

## AFRICAN AMERICANS

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In 1863 the U.S. Army began to organize regimental units of African Americans as the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Both freemen and former slaves served in these regiments as enlisted men. Some USCT regiments originated as state militia units that formed prior to 1863. A few Connecticut and Massachusetts African American regiments retained their state designators and did not assume USCT regimental numbers. Several Louisiana Native Guard and Corps de Afrique regiments were reorganized or renamed as USCT regiments and came under the USCT jurisdiction by late 1864. USCT regiments included regiments of cavalry, artillery, and infantry.

Two sets of records that will be most useful to researchers are the compiled military service records and pension files. Begin researching soldiers who served in USCT units by consulting the individual compiled military service records. The compiled military service records consist of an envelope that may contain card abstracts taken from records such as: muster rolls, returns, pay vouchers, orders, and other records that relate to the individual soldier. Information in the service record may include references to mustering-in, mustering-out, wounds, hospitalization, absents from the unit, capture and imprisonment by the enemy, courts-martial, and death.

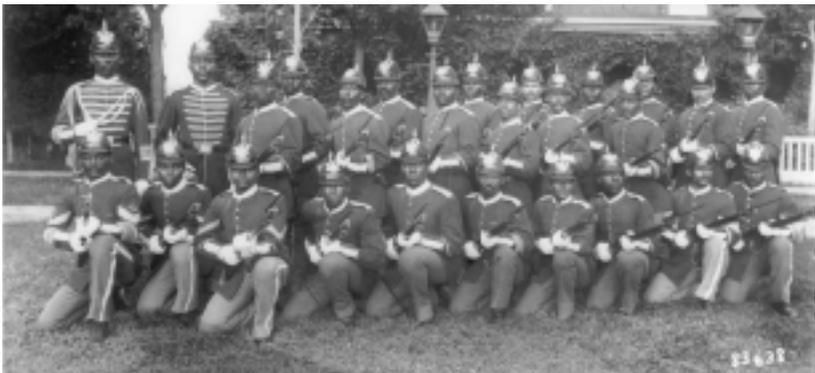
Eventually all USCT compiled military service records will be available on National Archives microfilm. Currently, all USCT cavalry and artillery units are on film as well as many of the lower numbered infantry regiments.

For information on unit activities consult M594, *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations*, Rolls 205–217, which documents the movements of USCT regiments and companies. This series is arranged by unit.

During the Civil War approximately 179,000 African Americans served in U.S. Colored Troops volunteer cavalry, artillery, and infantry units, but the opportunity to serve as regulars in the Army was not afforded African Americans until after the Civil War. In 1866, due in large part to the wartime service of the USCT, Congress authorized the Army to raise six black regiments: four infantry and two cavalry. This change was part of a much larger Army reorganization.

On July 28, 1866, Congress passed an act reorganizing the Army by adding 4 regiments to the already existing 6 regiments of cavalry and expanding the number of infantry regiments from 19 to 45. The reorganization included the creation of 6 colored regiments designated in November as the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry. The new colored regiments were to be composed of black enlisted men and white officers. Three years later, Congress reorganized the Army again by reducing the number of infantry units from 45 to 25 regiments. For the African American regulars, this reorganization changed only the infantry units and not the 9th and 10th Cavalry. The 38th Infantry and 41st Infantry became the 24th Infantry, while the 39th and 40th were consolidated into the 25th Infantry. These two new infantry regiments completely replaced the former 24th and 25th.

The place to start researching black regulars is Regular Army Enlistment Papers, 1798-1912, RG 94, entry 91. This series is arranged alphabetically by name of soldier and generally shows the soldier's name, place of enlistment, date of enlistment, by whom enlisted, age, place of



*Soldiers of Company I, 25th U.S. Infantry, at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, taken in the 1880s. (111-SC-83638)*

birth, occupation, personal description, regimental assignment, and certifications of the examining surgeon and recruiting officer. Soldiers usually have multiple enlistment papers if they served two or more enlistments.

Researchers should also consult M233, *Register of Enlistments in the U.S. Army, 1798–1914*. The register of enlistments is arranged chronologically and thereunder alphabetically by first letter of surname. The register usually shows the individual's name, military organization, physical description, age at time of enlistment, place of birth, enlistment information, discharge information, and remarks. For more detailed information concerning service consult the unit muster rolls arranged by arm of service, thereunder by regiment number, then alphabetically by company, troop or battery and thereunder chronologically. The muster rolls are found in RG 94, entry 53, Muster Rolls of Regular Army Organizations 1784–October 31, 1912.

For medical information, consult carded medical records found in RG 94, entries 529 and 530, covering the years 1821–85 and 1894–1912 respectively. These cards relate to Regular Army personnel admitted to hospitals for treatment and may include information such as name, rank, organization, age, race, birthplace, date entered service, cause of admission, date of admission, hospital to which admitted, and disposition of the case. Entry 529 is arranged by the number of the regiment (cavalry, infantry, and artillery are filed together under the common regiment number) and then by initial letter of surname. For example, the Ninth Cavalry is filed under the number “9” along with the Ninth Infantry and Ninth Artillery. Entry 530 is arranged by arm of service, and thereunder by regiment number. For information on other records related to Regular Army enlisted men consult the sections on returns, Army courts-martial, and pension files.

#### *Additional Sources of Information*

- Reidy, Joseph P. “Black Men in Navy Blue during the Civil War,” *Prologue*, Fall 2001, Vol. 33, No. 3.
- Plante, Trevor K. “Researching African Americans in the U.S. Army, 1866–1890: Buffalo Soldiers and Black Infantrymen,” *Prologue*, Spring 2001, Vol. 33, No. 1.