development and other key national security missions.

As early as 1943, there were already symbolic actions being taken that demonstrated this high degree of patriotism at Y-12. An example is the following account of the most unusual travels of a 48 star American flag.



Historic 48 Star American Flag that flew over Y-12 in 1943

William Earl Bartlett, Sr. a Local 51 Sheet Metal worker from Chattanooga was working at Y-12 in 1943. William left for the Navy and was presented this flag as a going away gift. The flag was taken down from the flag pole at Y-12 and presented to Bartlett with great ceremony. He was being sent to fight in the war that Y-12 workers were trying to help win.

On March 24, 2010, William Edward "Eddie" Bartlett, the senior Bartlett's grandson, donated this flag to the Y-12 History Center, completing a 67 year journey by returning the special flag to Y-12.

The "Y-12/Bartlett Flag" now hangs framed at the main entrance to the Y-12 History Center. It is positioned prominently to the right of the entrance and has the flag's history framed beside the huge display exhibit. The 48 stars cause visitors to stop and learn its history.

The pride that went with the awarding of that special flag to Bartlett, Sr. in 1943, was also very much apparent when Eddie returned the flag to its original home, Y-12. Having endured the travels and storage of years in the Bartlett family, the flag now is a remarkable feature of the growing exhibits in the Y-12 History Center.

Come by and see it for yourself. There are no badges required, and the history center is just off the main entrance to the Y-12 New Hope Center at 602 Scarboro Road in Oak Ridge, TN.

Ray Smith, Y-12 Historian