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Right to Serve, Right to Lead: Lives and Legacies of the USCT

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Right to Serve, Right to Lead: Lives and Legacies of the USCT

Abstract

This is a catalog for an exhibit that follows the evolution of African-American participation in the Civil War, from slaves, to contrabands, to soldiers of the United States Colored Troops (USCT), as well as the lives of black veterans beyond the war, and their ultimate military and social legacy. Using a variety of period items, it creates a narrative that stretches from the Antebellum Period to the current day. In doing so, the exhibit shows how black sacrifice on the battlefield redefined the war's purpose throughout the divided nation, how Jim Crowe suppressed the memory of black participation after Reconstruction, and how the illustrious African-American military tradition left by the USCT endures to this day in their modern heirs.

Keywords

Civil War, United States Colored Troops, Civil Rights, United States Military History, Museum Exhibits, Africana Studies

Disciplines

African American Studies | Military History | Museum Studies | Public History | United States History

Comments

"Right to Serve, Right to Lead: Lives and Legacies of the USCT" was displayed as an exhibit in the Special Collections Reading Room at Gettysburg College's Musselman Library from August 29, 2016 to December 18, 2017. The exhibit was built during the curator's [Brian C. Pohanka Internship](#) in the Gettysburg College Special Collections during the summer of 2016, offered through the Civil War Institute.

This catalog was created as a collaborative effort of Special Collections and College Archives and the Civil War Institute Fellowship program. CWI Fellows selected artifacts and conducted research to make connections to wider historical themes from the Civil War Era and beyond.

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RIGHT TO SERVE, RIGHT TO LEAD: LIVES AND LEGACIES OF THE USCT



An exhibition in Special Collections and College Archives,
Musselman Library, Gettysburg College
August 29, 2016-December 18, 2017

Curated by Matthew LaRoche '17
2016 Brian C. Pohanka Intern

Cover image: **"Marching on!"**--The Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Colored Regiment singing John Brown's March in the streets of Charleston, February 21, 1865. Published in Harper's Weekly March 18, 1865. Wood engraving

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Matthew LaRoche '17

Unless otherwise noted, all artifacts and documents highlighted in this catalog are on loan from the private collection of Angleo Scarlato.

CURATOR'S NOTE:

When I was five years old, my family began taking me to historic sites. I was attracted to those relating to the Civil War; Gettysburg in particular drew us back. As a boy accompanying my father on long walks with the park rangers, I got used to walking, to heat, and to investigating history.

Beginning my First Year Seminar, *The Long Shadow of the Civil War*, I was more interested in literature than history, but the class changed me. I started to see the study of history as a basis for philosophical inquiry. History allows you to apply any discipline or investigative method across the length and breadth of time. It seemed like a great way to answer questions, so I stuck with it.

I studied the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in the classroom, but what really drew me to the topic came from outside. While working at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia, I became aware of Storer College, an institution founded shortly after the war to educate local USCT veterans, freedmen and their families, tens of thousands of whom had fled to the huge Union depot during the war. Storer was also a "normal" school, training teachers of all races to take education into the South. In Harpers Ferry, the reasons why the USCT fought – safety, community, opportunity, education – coalesced. I found the interconnectedness astounding.

Then I took *The Great War*. Writing about the black Americans who served in the First World War, I became aware of the terrible abuses and insults they had suffered, even as the 369th Infantry Regiment (the Harlem Hellfighters) became the most decorated and most militarily successful U.S. regiment of the war. Their struggle to gain the right of officership, and then (unsuccessfully) to keep it after the war, factored heavily into the exhibit.

In developing the exhibit, I sought to

- **arrange objects in a lived-in, contextual way.** They progress chronologically, telling the story as if it were breaking news, and are intended to inform the visitor of the time in which the USCT lived. I hope each one helps to recreate the emotional tenor of its moment.
- **avoid generalizations by not portraying these men or their families as victims – or heroes.** They are both and neither. The USCT's history encompasses the gamut of experience from the very negative to the very positive, and everything between. In selecting items and information I tried to honor them, while making it clear that their legacy is still being written.
- **highlight the most important, influential parts of the USCT story,** above all showing its evolution through the war years when whites and blacks struggled to define what a black soldier was. Who would he fight for, for what reasons, and in what capacity? What is a democracy supposed to look like, and to whom should it be open?
- **celebrate the role of black agency in shaping the war's outcome.** Self-emancipation forced the question of how the federal government would legally consider blacks during and after the war. Courage and sacrifice at Fort Wagner led the Northern public to consider the black soldier, his rights as a potential citizen, and his vision for the post-war. Initiative and quick thinking at Chaffin's farm not only won 15 Medals of Honor for black soldiers, but demonstrated that black soldiers could lead men in combat – and lead them well.

Matthew LaRoche '17



W. T. CARLTON, PINX.

Ex'td according to Act of Congress, A. D. 1865, by W. T. Carlton, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Mass.

HEARD & MOSELEY, PHOT.

WATCH MEETING,



WAITING FOR THE HOUR.

Watch meeting, Dec. 31, 1862--Waiting for the hour. William T. Carlton. Photographic print on card mount.



BLACK SERVICEMEN ON THE SEAS: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE UNION NAVY

Hannah Christensen '17

When the Civil War began, the United States Navy's Atlantic Squadron, commanded by Commodore Silas H. Stringham, sought to blockade the entire Eastern Seaboard of the Confederacy. It faced two major problems: a shortage of manpower, and an abundance of fugitive slaves flocking to the Union fleet. The commander of one vessel, Commander O.S. Glisson, had fifteen refugees on his ship, none of whom he intended to return to their owners. Glisson wrote to Commodore Stringham asking for advice. Stringham in turn wrote to his superior, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, with an idea. Arguing that "if Negroes are to be used in this contest . . . they should be used to preserve the Government," Stringham asked permission to recruit these fugitive slaves. Secretary Welles, knowing that the Navy needed men, approved the request.

Two factors made Stringham's solution possible. The first was the Navy's perennial manpower problem. Since the Revolutionary War, the U.S. Navy had never had enough sailors. Time and again, they turned to African Americans for help filling the ranks. While a quota had been instituted in the 1830s, it was dropped in 1862 when the Second Confiscation Act and the Militia Act became law. The latter technically allowed African American recruitment for any kind of military service, so the Navy took full advantage. The second factor behind Welles's decision was the naval recruiting process itself. Naval recruitment was a federal responsibility, so the states had no say in how—or who—the Navy recruited. This put the Navy a couple of years ahead of the Army, which relied largely on state-based recruitment and did not allow African American enlistment until later in the war.

Not only were African American sailors allowed to enlist sooner than their counterparts in the Army, men in the Navy also experienced a different military culture. The Navy's leadership did not necessarily mind the presence of tens of thousands of African Americans, men not unlike the unidentified sailor in this photograph. In spite of the quota, most career sailors were accustomed to the idea of blacks and whites serving side by side. Because of this tradition, naval vessels had integrated crews and African Americans were offered equal pay, benefits, standards of living, health care, and status within the naval bureaucracy. Rank restrictions were dropped when the Navy started to compete with the Army for African American enlistment after the establishment of the United States Colored Troops in 1863.

While most African Americans served as low-ranking sailors, the Navy also hired some as pilots. Many formerly enslaved men, familiar with the coastal waterways of the Deep South, could easily guide Union troops and ships to attack Confederate positions inland. These pilots made up something resembling an officer class, with ranks of acting master pilot and acting ensign pilot. One such pilot was Robert Smalls, famous for sailing a Confederate steamer called the Planter past the Fort Sumter batteries to the Union blockade in May 1862. After this escapade, Smalls served as commander of the Planter, in addition to piloting Army and Navy vessels on many occasions, including the assault on Charleston, South Carolina in April 1863. Smalls was but one of the many African Americans who offered invaluable service to the Union Navy throughout the course of the war.

Unknown sailor. Tintype *Approximately 19,000 USCT served in the navy, a much smaller number than the 180,000 who served in on land. The entire Union military totaled 2,000,000; one in ten Union soldiers was a black man.*

A BEACON OF HOPE: CONTRABAND CAMPS, HARPERS FERRY, AND JOHN BROWN

Alex Andrioli '18

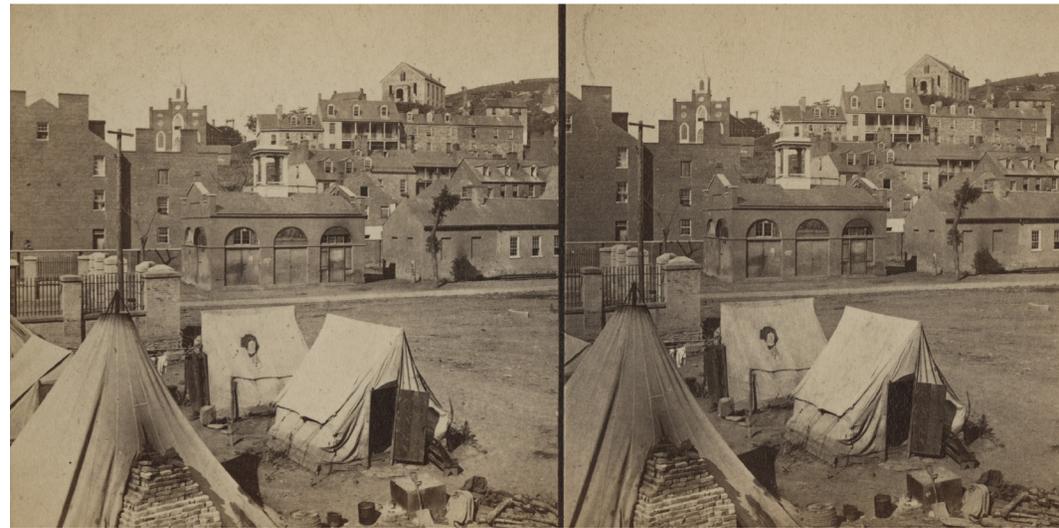
Stereoviews were created by using a twin-lens camera that captured the same subject from two slightly different angles. The photographer then placed the two images on a stereoview card that could be inserted into a special viewer that merged the two images together and created a life-like, three-dimensional image. Stereoviews' low cost meant they were an inexpensive way to insert oneself into realistic three-dimensional scenes like the pictured contraband camp.

These camps, however, were far more real for the people who inhabited them. "Contraband" was a term used by the Union Army to describe runaway and liberated slaves who were hiding behind Union lines. In the first few weeks of the war, the Union had no policy for dealing with former slaves, so it was up to individual commanders to decide how to handle them. Some commanders put them to work for the Union on a low wage, while others returned them to their owners. Union General Benjamin Butler was the first to call former slaves "contrabands of war" in 1861, eagerly declaring that these men were "property" that had been legally taken from the Confederate States of America and were not to be returned.

This stereoview of a contraband camp in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, poignantly details the Civil War's human cost, even with the total absence of people from the photograph. This example of early, three-dimensional photography known as "stereography" was very popular during the Civil War era. So popular was the medium that an estimated 70% of all Civil War photos were shot as stereoviews. As a result, almost no better method existed for bringing images of the war's human toll into people's homes.

The formerly enslaved men and women collecting at Union lines created significant logistical challenges for Union forces. Army commissaries and quartermasters were not prepared to provide for the basic needs of the thousands of self-emancipated individuals who followed them to freedom. To alleviate this pressure, contraband camps were set up in Union garrison towns like Harpers Ferry, where runaway slaves could seek refuge. These camps were squalid, comprised of makeshift tents and abandoned buildings, and filled with "great sickness and mortality . . . especially among children." However, the contraband camp in Harpers Ferry featured something unique which alluded to a future with potential: John Brown's Fort.

Two years before the start of the Civil War, in October 1859, John Brown brought his war on slavery to Harpers Ferry. Brown's plan to arm slaves failed and he and his cohort were captured in the "fort,"—then just a simple firehouse. The abolitionists were executed for their failed uprising, but Brown's legacy endured and became a symbol of the "cost of freedom." After the war, the fort's hallowed ground attracted civil rights groups like W.E.B. DuBois's Niagara Movement, which visited in 1906. Three years later, the fort was placed on the campus of Storer College, a historically black college in Harpers Ferry that was open to anyone regardless of race, sex, or religion.



Contraband Camp at Harpers Ferry, WV. Stereoview card. *The 3-dimensional stereoview and other photography brought the reality of the Civil War into civilian homes. This stereoview shows the rag-tag conditions of a contraband camp, erected just a few yards from John Brown's Fort in Harper's Ferry.*



THE COLORED VOLUNTEERS.

Fremont told us, when this war was first begun,
How to save this Union, and the way it should be done,
But Kentucky swore so hard, and old Abe he had his fears,
So that's what's the matter with the Colored Volunteers.

CHORUS.—Give us a flag all free without a slave,
We will fight to defend it as our fathers did so brave
Onward boys, onward, it's the year of jubilee,
God bless America, the land of liberty.

Little Mack went to Richmond with three hundred thousand brave—
Said keep back the negroes and the Union he would save ;
But Mack he was defeated, and the Union now in tears,
Is calling for the help of the Colored Volunteers.

CHORUS.—Give us a flag all free without a slave, &c.

Old Jeff he says he'll hang us if we dare to meet him armed—
It's a very big thing, but we are not at all alarmed :
He has first got to catch us before the way is clear,
And that's what's the matter with the Colored Volunteers.

CHORUS.—Give us a flag all free without a slave, &c.

Here's to the gallant Fourth which has not yet been tried,
They are willing and are ready with their brothers to divide;
General Birney leads us on, so we have no right to fear,
And that is the making of the Colored Volunteers.

CHORUS.—Give us a flag all free without a slave, &c.

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“THE COLORED VOLUNTEERS”: A RECRUITING TUNE FOR USCTS

Jennifer Simone '18

Given the dreadful reality of the Civil War, there was little use for songs that accurately reflected the duties and risks of soldiering when it came to recruiting civilians to fight. The danger involved in the war was high for all men, but black soldiers faced additional, unique threats. The particular hostility of Confederates to armed black men and distrust from their white Union comrades meant that they were especially vulnerable targets of wartime atrocities. Possibly written by a private in Company A of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, one of the first official African American units, “The Colored Volunteers” (also referred to as “Give Us a Flag”) was a song used as recruitment propaganda to encourage black men to enlist during the Civil War. The song’s lyrics sanitize many very serious issues and threats soldiers faced, offering a romanticized representation of the challenges a black enlistee would face.

THE COLORED VOLUNTEERS

*Fremont told us, when this war was first begun,
How to save the Union, and the way it should be done,
But Kentucky swore so hard, and old Abe he had his fears,
So that's what's the matter with the Colored Volunteers.*

John C. Frémont, famed explorer of the West and Army officer during the Mexican-American War, was appointed by President Lincoln to command the Department of the West in 1861. On August 30 of that year he issued an edict without permission of Lincoln stating among other things that slaves of Missourian rebels would be emancipated. However, “old Abe he had his fears” and worried that Frémont’s edict would lead Missouri and Kentucky to join the Confederacy. So Lincoln publicly revoked the edict, an act that hindered emancipation from becoming a war aim.

*CHORUS.—Give us a flag all free without a slave,
We will fight to defend it as our fathers did so brave;
Onward boys, onward, it's the year of jubilee,
God bless America, the land of liberty*

“The Colored Volunteers.” Song sheet. This song, encouraging black men to enlist, makes light the threat posed by Jeff Davis’s Special Order 111. After Fort Pillow, the reality of Confederate policy towards captured USCT became all too clear. Despite Confederate atrocities, black men continued enlisting throughout the war.

The optimistic tone of the chorus channels pride in the ability of black men to serve their country as their fathers did before restrictions were put in place on black military service. For the men who actually joined the USCT, of course, the celebratory tone of the chorus would prove to give less than a full picture of war.

*Little Mack went to Richmond with three hundred thousand brave —
Said keep back the negroes and the Union he would save;
But Mack he was defeated, and the Union now in tears,
Is calling for the help of the Colored Volunteers.*

The following stanza, however, reminds listeners of the hostility faced by black soldiers. George B. McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac in 1862, was no abolitionist and openly expressed his belief that whites were superior to blacks. McClellan, a conservative, also sought to win the war with minimal changes to the fabric of American society and discouraged Lincoln and Congress from embracing emancipation. This verse is a reminder that Union leadership resisted employing black soldiers in the early years of the war, but would eventually call for their enlistment when more help was needed.

*Old Jeff he says he'll hang us if we dare to meet him armed —
It's a very big thing, but we are not at all alarmed:
He has first got to catch us before the way is clear,
And that's what's the matter with the Colored Volunteers*

The most direct threat to black soldiers' well-being came from Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America. On December 24, 1862, he released General Order No. 111 including the declaration that "All negro slaves captured in arms be at once delivered over to the executive authorities of the respective States to which they belong to be dealt with according to the laws of said States." The statement suggested that runaway slaves who enlisted in the Union Army would be executed as punishment, but the song makes light of the situation and attempts to minimize its threatening implications. In reality, these threats were not empty. Confederates did indeed target black soldiers during brutal acts of retaliation, such as the massacre at Fort Pillow and the slaughter at the Battle of the Crater.

*Here's to the gallant Fourth which has not yet been tried,
They are willing and are ready with their brothers to divide;
General Birney leads us on, so we have no right to fear,
And that is the making of the Colored Volunteers.*

This song encouraged black men to enlist and fight for the Union with its catchy tune, downplayed depiction of war's horrors, and patriotic tone. Over time, however, as more black men joined the army, the singing of such enthusiastic songs quickly gave way to a more sober understanding of the war for freedom.

Right: **Unknown soldier.** Cabinet card





COMMANDING THE AFRICAN BRIGADE: A PORTRAIT OF UNION OFFICER EDWARD WILD

Savannah Rose '17

Edward Augustus Wild grew up in Massachusetts at a time when abolitionist fervor ran rampant within New England society. A doctor by profession and an adventurer by choice, Wild became a military officer out of a strong sense of personal honor, writing his wife Frances Ellen Wild that he did not enlist “to be elevated, but simply from a sense of duty.” At the outbreak of the war, Wild fulfilled the twin drives of duty and adventure by raising a company of volunteers and becoming a captain in the 1st Massachusetts Infantry.

Known as a courageous, capable, and obstinate officer, Wild led soldiers through numerous battles, from the First Battle of Bull Run—the first major engagement of the war—through the Peninsular Campaign, seeing combat at Yorktown, Williamsburg, and Fair Oaks, where he was wounded. A law unto himself, Wild complained to his superiors about the inadequacies of a fellow officer, eventually leading Wild to leave the regiment. He took command of the 35th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry as a colonel in August 1862, and a month later led his men at the Battle of South Mountain, losing his left arm in the fight.

When President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Massachusetts Governor John Andrew called for the creation of an African American regiment, forming the 54th Massachusetts Infantry with Colonel Robert Gould Shaw at its head. Inspired by the success of the 54th, Andrew pushed for the creation of an entire brigade of United States Colored Troops to be led by the newly promoted Brigadier General Edward A. Wild. With the help of Shaw, Wild selected white officers to head the group of black soldiers, and in April 1863 the “African Brigade” made its way to North Carolina to recruit local freedmen. While recruiting, Wild liberated hundreds of slaves from plantations and resettled them on Roanoke Island. They were then sent to South Carolina to assist in the capture of Charleston Harbor. The Brigade’s remarkable success in the Carolinas showcased the efficiency of United States Colored Troops to the nation, fulfilling a crucial goal of Wild and his men. They continued to strengthen the reputation of black troops in the eyes of the public. In 1864, the “African Brigade” repulsed the Confederate troops at Wilson’s Wharf in the first pitched battle between black troops and the Army of Northern Virginia.

Always a loose cannon, Wild was embroiled in controversy by the war’s end. When Richmond fell, Jefferson Davis had the last of the Confederacy’s gold evacuated to Georgia, in the hopes of shipping it overseas for safekeeping and to revive the dying Confederacy. While trying to recover the gold, Wild had the Chennault family of Georgia tortured, convinced they knew where the Confederate gold had been hidden. Wild never found the gold; modern scholarship concludes it was likely distributed to Confederate soldiers as payroll during its journey south.

Brigadier General Edward Wild. Carte de visite. *Brigadier General Wild was a USCT commander of some note. Serving from First Bull Run, the first major battle of the Civil War, to the end, he suffered multiple wounds and lost his left arm.*

ON THE PERIPHERY OF WAR: SUTLERS, LUXURIES, AND THE USCT

Jon Danchik '17

The Civil War caused an unmistakable strain on production and the allocation of resources in the North as well as the South. In order to keep armies in good order, a steady influx of supplies was needed, leading to shortages of food on the home front and in places like prisoner of war camps. The armies were typically well-fed, and many rations commonly consisted of small amounts of coffee, salt pork, and hardened bread called “hard-tack.” While enough to keep one from starvation, rations could hardly be described as appealing, and soldiers spent much of their time in camp devising new and innovative ways to make them more appetizing. Foraging for supplies yielded resources for combatant armies, but the practices of foraging depended on different commanders’ interpretations of official policies and unofficial social contracts. Soldiers were capable of living off of the land, and sometimes taking supplies from hapless farmers at the point of a bayonet was the only way to stay well-fed. Clearly the rationing system had its downsides.

Even colossal armies in the field could not escape the trappings of the American market economy. Independent vendors known as “sutlers” commonly followed armies and sold different luxury items to soldiers with the means to purchase them. If a soldier had the money, he could feast on a freshly-baked pie while his comrades dealt with hard-tack, occasionally distributed with unwelcome additions such as mold or maggots.

While many soldiers undoubtedly welcomed the company of sutlers, their presence eventually became a military concern. Before the beginning of the Overland Campaign in 1864, General Ulysses S. Grant dismissed sutlers from the camps of his armies in a series of orders meant to increase efficiency. While many of his own Federal soldiers were disappointed in losing easy access to luxuries, this order was also met with chagrin in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. In a letter to his mother, Confederate Brigadier General James Conner remarked that his men “had looked with so many fond anticipations to plundering the sutler wagons, that Grant’s order was regarded as cheating them of their just dues.”

Wartime and shortages often go hand in hand, and the Civil War was no exception. Food and raw resource shortages were certainly prevalent, but there was also a shortage of currency. Thus, sutlers independently minted their own coins for their transactions. Acts of Congress in 1864 eventually restricted private coinage, but from 1861 to 1864, most transactions with sutlers were made with nonstandard currency. This also meant that any change a soldier received for a purchase could only be spent with that particular sutler.

This coin, found near Bermuda Hundred in Virginia, is for a sutler by the name of C.H. Smith—the only sutler who served United States Colored Troops. It bears the inscription of the 117th USCT, a unit that was present with the Federal Army of the James from the Siege of Petersburg to Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House, with later service further west until being mustered out in 1867.



Sutler’s Token. This coin would be used as credit with a sutler, or vendor, who followed the Union Army, selling a range of luxury items from toothbrushes and soap to tobacco, cheese, and custom identification tags.

“I LONG FOR THE TIME TO COME WHEN YOU WILL COME HOME”: A LETTER TO A USCT SOLDIER FROM HIS WIFE

Laurel Wilson '19

Just as the experiences of African American soldiers during the Civil War went under recorded and underrepresented, so too did the hardships suffered by their wives and children behind the lines.

This letter, from Lucinda Lawrence to her husband, Private Canny Lawrence of the 35th USCT, details what early emancipation was like for the families of USCT soldiers. Writing from Union-held territory in North Carolina in the very last days of the war, one could expect Lucinda to report improving conditions and hope for better times ahead. Instead, she wrote in desperation to her husband that she was no longer able to draw rations for herself without written proof of his military service. Until she could show that proof, the commanding officer of the camp would only provide food for their child.

Lucinda’s experience as a “contraband” was not atypical. Contraband camps were fraught with problems, beyond the lack of food described in Lucinda’s letter. As Union armies advanced through the South, thousands of slaves flocked to their lines in order to escape bondage. The result was a vast humanitarian crisis, as the Union Army and civilian aid groups struggled to provide sufficient rations, shelter, sanitation, and other basic necessities to camp residents. Virtually everything was in short supply, and few quartermasters considered the welfare of contrabands to be their top priority; most resented the contrabands as a drain on important military resources.

Despite Lucinda’s main purpose in writing her desperate letter, she also hinted at the more positive aspects of life in the contraband camps. She mentioned that Alice—most likely her daughter—was attending school and doing well. The opportunity for the children of the formerly enslaved to openly attend school had been unthinkable just a couple of years before. In addition to education, the camps provided these men and women the chance to earn wages as laborers, laundresses, and hospital workers for the Union Army. This newfound opportunity proved to be the first steps in helping former slaves begin new lives as free members of society.



New Berne April 1st 1865

My dear Husband,

It is a very long time since I heard from you, and I feel very anxious, if you would only direct care of Miss Pearson, I should be sure to get the letters. I want you to send what Co. you belong to, and tell me how you are. I am well so is Alice she seems to be getting along in school right well. I wish you would send me some money, for I can't get rations. They only feed the child now. Sister is with me yet, and is very well. I have waited to get an answer from you, and it is so long. I had to write to you.

I got a letter from brother Jo. He is well, I have only heard from Austin once. He was very well then. Write me soon.

Now I want you to send me a paper from your Capt stating what Co. you are in etc, then I can draw rations. I should like to draw wood.

Your loving Wife

Lucinda Lawrence

P.S. I long for the time to come when you will come home.

Lucinda Lawrence to Husband. Letter and envelope. Lucinda wrote to her husband Canny on April 1, 1865. Conditions for their family and the families of other USCT were dire. Since their last exchange of letters, the commander of the camp where she drew rations had decided to cut back. The army now only provided food for her child.

New Berne Apr 1st 1865

My dear Husband,

It is a very long time since I have heard from you, and I feel very anxious, if you would only direct care of Miss Pearson. I should be sure to get the letters. I want you to send what Co. you belong to, and tell me how you are. I am well so is Alice she seems to be getting along in school right well. I wish you would send me some money, for I can't get rations. They only feed the child now. Sister is with me yet, and is very well. I have waited to get an answer from you, and it is so long. I had to write you.

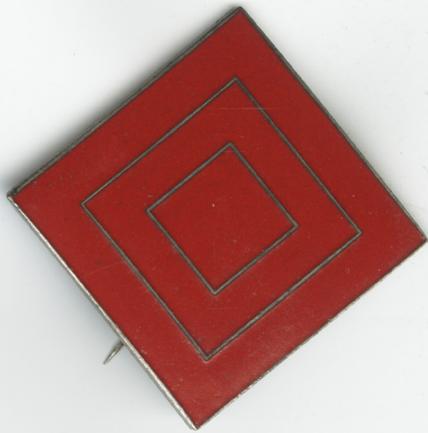
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Your loving Wife

Lucinda Lawrence

P.S. I long for the time to come when you will come home.



THE EMBLEM OF THE XXV: A USCT CORPS FROM PETERSBURG TO APPOMATTOX

Jonathan Tracey '19

Pictured here are three corps badges for the Union XXV Corps. Beginning in 1863, most corps in the Union Army adopted symbols so it would be easier to distinguish different commands from each other during the height of battle. In addition to the symbol distinguishing what corps a soldier belonged to, badges were also color-coded to denote divisions. Generally, red would mark the first division, white the second, and blue the third. The XXV Corps adopted this shape, sometimes worn as a square, although usually seen pinned on as a diamond.

The XXV Corps was unique amongst Union corps as it was formed entirely from the USCT regiments from other commands. It was the only entirely African American corps in the Union Army. Its men served in the trenches during the final days of the Petersburg and Richmond campaigns and distinguished themselves as being some of the first Federal troops to march into both cities on the morning of April 3, 1865. The majority of the corps was left to assist in the recovery of Petersburg, as fleeing Confederates had set sections of the city on fire, but two of its brigades pursued the Confederate Army out of the city. At times, the men marched thirty miles in less than twenty hours.

On April 9, soldiers of the corps earned further distinction by fighting Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House. Southern troops attempted to continue westward, but the fast-paced march of the XXV Corps and their sister corps, the all-white XXIV Corps, were directly in the way. Advancing together, these white and black forces were described as a "checkerboard" that moved down the ridge and blocked the Confederate advance. With no way out and more Union forces on the way, General Lee surrendered his army that afternoon, having been halted in part by men of the XXV Corps.

After the surrender, the corps regrouped near Petersburg. They spent a month occupying the area surrounding Richmond, but were then ordered to Texas. Having enlisted later than most white units, USCT regiments often found themselves assigned to occupation duty in the post-war South—to the fury of former Confederates—simply because they had more time left in their enlistment. The corps spent the remainder of 1865 stationed in Texas, guarding the border with Mexico as well as watching for resurgent Confederate activity. This proved to be a miserable, disease-ridden assignment, killing hundreds of soldiers who had witnessed the surrender at Appomattox. The regiments began to muster out of service in late 1865, but the last would not return home until early 1867. Despite an uncertain future for their freedom, the soldiers of the XXV Corps had fought hard and been present at one of the greatest triumphs in American history, earning the right to be proud of their service.

XXVth Corps. Corps badges. *These pins were worn by members of an all-black unit formed late in the war which had the distinction of being the first to enter Richmond. Corps badges like these were used to easily identify units on the battlefield. Each corps had a unique design, and each division a different color—red for the first, white for the second, blue for the third, and sometimes green for the fourth.*

A RECORD OF SERVICE: THE LOGBOOK OF THE 28TH INDIANA INFANTRY

Danielle Jones '18

The 28th Indiana Infantry Regiment—officially the 28th Regiment United States Colored Troops—was Indiana's first and only all-black regiment during the Civil War. Mustered into service on January 12, 1864, the 28th formed in response to fears sparked by Confederate General John Hunt Morgan's raid into Indiana in the summer of 1863. Morgan hoped to rouse Copperheads in the North and inspire them to rise up against the Union. The raiders ransacked Corydon, Salem, Dupont, Versailles, and other small towns in southern Indiana, burned and looted property, and stole over 4,000 horses. All told, the raid caused over one million dollars in damage. Thousands of Hoosiers enlisted in response to the raid, including the men of the 28th. The raid ultimately failed; Morgan was chased out of southern Indiana by state troops and kept out by the United States Navy. Although the 28th was recruited to help prevent future rebel violence, state officials feared that raising more than one African American regiment would provoke another Confederate raid.

By the end of the war, the 28th had sustained an estimated 212 fatalities: two officers and 45 enlistees killed or mortally wounded in combat, and one officer and 164 enlistees who died of disease. Like several other USCT regiments, the 28th was assigned menial duties on the Mexican border. At times, the work became too much for the men. The two most frequent entries in the logbook are the receipt of special orders and notes of incidents which resulted in soldiers receiving demerits. The logbook also briefly mentions the issue of disease in the regiment. USCT troops were often neglected as far as supplies went as they worked menial jobs and did not receive the same care and attention as white troops. At times their diet lacked essential nutrients; many of the soldiers, including James Trail, developed scurvy.

James and his brothers Benjamin, David, and William Jr. were just a handful of the men who enlisted in the 28th Indiana. Benjamin was the first of the four brothers to serve. A sergeant major, he was killed at the Battle of the Crater. James also died during the war, but David and William Jr. eventually returned to Indiana. Little is known about the men of the 28th, but there is growing interest in their stories. The 28th were honored with a historical marker in Indianapolis in 2004 and they are also featured on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in downtown Indianapolis.

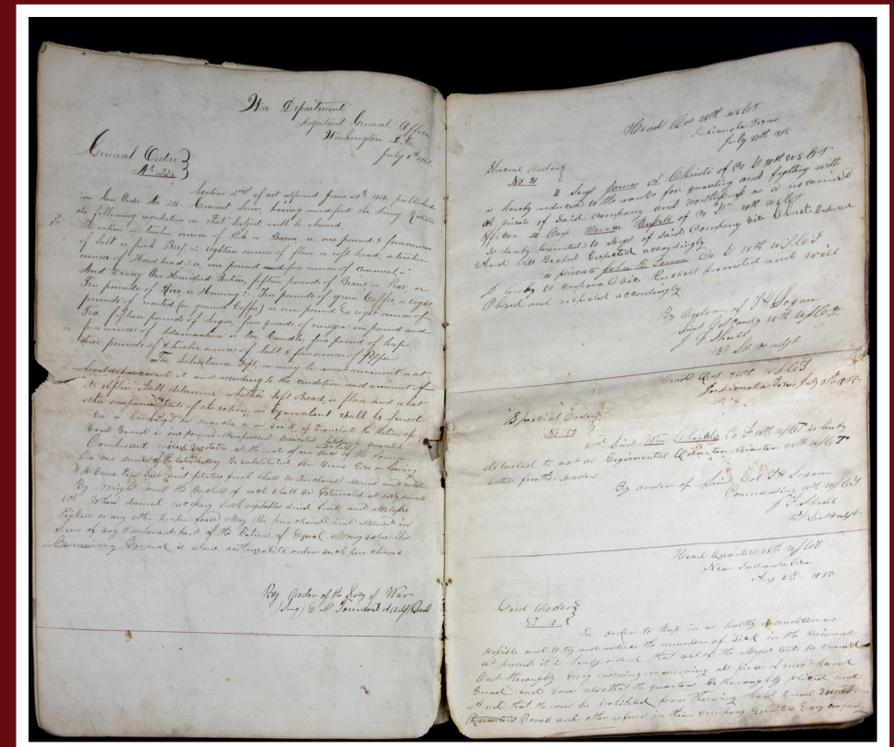
28th USCT. Descriptive logbook. Every regiment kept a descriptive log of the "special orders" issued by its Colonel to the regiment, and "general orders" from higher up the command chain that affected the regiment in some way.

Head Quarters 28th USCT
 Indiana Term July 31st 1864

Special Order
 52-53

2nd Lieut Wm Chubbly Co F 28th USCT is hereby detailed to act as Regimental Quartermaster 28th USCT until further orders

By order of Lieut Col JH Logan
 Commanding 28th USCT
 J. L. Hall
 1st Lieut



MARCHING IN STEP: USCT VETERANS AND THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC

Ryan Bilger '19

For many United States Colored Troops, remembering the Civil War and their comrades who fell in it became an important part of their post-war life. One of the primary opportunities for public expression of remembrance was Decoration Day, now known as Memorial Day. African Americans played a critical part in the creation of this holiday. On May 1, 1865, the newly-freed black residents of Charleston asserted their place in Civil War memory by leading a parade to a recently constructed cemetery for Union prisoners at the city's horseracing course. The procession heaped flowers upon the graves of the honored dead, after which ministers from the town's black congregations gave dedicatory speeches. This event, known among some in the North as the "First Decoration Day," exemplified African American interest in perpetuating the memory of the Civil War. However, the resentment of white Southerners at the time towards this instance of black agency led to the marginalization and eventual forgetting of the event in the mind of the public at large.

The tradition of Decoration Day took greater hold in the post-war years with the rise of the Grand Army of the Republic, a powerful Union veterans' organization that played a key role in organizing and promoting the memory of the conflict. Though GAR posts were sometimes self-segregated as a consequence of racial tensions, Decoration Day ceremonies commonly saw posts of both races working in conjunction with one another. For example, soldiers from black and white posts marched together in parades and collaborated on commemorative ceremonies at local cemeteries. In some areas of the Deep South, where former Confederates were outright hostile to any Union commemorations, much less those led by African Americans, black posts had the duty of decorating the thousands of graves of both black and white Union soldiers. Through these actions, African Americans were able to take part in and in some cases direct the formation of Civil War memory.

The procession in Easton, Pennsylvania, that is depicted in this photograph may be an example of USCT participation in a Decoration Day parade. The holiday held great significance for the people of Easton. In 1874, for example, many citizens marched in a procession to the city cemetery and adorned the graves of the fallen. USCT veterans would have likely joined in the parade to show their solidarity with the cause of remembrance. Though no other groups are visible, these men may have been marching along with local white posts, reflecting a collective GAR memory. While these combined commemorations may have been positive in that they broke away some of the barriers of segregation, the fact that they were predominantly directed by the white posts meant that the white narrative of the war generally became the one that was preserved. Instead of the Civil War being labeled clearly as a struggle for freedom and equality for African Americans, the interpretations of the Lost Cause and the "brothers' war" became increasingly popular. Thus, USCT participation in Decoration Day ceremonies and other celebrations of memory was surely positive, but it did not achieve the lasting effect that those veterans would have desired. Instead, narratives took root that minimized the role of race and the service of the USCTs, clearing the way for new forms of institutionalized racism in the South and apathy toward these abuses in the North.



USCT Veterans on Parade, Easton, PA. Postcard. Black GAR veterans were, like their white counterparts, very active in the realms of commemoration and politics. "Decoration Day," the precursor to our modern Memorial Day, officially started with the GAR in 1868, and served both purposes.

HEALING THE DIVIDE?: THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

Savannah Labbe '19

Between June 29 and July 6, 1938, approximately 1,870 Union and Confederate veterans gathered at that fateful battlefield where many of them had fought 75 years earlier. The veterans stayed in camps and took part in various ceremonies and parades, including a parade of veterans from all wars since 1863, as well as a military flyover. The highlight of the ceremonial events, however, was the dedication of the Eternal Light Peace Memorial on Oak Hill outside of town. President Franklin Roosevelt made the dedication speech on July 3, 1938, around the same time Pickett made his charge 75 years before. More than 200,000 people attended, watching the friendly reunion of men who had once been enemies. Together, two men—92-year-old Union veteran George N. Lockwood of Los Angeles, CA, and 91-year-old Confederate veteran A.G. Harris of McDonough, GA—undraped the flag covering the memorial.

Much in the same way that the reunion brought Lockwood and Harris together in friendship to unveil the memorial, the event also brought all the veterans and spectators together, regardless of which side they had fought for or what part of the country they were from. Confederate veterans met Union veterans at the Bloody Angle, shaking hands in good will and offering silent tribute to the soldiers who had fought and lost their lives at this fateful place on the battlefield many years earlier. The medals that were given to the veterans and their attendants were another symbol of this harmony. The ribbon on the medal was blue and gray, while the medals themselves featured an eagle clutching the Confederate and Union flags in its talons. In addition, the veterans' medals displayed the fasces symbol, a martial symbol of brotherhood. The symbol depicts an axe with extra handles wrapped around the original haft, representing the power gained when many join together to wield a weapon. The medals themselves were emblematic of the intended spirit of the reunion: bringing the country together in harmony and solidarity.

This pageantry distracted from the divisions that still plagued the country in the era of Jim Crow. While the 75th anniversary did much to encourage harmony between North and South, it came at the expense of the black perspective of the war's cause and cost. Take, for example, this medal owned by Larkin Woodruff, an African American veteran. He died on June 10, 1938, just a few weeks before the reunion. Woodruff was one of several dozen former USCTs invited to the event. Twenty-five years earlier, at the 50th anniversary, many white veterans had worked to discourage, or at very least not extend an invitation, to black veterans. The policy of acceptance in 1938 had nothing to do with racial equality, though—Larkin and his USCT comrades were invited to take part in a national narrative of the war's legacy which had become tightly choreographed.

With the U.S. staring down another world war, martial, and fraternal unity became the driving theme of reunions. All hands were needed—North, South, black, white—but certain facts of the war threatened that unity. The "Lost Cause" sentiment still pitted ex-Confederates and their kin against their Yankee "occupiers." The cruelties of slavery made coexistence, much less cooperation, between southerners and slaves-turned-soldiers almost impossible. Nonetheless, for many, it seemed a safer bet to try and heal regional, if not racial, divides. It was better to commemorate the war as a brotherly "quarrel forgotten," as President Woodrow Wilson described it, than it was to remember the complex racial dimensions of the war and its legacy.



Larkin Woodruff, 50th USCT. 75th Anniversary of Gettysburg medals. Veterans attending 75th Anniversary commemorations wore medals like these full of symbolism. The bundle of wooden rods surrounding an axe is a classical symbol called a "fasces." In Roman times, it stood for martial strength through unity. Sadly, Larkin Woodruff died just weeks before the 75th Anniversary Commemoration in Gettysburg, PA.



A MEDAL OF DISTINCTION: REMEMBERING THE MONTFORD POINT MARINES

Matt LaRoche '17

In the century that followed the Civil War, Jim Crow wormed its way into the heart of every American institution—including the military. Despite the illustrious tradition laid down by black servicemen in the Civil War, the racial norms of the post-war years worked to beat their successive generations back into the shadows. Many branches—including the Marine Corps—entirely banned African Americans from serving. Even traditionally inclusive institutions, such as the often short-handed Navy, relegated blacks to menial roles. Beginning in 1893, they could serve only as cooks and cleaners aboard U.S. ships.

Under pressure from civil rights groups, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 in 1941, prohibiting hiring discrimination in industries producing crucial war materiel. In response to the intensifying pressure provided by the Double V campaign – and increasing concern over the nation’s public image – the president also prodded the U.S. military to create new opportunities for black men in all branches of service. Within a year, the United States Marine Corps founded Camp Montford Point in Jacksonville, North Carolina. This camp produced the first black Marines since the American Revolution.

During World War II, over 13,000 Montford Point (MP) Marines served in the Pacific Theater. Most served in dangerous yet thankless support roles, bringing ammunition to the front and carrying the dead and wounded out of combat. Despite their non-combat designation, members of Ammunition and Depot Companies saw action at amphibious landings and thick fighting on Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and many other battlefields.

With the war ended, and the mud and blood left behind for the trappings of civilian life, the MP Marines found new ways to fight for democracy and equality at home. Many who returned lent the determination and talent they developed in the Corps to the budding Civil Rights Movement. In doing so, they immortalized the legacy of the Montford Point Marines, helped change the moral landscape of America, and lived out the highest principles of the Marine Corps.

In recognition of their immense contribution to the nation and the human ideals for which America stands, in 2011 President Barack Obama awarded the MP Marines the Congressional Gold Medal—the highest civilian award for distinguished achievement. Fortunately, Ernest Alfred Smith, a veteran of the fighting on Saipan and Iwo Jima, lived to receive his award in person. Although he has since passed, his daughters, Dr. Deborah M. Smith, and Stephanie C. Smith, USMC Colonel, retired, have carried on his legacy in their professional lives.

Montford Point Marines. Bronze replica medals. 1.5 in. replica of the Congressional Gold Medal designed by U.S. Mint Sculptor-Engraver, Don Everhart and awarded collectively to the Montford Point Marines on June 27, 2012 in the U.S. Capitol. The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest award issued by Congress for distinguished achievement. Approximately 600 Montford Point Marines have received their medals. On loan courtesy of Dr. Deborah M. and Stephanie C. Smith, USMC Colonel (Ret.).

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Our thanks first go to Director Peter Carmichael and Associate Director Jill Titus of the Civil War Institute (CWI) for expanding the Brian C. Pohanka Internship to include placement in Special Collections and College Archives. When Matthew LaRoche '17 was hired as our summer 2016 Pohanka intern, his major in History and minors in Civil War Era Studies, Writing, and Peace and Justice Studies enticed our staff to move forward on a full-room exhibit exploring African American involvement in the Civil War. Matt's skill at making historical connections and his enthusiasm for public history fill every information panel and case of the exhibit. Special thanks to Amy Lucadamo, our College Archivist, for serving as Matt's mentor. Her innovative approach to exhibit design heightens the viewer's appreciation for both the artifacts and the narrative.

The artifacts

Of the 127 objects on exhibit, only three belong to Special Collections and College Archives. This exhibit would never have happened without the generosity of private collector Angelo Scarlato. He has been an unfailing partner in sharing primary sources with Gettysburg College students and the public. His artifacts, photographs, and documents from the 19th century give an unfiltered view of the African American experience and provided this exhibit a national scope. We are further indebted to Ben Neely and Lauren Roedner '13 of the Adams County Historical Society for giving a local voice to the history of the USCT. Melanie Fernandes '16 was instrumental in exhibit installation. We are also so appreciative for the Gettysburg College legacy connection made by Dr. Deborah M. Smith and Stephanie C. Smith, USMC Colonel, retired, whose father, Ernest Alfred Smith, served as a Montford Point Marine and loving grandfather to Robia '11 and Nicholas '13.

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*Carolyn Huber Sautter, Director of Special Collections and College Archives
Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, May 2017*

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