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COMPILED MILITARY SERVICE RECORDS OF VOLUNTEER UNION SOLDIERS  
WHO SERVED WITH THE UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS:

1st through 5th United States Colored Cavalry  
5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored)  
6th United States Colored Cavalry

Introduction

On the 107 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1817, are reproduced the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers belonging to the 1st through 5th United States Colored Cavalry, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored), and the 6th United States Colored Cavalry. While the 5th Massachusetts did retain its state designation, these units were all part of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). The USCT included 7 numbered cavalry regiments; 14 numbered artillery regiments; 144 numbered infantry regiments; plus Brigade Bands Nos. 1 & 2 (Corps d'Afrique and US Colored Troops); Powell's Regiment Colored Infantry; Southard's Company Colored Infantry; Quartermaster Detachment; Pioneer Corps, 1st Division, 16th Army Corps; Unassigned Company A Colored Infantry and Unassigned USCT. The records reproduced are part of the Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group (RG) 94.

Background

United States Colored Troops

Since the time of the American Revolution, African Americans have volunteered to serve their country in time of war. The Civil War was no exception. Official sanction was the difficulty. In the fall of 1862 there were four Union regiments of African Americans raised in New Orleans, LA: the 1st, 2d, and 3d Louisiana Native Guard, and the 1st Louisiana Heavy Artillery (African Descent). The 1st South Carolina Infantry (African Descent) was not officially organized until January 1863; however, three companies of the regiment were on coastal expeditions as early as November 1862. Similarly, the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry was not mustered into Federal service until January 1863, even though the regiment had already participated in the action at Island Mound, MO, on October 27, 1862. These early unofficial regiments received little Federal support, but they showed the strength of the African American soldier's desire to fight for freedom.

The first official authorization to employ African Americans in Federal service was the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of July 17, 1862. This act allowed President Abraham Lincoln to receive into the military or naval service persons of African descent and gave him permission to use them for any purpose "he may judge best for the public welfare." However, the President did not authorize use of

African Americans until issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

In late January 1863, Gov. John Andrew of Massachusetts received permission to raise a regiment of African American soldiers. The pace of organizing additional regiments was very slow. In March Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton sent Gen. Lorenzo Thomas to the lower Mississippi Valley to recruit free and contraband African Americans. Thomas was given broad authority. He was to explain the administration's policy regarding African American soldiers and recruit volunteers to raise and command them. Stanton wanted all officers of such units to be white, but that policy was softened to allow African American surgeons and chaplains. By the end of the war, in addition to the chaplains and surgeons, there were some 87 African-American officers. Thomas's endeavor was very successful, and on May 22, 1863, the Bureau of Colored Troops was established to coordinate and organize regiments from all parts of the country. Created under War Department General Order No. 143, the bureau was responsible for handling "all matters relating to the organization of Colored Troops." The bureau was directly under the Adjutant General's Office and its procedures and rules were specific and strict. All African American regiments were now to be designated United States Colored Troops (USCT). At this time there were some African American regiments with state names and a few regiments in the Department of the Gulf designated as Corps d'Afrique. All these were ultimately assimilated into the USCT, even though some of the regiments, such as the 5th Massachusetts, retained their state designations.

To facilitate recruiting in the states of Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee, and eventually Kentucky, the War Department issued General Order No. 329 on October 3, 1863. Section 6 of the order stated that if any citizen should offer his or her slave for enlistment into the military service, that person would, "if such slave be accepted, receive from the recruiting officer a certificate thereof, and become entitled to compensation for the service or labor of said slave, not exceeding the sum of three hundred dollars, upon filing a valid deed of manumission and of release, and making satisfactory proof of title." For this reason, some records of manumission are contained in the compiled service records reproduced in this publication.

The USCT fought in 39 major engagements and over 400 lesser ones. Sixteen African American soldiers received Medals of Honor. As it was in other units, the death toll from disease was very high in the USCT. Deaths from disease and battle totaled 37,000. The last regiment of the USCT was mustered out of Federal service in December 1867.

Important sources for information about African American units in the Civil War are the War Department's *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: 1880-1901; reprinted Harrisburg, 1971 and 1985) and the Navy Department's *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies* (Washington, DC: 1874-1922; reprinted Harrisburg, 1971 and 1985). These multivolume works contains reports of operations and other official correspondence.

### 1st United States Colored Cavalry

This regiment was organized at Camp Hamilton, VA, on December 22, 1863, and assigned to duty in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. The 1st participated in Gen. Benjamin F. Butler's operations on the south side of the James River and against Petersburg and Richmond, May 4-28, 1864. These included the capture of Bermuda Hundred and City Point, VA, on May 5, and events leading up to and including the siege of Petersburg. In August 1864 it was transferred to the defenses of Portsmouth, District of Eastern Virginia. On June 10, 1865, the 1st sailed from City Point, VA, to Texas where it was

assigned duty on the Rio Grande and various other areas of the state. The unit was mustered out on February 4, 1866. Compiled casualty figures are not available.

### 2d United States Colored Cavalry

This regiment was organized at Fort Monroe, VA, on December 22, 1863, and assigned to duty in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. The 2d participated in Gen. Benjamin F. Butler=s operations on the south side of the James River and against Petersburg and Richmond, May 4-28, 1864. These included the capture of Bermuda Hundred and City Point, VA, on May 5, and events leading up to and including the siege of Petersburg. In February 1865 it was transferred to Norfolk, District of Eastern Virginia. On June 10, 1865, the 2d sailed from City Point, VA, to Texas where it was assigned duty on the Rio Grande and various other areas of the state. The unit was mustered out on February 12, 1866. Losses included 19 killed in action and 161 dead from disease and other causes.

### 3d United States Colored Cavalry

Organized at Vicksburg, MS, on October 9, 1863, as the 1st Mississippi Cavalry (African Descent), this regiment was redesignated the 3d U.S. Colored Cavalry on March 11, 1864. From its organization until March 1864, the unit was attached to the District of Northeast Louisiana and from January to March 1864 participated in operations up the Yazoo River and the occupation of Yazoo City. The regiment was then transferred to the District of Vicksburg, Department of Tennessee, where it remained until December 1864. That month the unit moved to Memphis, TN, and from December 21, 1864, to January 5, 1865, participated in Gen. Benjamin Grierson=s raid to destroy the Mobile & Ohio Railroad. The 3d remained on duty in Memphis and the District of West Tennessee and took part in the expedition from Memphis to Brownsville, MS, April 23-26, 1865. On April 29 the regiment returned to Vicksburg and operated around Natchez in search of fugitive Confederate President Jefferson Davis. The unit remained in the District of West Tennessee and Department of Mississippi until January 26, 1866, when it was mustered out. Losses included 37 killed in action and 367 dead from disease and other causes.

### 4th United States Colored Cavalry

Organized on September 12, 1863, as the 1st Corps d=Afrique Cavalry, this regiment was redesignated the 4th United States Colored Cavalry on April 4, 1864. From its organization until August 1864, it was attached to the Defenses of New Orleans, Department of the Gulf. On August 8, 1864, the 4th was ordered to Baton Rouge, LA, District of Port Hudson, and remained on duty at that post until July 1865 when it was transferred to the Department of Mississippi. It performed duties at various points in that department until it was mustered out on March 20, 1866. Compiled casualty figures are not available.

### 5th United States Colored Cavalry

This regiment was organized at Camp Nelson, KY, on October 24, 1864, and attached to the 1st Division, District of Kentucky, Department of Ohio. December 10-29, 1864, it participated in Stoneman=s Raid into southwestern Virginia, including the capture of Saltville and the destruction of saltworks on December 20-21. In February 1865 the regiment was transferred to the Military District and Department of Kentucky until December of that year when it was ordered to the Department of Arkansas. During the latter period the unit performed mostly garrison duty. The regiment was mustered out March 20, 1866. Losses included 35 killed in action and 152 dead from disease and other causes.

### 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored)

This regiment was organized at Camp Meigs, Reedville, MA, in the spring of 1864, and sent to Washington, DC, in May of that year. On May 13 the regiment moved to City Point, VA, where it was attached to the 18th Army Corps. Until June 16 it functioned as an infantry unit and participated in the siege of Petersburg. On June 30 it was moved to Point Lookout, MD, to guard prisoners of war. In July 1864 the regiment, still at Point Lookout, became part of the 22d Army Corps. It was transferred to the 25th Army Corps in March 1865 and ordered to the field near Richmond and Petersburg. In June the regiment was ordered to the Department of Texas where it was assigned duty at Clarksville until October 31, 1865, when it was mustered out. Losses included 7 men killed in action and 116 dead from disease and other causes.

### 6th United States Colored Cavalry

This regiment was organized at Camp Nelson, KY, on October 24, 1864, and attached to the 1st Division, District of Kentucky, Department of Ohio. December 10-29, 1864, it participated in Stoneman=s Raid, including the destruction of the lead mines in southwestern Virginia. At the end of December the regiment returned to Camp Nelson and in February 1865 was transferred to the Military District and Department of Kentucky. It remained there until December 1865 when it was ordered to the Department of Arkansas. The unit was mustered out on April 15, 1866. Compiled casualty figures are not available.

#### Records Description

Compiled service records consist of a jacket-envelope for each soldier, labeled with his name, rank, unit, and card numbers. The compilation of service records of Union soldiers began in 1890 under the direction of Col. Fred C. Ainsworth, head of the Record and Pension Office of the Adjutant General's Office, Department of War. Information from muster rolls, regimental returns, descriptive books, and other records was copied verbatim onto cards. A separate card was prepared each time an individual name appeared on a document. These cards were numbered on the back, and these numbers were entered onto the outside jacket containing the cards. The carded information was verified by a separated operation of comparison; great care was taken to ensure that the cards were accurate.

A typical jacket contains card abstracts of entries found in original records relating to the soldier and original documents relating solely to that soldier. Examples of the latter include enlistment papers, substitute certificates, casualty sheets, death reports, prisoner-of-war memorandums, and correspondence. Unique to the records of the USCT are deeds of manumission, oaths of allegiance, proof of ownership, certificates of monetary award, and bills of sale. These items appear most frequently in units recruited in the border states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland. These states remained in the Union but were slave states. Jackets and cards include a section labeled "bookmark" which was reserved for cross-references to other records relating to the individual or his unit. The service records are arranged by arm of service, thereunder numerically by regiment or independent battalion or company and thereunder alphabetically by name of the soldier. Records for officers are interfiled alphabetically by name with the records of enlisted men. If an individual served in more than one unit, which was typical for USCT officers, there will be a separate service record for each unit in which he served.

#### Related Records

Among the records of the Adjutant General's Office in the National Archives are many of the original

records that were abstracted or "carded" by the Record and Pension Office. These include the individual unit's muster rolls, returns and descriptive books. Other series in RG 94 that contain information relating to volunteer Union soldiers who served with the USCT include carded records relating to Union staff officers, carded medical records of volunteer Union soldiers, unbound and bound regimental records and "record of events" cards. The regimental records of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored) have been reproduced as Microfilm Publication M1659, *Records of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (Colored), 1863-1865*.

The "record of events" cards include information copied from the unit's muster rolls and returns. They show the stations of the field and staff and those of the various companies of the regiment at the time the muster roll or return was prepared and sometimes mention battles, skirmishes, or other activities in which the regiment participated. The cards have been reproduced as Microfilm Publication M594 *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations*.

Record Group 94 also includes a card index for the USCT, reproduced as Microfilm Publication M589, *Index to Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with U.S. Colored Troops*, which may be used to locate the regiment of USCT personnel. An index card gives the name of the soldier and his rank, as well as the unit in which he served; sometimes there is a cross-reference to his service in other units or organizations. The National Archives is continually producing microfilm publications of volunteer Union compiled military service records. A complete listing of finished publications can be found in the National Archives' *Microfilm Resources for Research: A Comprehensive Catalog* which is available online at <http://www.nara.gov>.

The Records of the Colored Troops Division, within RG 94, include division correspondence and records relating to recruiting, the appointment of officers, and the slave or free status of individuals; and a compilation of historical extracts and official papers concerning the military service of African Americans from the colonial period through the Civil War entitled *The Negro in the Military Service of the United States 1639-1886*. This compilation is reproduced as Microfilm Publication M858. The Records of the Bounty and Claims Division, also in RG 94, include correspondence of the division and records relating to bounties and claims paid to loyal owners of slaves by the Slave Claims Commissions of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee and West Virginia.

If an application for a pension was made, the pension application case file may be among the Records of the Veterans Administration (RG 15). Indexes to the pension applications have been reproduced as Microfilm Publication T288, *General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934*, and T289, *Organizational Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861 and 1900*.

If a soldier or officer was tried before a general court-martial or if an individual or his unit was the subject of a court of inquiry or military commission, transcripts of the proceedings may be among the Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army) (RG 153). The registers to the proceedings have been reproduced as Microfilm Publication M1105, *Registers of the Records of the Proceedings of the U.S. Army General Courts-Martial, 1809-1890*.

Other record groups having information pertaining to the USCT include Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (RG 105); Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau (Civil War) (RG 110); Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury (RG 217); and Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920 (RG 393).

## CONTENTS

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	1st United States Colored Cavalry
	Akess, Alexander - Bom, John H.
2	Bomer, James - Cartwright, John
3	Casey, Thomas - Davenport, John J.
4	Davis, Augustus - Floyd, George
5	Fly, Benjamin - Griffin, Oliver
6	Griffin, Quinton - Holstead, Peter
7	Holt, George - Jones, Herbert
8	Jones, Howell - Macoy, Peter
9	Madry, Andrew - Mosley, Jacob
10	Moss, James - Polk, James
11	Pollard, Sipio - Sales, William
12	Sample, Abram (Abraham) - Smith, Ives
13	Smith, James - Times, Nelson
14	Tines, Archer - Wheldon, Charles M.
15	Whitby, Joseph - Wilson, Isaac
16	Wilson, James - Zoe (no first name)
17	2d United States Colored Cavalry
	Abbot, John - Bell, Charles
18	Bell, Henry - Burns, Richard
19	Burroughs, George L. - Cotton, Samuel
20	Coues, Alexander - Duncan, Levi
21	Dunkins, Ezekiah James - Gardner, Richard
22	Garris, Henry - Harrison, Thomas
23	Harrison, William - Humphries, David
24	Hunter, Francis - Jones, Robert
25	Jones, Robert F. - Martin, Robert (Martin)
26	Martin, Thaddeus or Martin, Thaddeus W. - Osborne, Henry S.
27	Oulden, Jacob - Prior, Edward or Edmund
28	Proctor, David - Sawyer, Wilson
29	Scabber, Charles - Stanley, William
30	Stanley, Wright or Right - Upshear, Neverson
31	Upshear, Samuel - Whites, Joe
32	Whites, Silas - Zodrick, Isaiah A. or Isaiah
33	3d United States Colored Cavalry
	Aaron, John - Black, David
34	Black, Richard - Cameron, Wyatt
35	Cammel, Austin - Cooper, Stephen
36	Coran, Joseph - Erving, Tilson
37	Erwin, Anderson - Gool, George
38	Gordon, Alfred - Haskins, Jasper
39	Hawkins, Frank - Jackson, Harvey
40	Jackson, Henry - Kembro, Abraham
41	Kenedy, Lemuel - Lott, Judge

42 Lott, Matton - Mitchell, Berry  
 43 Mitchell, George - Pettis, Edmond  
 44 Pettis, George - Roberson, Jefferson  
 45 Roberson, Wallace - Simpson, Levi  
 46 Sims, Anderson - Taylor, Phillip  
 47 Taylor, Richard - Washington, Isaac  
 48 Washington, Oscar - Williams, Mitchel  
 49 Williams, Moses - Young, Mathew  
 50 4th United States Colored Cavalry  
 Abraham, Randall - Blanchan, William  
 51 Blanchard, Moses - Clark, Moses  
 52 Clark, Theodore - Ellars, James  
 53 Ellars, John - Heath, Culbert  
 54 Henderson, George - Johnson, Henderson  
 55 Johnson, Henry - Mayberry, Nelson  
 56 Macomory, John - Oliver, Celestine  
 57 Olsten, Alexander - Robinson, William  
 58 Robinson, William E. - Thomas, Stephen  
 59 Thomas, William - Williams, Horace  
 60 Williams, Isaac - Zulia, Francois  
 61 5th United States Colored Cavalry  
 Abel, Fletcher - Biggs, Randall  
 62 Birch, Benjamin - Burly, Frank  
 63 Burly, James - Coffman, James D.  
 64 Coke, Samuel - Dudley, John  
 65 Duke, John - Givens, Peter  
 66 Glen, John - Harriden, Edmund  
 67 Harrigan, Harden - Hughes, Thomas  
 68 Hulse, James - Keller, Ephraim  
 69 Kelley, Franklin - Matthews, Benjamin  
 70 Maupin, Preston - Murry, Ned  
 71 Murtney, Morton - Ray, John  
 72 Ray, Thomas - Sherrod, William  
 73 Shrewsbury, Joseph - Stone, John  
 74 Stone, Lewis - Trye, Benjamin  
 75 Trueheart, Samuel - Williams, James  
 76 Williams, Jerry - Yowell, Joseph  
 77 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored)  
 Abbey, David - Biers, William  
 78 Billings, Jeremiah - Burgess, Williams  
 79 Burnett, Lewis - Cook, Joseph T.  
 80 Cooper, Isaac - Dunmore, William  
 81 Durbin, Stephen - Furman, Seneca A.  
 82 Gadson, James - Gurley, Joseph L.  
 83 Guy, James - Hill, John W.  
 84 Hill, Richard - Johns, Thomas H.  
 85 Johnson, Aaron - Lambert, William  
 86 Lancaster, James - Mason, John

87 Mason, John H. - Nelson, Philip  
 88 Nelson, Preston - Preston, Thomas  
 89 Price, Adam - Sampson, George P.  
 90 Sanborn, Madison - Stringer, William  
 91 Strother, Frank - Vance, William H.  
 92 Van Hoesen, Charles - Wilkinson, Simon  
 93 Williams, Abram H. - Young, Thomas  
 94 6th United States Colored Cavalry  
     Abbot, John - Birch, James  
 95 Bivins, Gabriel - Buckner, George  
 96 Buckner, Henderson - Compton, James  
 97 Cook, Benjamin - Ellis, William  
 98 Ellis, Wyatt - Godley, Isaac  
 99 Gooch, Alexander - Herston, Abraham  
 100 Heywood, John R. - Johnson, Jackson  
 101 Johnson, James M. - Marshall, Lyman  
 102 Marshall, William - Neihardt, Isaac D.  
 103 Nelson, Joseph - Redd, Tiney  
 104 Redway, Hamilton K. - Sebree, Bob Woodcock  
 105 Sebree, Crittenden - Sumpter, John  
 106 Sutherland, Williams - Washington, Charles  
 107 Washington, George - Wren (no first name)