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COMPILED MILITARY SERVICE RECORDS OF VOLUNTEER UNION SOLDIERS  
WHO SERVED WITH THE UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS:  
INFANTRY ORGANIZATIONS, 14TH THROUGH 19TH

Introduction

On the 105 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1822, are reproduced the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers belonging to the 14th through the 19th infantry units organized for service with the United States Colored Troops (USCT). The USCT included 7 numbered cavalry regiments; 13 numbered artillery regiments plus 1 independent battery; 134 numbered infantry regiments; Brigade Bands Nos. 1 and 2 (Corps d'Afrique and U.S. Colored Troops); Powell's Regiment Colored Infantry; Southard's Company Colored Infantry; Quartermaster Detachment; Pioneer Corps, 1st Division, 16th Army Corps; Pioneer Corps, Cavalry Division, 16th Army Corps; Unassigned Company A Colored Infantry and Unassigned USCT. There are also miscellaneous service cards arranged alphabetically by surname at the end of the unit records. The records reproduced are part of the Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group (RG) 94.

Background

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 four Union regiments of African Americans were raised in New Orleans, LA: the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd 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. 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 (12 Stat. 592). This act allowed President Abraham Lincoln "to employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary and proper for the suppression of this rebellion, and for this purpose he may organize and use them in such manner as he may judge best for the public welfare." The President did not authorize use of African Americans in combat, however, 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. Because the pace of organizing additional regiments was very slow, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton sent General Lorenzo Thomas to the lower Mississippi Valley in March 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 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. The Corps d'Afrique units ultimately became numbered regiments in the USCT. The 54th and 55th Massachusetts Infantries (Colored), the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored), the 29th Connecticut Infantry (Colored), the 6th and 7th Louisiana Infantries (African Descent), the 3rd Tennessee Volunteer Infantry (African Descent), and the 1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored) retained their number and state designation, but served under the Bureau of Colored Troops.

To facilitate recruiting in 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 the Medal 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 approximately 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, PA, 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, PA, 1971 and 1985). These multivolume works contain reports of operations and other official correspondence.

#### 14th United States Colored Infantry

This regiment was formed between November 16, 1863, and January 8, 1864, in Tennessee. The various companies of the 14th USCT were initially detailed to garrison duty, railroad protection, or wagon train protection between Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Dalton, Georgia. The 14th USCT saw its first combat on August 14th and 15th, 1864, when it engaged in heavy skirmishing with raiding parties from General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry at Dalton, Georgia. The regiment again saw combat on October 28, 1864, at Decatur, Alabama. The 14th USCT fought in the Battle of Nashville, December 15 and 16, 1864, and took part in the pursuit of the remainder of Hood's forces to the Tennessee River from December 17-28, 1864. Following the Nashville, Tennessee, campaign the regiment returned to guarding railroads and garrison duty throughout the Department of Tennessee until it was mustered out on March 26, 1866.

#### 15th United States Colored Infantry

This regiment was organized at Nashville, Tennessee, December 2, 1863, to March 11, 1864. The 15th USCT was responsible for railroad and guard duty at Nashville, Columbia, and Pulaski, Tennessee, from March to June 1864. From June 1864 until it mustered out on April 30, 1866, the 15th regiment was engaged in post duties throughout the District of Middle Tennessee.

#### 16th United States Colored Infantry

This regiment was formed at Nashville, Tennessee, between December 4, 1864, and February 13, 1864. It performed guard duty until September 24, 1864. Between September 25 and 27, 1864, the regiment participated in several skirmishes against General Nathaniel Bedford Forrest's forces near Pulaski, Tennessee. The 16th USCT participated in the Battle of Nashville December 15-16, 1864, and the pursuit of General Hood's forces to the Tennessee River until December 28, 1864. The regiment returned to guard duty at Nashville and in Middle and East Tennessee until it mustered out on April 30, 1866.

#### 17th United States Colored Infantry

The 17th USCT was organized from December 12 to 23, 1863, at Nashville, Tennessee. The regiment performed guard duty at Murfreesboro, Franklin, and Saundersville, Tennessee, until November 1864. On December 15-16, 1864, the regiment fought at the Battle of Nashville and suffered two officers killed and four wounded, and thirteen enlisted men killed and 58 wounded. The 17th USCT participated in the pursuit of General Hood's remaining forces until December 26, 1864. On December 27, 1864, the regiment was engaged in light skirmishing near Decatur, Alabama. For the remainder of its service the regiment served on guard duty in the Department of Tennessee until it mustered out on April 25, 1866.

#### 18th United States Colored Infantry

This regiment was organized in Missouri from February 1 through September 28, 1864. It performed guard duty first at Paducah, Kentucky, then at Nashville, Tennessee, November 7 to December 11, 1864. The regiment withstood the siege of Nashville by General Hood's army December 1-15, 1864. It participated in the Battle of Nashville and the subsequent pursuit of General Hood, December 15-30, 1864. On January 27, 1865, a detachment of three officers and 75 men fought at the skirmish of Sand Mountain, or Elrod's Tan Yard. The regiment was stationed at Nashville, Tennessee, until it mustered out February 21, 1866.

#### 19th United States Colored Infantry

The 19th USCT regiment was organized at Camp Stanton, Maryland, from December 25, 1863, until January 16, 1864, and was stationed at Camps Stanton and Birney until March 1864. From April to June 1864, the 19th USCT participated in the campaign from the Rapidan to the James River, Virginia. The regiment took part in the siege of Petersburg and fought in the Battle of the Crater July 30, 1864. It was engaged in the Richmond campaign and entered the city on April 3, 1865. The 19th USCT was present at the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House April 9 and 10. Transferred to Brownsville, Texas, for duty on the Rio Grande River, the regiment mustered out on January 15, 1867.

### 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 separate 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, proofs 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.

The unjacketed miscellaneous cards were accumulated by the War Department with the expectation that they would be incorporated in individual compiled service records. The expectation was never fulfilled, however, because either insufficient or contradictory information made it impossible to associate the cards or papers with a particular soldier's service record.

#### 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 as well as the stations of the 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 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, as well as 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 a soldier applied for a pension, 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).

Holdings of the National Archives relating to the Civil War are outlined in Kenneth W. Munden and Henry Putnam Beers, *Guide to Federal Archives Relating to the Civil War* (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1962) and Henry Putnam Beers, *Guide to the Archives of the Government of the Confederate States of America* (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1968), which were reprinted as *The Union* (1986) and *The Confederacy* (1986).

## CONTENTS

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	14th United States Colored Infantry
	Abernathy, Henry – Barksdale, Warren
2	Barkster, Wesley – Brown, William W.
3	Browning, Huston – Clark, Lewis
4	Clark, Martin – Davis, Joseph
5	Davis, Morgan – Evans, James
6	Everett, Benjamin – Green, Bowling
7	Green, Charles – Hodges, Andrew
8	Hodges, Cornelius – Jones, Nelson A.
9	Jones, Orson – Manessee, Lewis
10	Manuel, Andrew J. – Miller, Willis
11	Milliken, Thomas – Owens, Samuel
12	Page, Benjamin – Randolph, Willis
13	Ransom, Richard – Sanders, Jesse
14	Saunders, Abraham – Tear, Wallace
15	Terrell, Green – Washington, Barney
16	Washington, Charles – Word, Anderson
17	Wright, Daniel K. – Young, Richard
	Miscellaneous Service Cards

18                   Abernathy, James – Young, Joseph  
                   15th United States Colored Infantry  
                   Adams, Albert – Bonner, Louis  
 19                   Bonnett, Carter H. – Chambers, Taylor  
 20                   Chance, Anthony – Dean, George  
 21                   De Armond, James A. – Fleming, Ruben  
 22                   Fletcher, Abraham – Gregory, John  
 23                   Gregory, Peter – Horde, Jamison  
 24                   Hornburger, Alexander – Kelley, Kager  
 25                   Kelley, Melvin – Manning, Samuel  
 26                   Manse, Joseph – Nance, Webster  
 27                   Napier, George – Reems, Hardy  
 28                   Rees, Samuel – Small, Henry  
 29                   Smallwood, David – Thomas, Moses  
 30                   Thomas, William – Webb, Wyatt  
 31                   Webster, Edward – Youst, John  
 32                   Miscellaneous Service Cards  
                   Abram, Isaac – Young, Nero  
 33                   16th United States Colored Infantry  
                   Abdill, William J. – Beauregard, Isaac  
 34                   Bell, Edmund – Bush, George  
 35                   Bush, Patrick – Courtney, Henry  
 36                   Courtney, Michael L. – Earl, Rumsey  
 37                   Easley, Roland T. – Gatewood, James  
 38                   Gaw, William B. – Hall, William  
 39                   Hamilton, James – Hughes, Edmond  
 40                   Hughes, John – Kincade, Harvey  
 41                   Kincade, Henry – Marbly, John  
 42                   Marley, Judge – Moore, Page  
 43                   Moore, Quint – Powell, Lawrence  
 44                   Powers, Calvin – Russell, William  
 45                   Russian, Ellis – Sugg, Horace  
 46                   Suggs, Wilson – Washington, William  
 47                   Waterbury, Fordyce H. – Young, Wallace  
 48                   Miscellaneous Service Records  
                   Abernathey, Frank – Young, Thornton  
 49                   17th United States Colored Infantry  
                   Acklen, Robert – Bennett, Elliott  
 50                   Bensebey, Thomas – Butler, Benton  
 51                   Butler Frederick – Dade, Walter  
 52                   Daniels, Henry – Ferguson, Joshua  
 53                   Ferguson, Robert – Green, Francis  
 54                   Green, Jackson – Holden, Edward  
 55                   Holden, George W. – Jordan, Evans  
 56                   Jordan, James H. – Maston, Hampton  
 57                   Maston, Henderson – Moon, Henry  
 58                   Moon, Lewis – Pettus, Frank  
 59                   Phelps, Jeremiah – Rogers, Minor  
 60                   Rolan, Alfred – Stivers, Edwin J.  
 61                   Stokes, Silas – Walker, Thomas

62 Walker, Wesley – Wiseman, John  
63 Wood, Edmund D. – Younkins, John  
64 Miscellaneous Service Cards  
Ackley, Derusha – Young, Willis  
65 18th United States Colored Infantry  
Adams, Benjamin – Blackburn, Reuben D.  
66 Blackwell, Roddam – Bundam, Thomas  
67 Burget, George – Crocket, Benjamin  
68 Crocket, David – Downs, Richard  
69 Drayton, David – Fox, John  
70 Frame, John C. – Grimmett, Peter  
71 Guinn, James – Heartshorn, George  
72 Heathers, Jacob H. – Jackson, Boyd  
73 Jackson, General – Jones, Nathan  
74 Jones, Peter – Lindsay, William  
75 Linn, Lewis T. – Mitchell, Robert  
76 Mobely, Samuel – Parlen, Charles  
77 Parmer, George – Remick, James  
78 Remick, Squire – Shepard, Hardin  
79 Shepard, John – Taylor, Samuel  
80 Taylor, William – Walker, Charles  
81 Wall, Doc – Williams, Lamus  
82 Williams, Peter – Young, Robert  
83 Miscellaneous Service Cards  
Adams, John – Young, Jerry  
84 19th United States Colored Infantry  
Able, John W. – Baswell, Isaac  
85 Baswell, Nathane – Brooks, George W.  
86 Brooks, Isaac – Carr, John H.  
87 Carroll, George W. – Cooper, William H.  
88 Copper, John – Dobbs, Lemuel D.  
89 Dobson, James H. – Fletcher, Edward  
90 Fletcher, Frederick K. – Gray, Peter  
91 Green, Alexander – Hawkins, Edward  
92 Hawkins, Frank – Hudson, George  
93 Hudson, John – Johnson, James H.  
94 Johnson, John – King, Thomas  
95 Kinnard, Charles – Manoky, Alfred  
96 Manns, Charles – Murray, George  
97 Murray, Henry – Potwin, George C.  
98 Powell, Horace – Robbins, Thomas  
99 Robert, Joseph E. – Short, William  
100 Shorter, John A. – Stephens, George  
101 Stephens, Joseph – Thomas, Henry G.  
102 Thomas, James – Wallace, Robert  
103 Walley, Richard – Williams, John H.  
104 Williams, Joseph – Young, William  
Miscellaneous Service Cards  
Able, John – Diggs, John W.  
105 Dillahay, Peter – Young, William

