



# MISSOURIANS IN UNIFORM

## U. S. COLORED TROOPS

Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and Missouri enacted a law allowing gradual emancipation six months later. Almost immediately, more than 300 African Americans joined the First Regiment of Missouri Colored Infantry. It has been estimated that 8,400 African Americans joined Missouri regiments of the U.S. Army and even more belonged to out-of-state Army units. There was only one African American unit of the Enrolled Missouri Militia. That unit was based in Hannibal.

Recruiting African Americans as soldiers was not popular with slave holders. The first recruits were taken from slave owners who were disloyal to the Union, but over time, the military recruited the slaves of loyal slave holders as well.



W. F. Yates of Richmond, Missouri to M. V. Sinclair of Georgetown, Kentucky, February 23, 1864.

HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF THE BORDER,  
St. Louis, Mo., July 4, 1863.

To Col. C. W. Marsh,  
St. Louis, Mo.

These are at present in the hands of the District of the Border, and are the property of the Government. I respectfully request that you authorize me to organize them in companies under white officers to be selected by me among the meritorious soldiers of my command. I suppose there are enough of such negroes in this district for one Regiment.

I will, if such authority is given me, see that no persons are enlisted, or being enlisted, are mustered, who are the slaves of loyal men; and none who have not had certificates of freedom from the Provost Marshal under the above named order. All of course I would not treat such as a privilege, as nothing more than being free evidence of the alleged fact stated in the order.

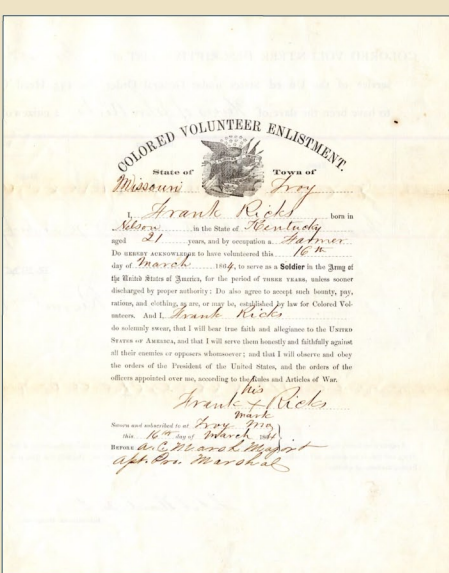
There are numbers of recruits officers, appointed by Genl. Smith under his letter of authority for the new Department, I have some experience of them, and believe the "second regiment Kansas Colored Infantry," who are recruited along the border in my District. It is very my desire to have the best of them in my District - but it will be better to the peace of the District than to recruit in Missouri.

Brigadier General Thomas Ewing to Lieutenant Colonel C. W. Marsh, July 4, 1863. Missouri State Archives

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**"I respectfully request that you authorize me to organize [African Americans] in companies under white officers to be selected by me [from] among the meritorious soldiers of my command. I suppose there are enough of such negroes in this district for one Regiment."**

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Colored Volunteer Enlistment form for Frank Ricks, March 16, 1864. Missouri State Archives

Headquarters Sixth Sub-District of North Mo.,  
Provoat Marshal, O'Neil,  
St. Louis, Mo., March 25, 1864.

Dear Sir,

I am directed by former Adj. Genl. to transmit to you the description of all of the colored recruits that have been submitted to me since the first of February. I have marked the sub-district of enrollment on these also according to his direction. Perhaps he only kept me to send the order for the month of February, but should see up to the date, to enable Capt. [Name] to have the names of your list.

Very respectfully,  
P. K. O'Donnell

Acting Assistant Provost Marshal P. K. O'Donnell to Adjutant General John Gray, letter of transmittal for tabulations of Colored Volunteer Enlistments, March 25, 1864. Missouri State Archives

While military life could be difficult for all soldiers, it was especially hard for African American troops because they were often less well equipped than their white counterparts. This muster roll (below right) shows the extreme conditions troops had to face. It lists 21 African American men who died from exposure after marching 200 miles to St. Louis in the cold with inadequate clothing and provisions.

Muster rolls also show that not all African American troops came from the United States. On the roll below, enlistees claim to have come from Canada. Some claimed to have come from as far as England and Jamaica to join the Union cause.

Everyone of my negroes (but Basil), have joined the Federal army, and almost all of the able bodied negroes in this state have joined. Four of Mr. Nelson's have joined, viz Walk, Henry, Gran and Merritt, and I think what few men are left, will leave with the women and children in the spring. I hope they will all go to Kansas.

Below: Muster and Descriptive Roll of the 72nd Regiment of the U.S. Colored Infantry, August 22, 1864.

Right: Muster-Out and Payroll of Company I of the 2nd Regiment of Missouri Colored Infantry Volunteers, February 29, 1864. Missouri State Archives

NAME	RACE	REGIMENT	COMPANY	DATE	REMARKS
1. Bentley, Abraham	Colored	72nd Regt. of Col. Inf.	Co. B	Aug 22, 1864	100 lbs. 5 ft 10 in. 20 yrs. 1864
2. Brown, Henry	Colored	72nd Regt. of Col. Inf.	Co. B	Aug 22, 1864	100 lbs. 5 ft 10 in. 20 yrs. 1864
3. Burton, Wm.	Colored	72nd Regt. of Col. Inf.	Co. B	Aug 22, 1864	100 lbs. 5 ft 10 in. 20 yrs. 1864
4. Russell, Edward	Colored	72nd Regt. of Col. Inf.	Co. B	Aug 22, 1864	100 lbs. 5 ft 10 in. 20 yrs. 1864

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"The long list of Mortality in this Company is attributable to the fact that most of the men were enlisted and transported to this place [Benton Barracks]—a distance of 200 miles—at a time when the weather was Extremely cold. They were thinly clad, and poorly provided for, and suffered Severely from exposure."

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Picket station at Dutch Gap, Virginia. Library of Congress