

African American soldiers

"African American Soldiers During the Civil War (see <http://memory.loc.gov/learn///features/timeline/civilwar/aasoldrs/soldiers.html>), from the Library of Congress Learning Page.

PROVIDED BY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

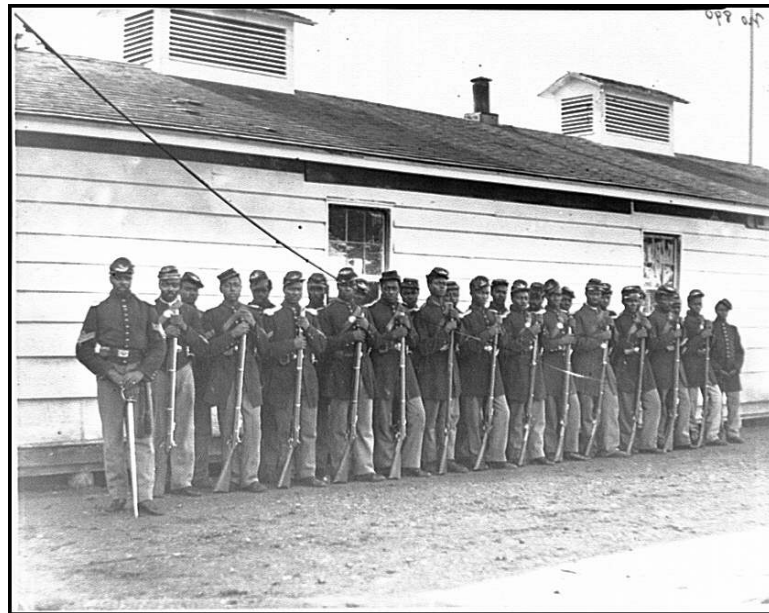


Figure 1. The soldiers of Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry.

In 1862, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation opened the door for African Americans to enlist in the Union Army. Although many had wanted to join the war effort earlier, they were prohibited from enlisting by a federal law dating back to 1792. President Lincoln had also feared that if he authorized their recruitment, border states would secede from the Union. By the end of the war, approximately 180,000 African-American soldiers had joined the fight.

In addition to the problems of war faced by all soldiers, African-American soldiers faced additional difficulties created by racial prejudice. Although many served in the

infantry and artillery, discriminatory practices resulted in large numbers of African-American soldiers being assigned to perform non-combat, support duties as cooks, laborers, and teamsters. African-American soldiers were paid \$10 per month, from which \$3 was deducted for clothing. White soldiers were paid \$13 per month, from which no clothing allowance was deducted. If captured by the Confederate Army, African-American soldiers confronted a much greater threat than did their white counterparts.

In spite of their many hardships, African-American soldiers served the Union Army well and distinguished themselves in many battles. Of their service to the nation Frederick Douglass said, "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States." African-American soldiers comprised about 10 percent of the Union Army. It is estimated that one-third of all African Americans who enlisted lost their lives.

On the web

More from LEARN NC

Visit us on the web at www.learnnc.org to learn more about topics related to this article, including African Americans, Civil War, history, military, and soldiers.

Image credits

More information about these images and higher-resolution files are linked from the original web version of this document.

Figure 1 (page 1)

. This image is believed to be in the public domain. Users are advised to make their own copyright assessment.