



National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408-0001

Military Service in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War, 1863–1866

In 1863 in response to President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation the United States Army began to organize and recruit regiments of African-Americans (both freemen and former slaves) as the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Some USCT regiments originated as state militias that were established before 1863. Those of Massachusetts and Connecticut (such as the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers) remained separate, while Louisiana regiments (Native Guards and *Corps d'Afrique*) had reorganized as USCT organizations by late 1864. The USCT included cavalry, artillery, infantry, and engineering units. Most USCT soldiers served as privates and non-commissioned officers, although about 75 soldiers also received field promotions to junior officers.

Compiled Military Service Records (CMSRs)

In the 1890s, the Department of War used numerous sources, such as muster rolls, descriptive rolls, and pay rolls to create compiled military service records. These records generally show when a soldier joined a unit and if he was present when the unit was mustered.

CMSRs on Microfilm

Military service records for USCT organizations are being reproduced on microfilm. The following publications are currently available:

___M589, *Index to the Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with U.S. Colored Troops*. 98 rolls. DP. Arranged alphabetically by surname.

___M1817, *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*. 107 rolls. DP.

___M1818, *Compiled Military Service Records Of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Artillery Organizations*. 299 rolls. DP.

___M1819, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: 1st U.S. Colored Infantry, 1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored) Company A, 1st U.S. Colored Infantry (1 Year)*. 19 rolls. DP.

___M1820, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops, 2nd through 7th Colored Infantry including 3d Tennessee Volunteers (African Descent), 6th Louisiana Infantry (African Descent), and 7th Louisiana Infantry (African Descent)*. 116 rolls. DP.

___M1821, *Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 8th through 13th, including the 11th (new)*. 109 rolls. DP.

___M1822, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 14th through 19th*. 105 rolls. DP.

___M1823, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 20th through 25th*. 98 rolls. DP.

___M1824, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 26th through 30th, Including the 29th Connecticut (Colored)*. 108 rolls. DP.

___M1992, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 31st through 35th*. 86 rolls. DP.

___M1993, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 36th through 40th*. 116 rolls. DP.

___M1994, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served With the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 41st Through 46th*. 113 rolls. DP.

___M2000, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 47th Through 55th*. 183 rolls. DP.

___M1898, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the U.S. Colored Troops, 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (Colored)*. 20 rolls. DP.

___M1659, *Records of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (Colored), 1863–1865*. 7 rolls. DP. This publication contains bound and unbound regimental records, arranged by type of record, including letters, orders issued and received, company descriptive books, morning reports, returns, and muster rolls.

___M1801, *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: 55th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored)*. 16 rolls.

Other Records

___M594, *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations*. 225 rolls. DP. Arranged alphabetically by State or Territory, then by type of unit (cavalry, artillery, or infantry), followed by militia, reserves, sharpshooters, and other organizations. The U.S. Colored Troops appear on rolls 204–217.

Note: Union and Confederate carded histories have also been published in Janet B. Hewett, ed. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Part II: Record of Events*. 80 vols. Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1994–1998. (E 464. U6 Suppl.) The volumes are arranged alphabetically by state; microfilm publication and roll number citations follow the transcriptions for each unit. Series II, Vols. 77–79 cover USCT organizations, arranged by unit. In the Index (Se–Z), pages 5297–5303 refer to the USCT in the *Official Records*. This publication is

available in the Archives Library Information Center (ALIC) in the National Archives Building as well as major libraries.

For more information, see the following reference report: *Troop Movements and Activities of Volunteer Units in the United States Army, 1775–1902*.

___M858, *The Negro in the Military Service of the United States, 1639–1886*. 5 rolls. DP. Arranged chronologically. This publication reproduces historical extracts and official papers compiled by the Adjutant General's Office concerning the military service of African Americans from the colonial period through the Civil War.

___M1894, *Descriptive Recruitment Lists of Volunteers for the United States Colored Troops for the State of Missouri, 1863–1865*. 6 rolls. DP. Arranged alphabetically by recruiting station, then chronologically by date of enlistment, this publication reproduces 55 recruitment books and 3 indexes. The records document 8,000 African Americans from Missouri who enlisted in the 18th, 60th, 62nd, 65th, and 68th USCT, and provide such information as the recruit's name, physical description, place of birth by county or state, occupation at the time of recruitment, details (when and where recruited), recruitment officer's name, period of service, and former slave owner's name and residence by county or state.

Pensions

Pension applications and records of pension payments for veterans, their widows, and heirs are based on service in the armed forces of the United States. These files can contain supporting documents such as narratives of events during service, marriage certificates, birth records, death certificates, family letters, statements from witnesses, and affidavits.

A veteran's pension file can include his rank, place of residence, age or date of birth, and time of service. A widow's application can also include her place of residence, her maiden name, the date and place of marriage, the date and place of her husband's death, and the names of children under 16. A child's or heir's file contains information about both the veteran and the widow, as well as the child's place of residence, date of birth, and the date and place of the widow's death.

These records have not been filmed and in some cases must be requested from the Veterans Administration.

For more information, see the following reference report: *Records Relating to Pensions for Soldiers who Served During the Civil War, 1861–1865*.

Textual Records

Many records pertaining to the USCT exist only in textual form. Compiled by the Colored Troops Division of the Adjutant General's Office (RG 94), these records pertain primarily to the recruitment, organization, and service of black troops and their officers. Typical records include registers of applications of officers of colored troops, registers and rosters of officers, registers of colored enlistments, record of regiments of U.S. Colored Troops, and descriptive lists of colored volunteers.

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