After the battle of the "crater" near Petersburg, Virginia on July 30, 1864. The next day, Union General George G. Meade wrote to Confederate General Robert E. Lee requesting a cease-fire to rescue the wounded and bury the dead. General G. T. Beauregard responded for General Lee: "... Your proposition is acceded to, and hostilities will be suspended for the purpose to-morrow morning at 5 o'clock. The cessation will continue for four hours." War of the Rebellion, Ser.1, Vol. 40, part 3, pp. 691, 821.
Focus

The Civil War is fascinating to many people. There is still much debate among historians about most aspects of the war. The stories of people—the individuals who took part—provide information about some of the most interesting episodes of the war.

As we prepared this issue focusing on black soldiers in the Civil War, we found an individual who brought the human element to the experience—Chaplain Garland H. White of the 28th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops. This regiment was the only black regiment organized in Indiana.

Chaplain White came to Indianapolis from Toledo, Ohio, to enlist. He had been a slave; he escaped to Canada, where he became an African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) minister.

During his service with the 28th, Chaplain White wrote letters from the field to an AME newspaper called the *Christian Recorder*. We have used excerpts from these letters, along with official records and engravings from publications about the Civil War, to follow Indiana's 28th Regiment through its service.

On page 3, there is an overview of some of the activities of black troops in the Union army.

On page 4, the story of the 28th begins. It continues through page 13. Pages 8 and 9 include maps and listings of the 28th's tour of duty.

Page 14 includes 2 activities based on the content of this issue.

The "Apple" on page 15 provides selected resources for further investigation.

Research for this issue has reemphasized how few non-official resources there seem to be about Indiana black soldiers. Perhaps, you can follow-up in your own community and help make available more information about the black soldiers who served the Union so admirably.

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Sources for This Issue

Unless otherwise noted, the information in this issue is based on the records and correspondence in the *War of the Rebellion* and Terrell, *Report of the Adjutant General*.

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This engraving depicts the quarters of the black soldiers of the Union Army of the James in March, 1865. The 28th Regiment was assigned to the 25th Corps of the Army of the James at this time.

Black Men Fight for Freedom

On April 12, 1861, Confederate soldiers fired on Fort Sumter beginning the Civil War. President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to defend the Union. In a burst of patriotism, white men of all ages answered the call. Black men offered their services, too.

Blacks hoped that once they proved themselves in battle, a grateful nation would grant them full citizenship. Frederick Douglass, a black activist of the day, kept this issue before the doubtful public.

Blacks had fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. A 1795 law, however, prohibited blacks from serving as soldiers. In this war, the law was followed. Many whites were only interested in preserving the Union, not abolishing slavery. Some whites were afraid to arm black men. Others believed that blacks would make poor soldiers.

Southern free blacks offered their services to the Confederate army. They hoped to gain some equality with whites and receive better treatment. Not allowed to serve as soldiers, blacks in the Confederate army built fortifications, made guns and powder, maintained the railroads, and worked in hospitals. Whenever possible, they deserted across Union lines.

By 1862, war-weary and disillusioned, fewer white men were joining the Union army. Lincoln finally acknowledged the need to use blacks as soldiers. On July 17, 1862 Congress passed an act which allowed the president to use as many persons of African descent as he thought necessary to end the war. In addition, the act repealed the 1795 law which prohibited blacks from serving as soldiers. Blacks could then fight for their freedom.

There was a total of 166 black regiments in the Union army: 145 infantry, 7 cavalry, 12 heavy artillery, 1 light artillery, and 1 engineers. The number of black soldiers was approximately 179,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blacks Fighting for the Union</th>
<th>1862</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 12</td>
<td>Beginning of Civil War when Confederates fired on Fort Sumter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>Union Navy captured New Orleans from the Confederates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 17</td>
<td>Black soldiers authorized by Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Organization of a black regiment in Kansas began.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Black volunteers organized for construction of earthworks and fortifications around Cincinnati.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 27</td>
<td>1st Louisiana Native Guard (also known as the Corps d'Afrique) mustered. First free black regiment to join the Union army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 12</td>
<td>2nd Louisiana Native Guard mustered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28</td>
<td>1st Kansas Colored Volunteers attacked at Island Mounds, Missouri, becoming the first black unit to engage in action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 24</td>
<td>3rd Louisiana Native Guard mustered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1863 |
| January 1 | Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in Confederate states. |
| January 31 | 1st South Carolina was first former slave regiment to be organized. |
| May | 54th Massachusetts was first black regiment from a northern state. |
| May 27 | Black troops were used for the first time in a formal battle at Port Hudson, Louisiana. |
| November 30 | Black regiment requested by Indiana Governor Morton was authorized. |
| December 3 | Call to arms for Indiana black regiment. Later became 28th Regiment U. S. Colored Troops. |

| 1864 | Spring |
| Black regiments prominent in the Richmond, Virginia campaigns. |
| June 15 | Black troops captured front lines and artillery at Petersburg, Virginia. |
| June 15 | Congress provided that black troops receive same uniforms, equipment, arms, rations, and pay as whites. |
| July 30 | Black troops fought gallantly at the battle of the "crater" at Petersburg, Virginia. |

| 1865 | April 9 |
| Black troops distinguished themselves at Fort Blakely, Alabama, the final battle of the war. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia ending the Civil War. |

The Call to Arms

Indiana fulfilled its obligations to raise Union troops throughout the war. Indiana’s first black troops were not enlisted until late 1863.

In a letter to Governor Oliver P. Morton dated November 30, 1863, the War Department authorized the state of Indiana “...to raise one Regiment of infantry to be composed of Colored men...”

The orders to the left began the organizational process of Indiana’s first black fighting unit.

Blacks from Indiana had been enlisting in other states in order to fight in the Civil War. After the December orders, out-of-state recruiters were banned from working in Indiana.

This War Department letter of January 12, 1864 informed Governor Morton that Indiana’s black troops would be the 28th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops.
The First Months

The men of the 28th Regiment began their training at Camp Fremont in Indianapolis, near the present southside neighborhood of Fountain Square. Captain Charles S. Russell was named commanding officer.

Like all new recruits, the men were issued clothing. They were instructed on the use and care of their weapons and equipment; taught how to drill, or march; and trained in military tactics, courtesy, and discipline.

Special orders from the U.S. War Department, dated March 14, 1864 assigned the 28th Regiment to the 9th Army Corps under Major General A. E. Burnside. An April 16 telegraph indicated that officers were being sent to escort the 28th to the east coast. The Indiana Adjutant General’s office was to make transportation arrangements. The 28th Regiment left Indiana on April 24, 1864.

The document above lists the numbers of men present and absent for the 6 companies of the 28th Regiment on March 17, 1864. The regiment was still in Indianapolis on this date.

Archives Division, Indiana Commission on Public Records.

You’re in the Army Now!

Camp life for any soldier was uncomfortable and often times miserable. Rationed army food was far from tasty. Hardtack, a hard cracker, was given such names as tooth duller, worm castle, or Lincoln pie. Dehydrated milk and vegetables were also provided. Salt horse was heavily salted beef or pork. The company bean boiler, or cook, would occasionally serve slow deer, slang for a pig.

Dog or pup tents, so named because of their small size, provided some shelter. During cold or wet weather, the little tents were very uncomfortable. The sink, or latrine pit, provided toilet facilities.

When not drilling or on duty, soldiers often wrote letters home to their families. Many kept diaries or journals. Others provided entertainment by playing musical instruments. The mood of the camp could be swayed by the type of music. Political songs could be funny and frivolous. Songs of battle could stir pride. Songs of home and family could sadden.

Cards and dice were played to relieve the constant boredom and homesickness. Always in the minds of the men was the coming battle and the threat of injury or death. For many soldiers, devotion to preservation of the Union was a force that kept their courage high.

Sources: John Elting, Dan Cragg, and Ernest Deal, A Dictionary of Soldier Talk (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984); Hargrove, Black Soldiers in the Civil War.
Who Were the Men of the 28th?

The muster roll (a page of Company D is reproduced below and on page 7) for the 28th Regiment records who joined the regiment. A copy of the muster roll travelled with the troops so that remarks could be added as needed.

Over 500 men were initially enrolled for the regiment, forming 6 companies. After July 1864, 4 more companies were raised in Indiana to bring the regiment to full strength. The chart on page 7 provides summary figures on personnel for the 28th’s service.

Most officers of black units were white men. An exception with the 28th was the chaplain, Garland H. White.

The muster roll provides information about him; he is number 72 on the roll for Company D. White is listed as 25 years old, 5 feet 6 inches tall, with black hair and eyes. He was married. He was enrolled in Indianapolis on December 14, 1863 and mustered in on January 7, 1864.

You Be the Historian
- Working in groups, transcribe the 37 entries on the muster roll reproduced below.
- Putting together all of the transcribed information, determine similarities and differences between the 37 recruits. For example, compare age, occupation, nativity, and residence.
In the East

The 28th Regiment went to Washington, D. C. and then to Alexandria, Virginia for further training for field service.

On June 21 near White House, Virginia the 28th engaged in its first battle. Additional action brought “severe losses from frequent skirmishes with the enemy,” according to the official regiment history by Indiana Adjutant General W. H. H. Terrell.

The 28th Regiment was then active in the siege of Petersburg, Virginia starting in the summer and fall of 1864.
Follow the 28th Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops!
The list of dates and locations below will lead you through the travels and the battles of the
28th. With a marker or crayon, mark the tour of duty for the regiment. Use the enlargement
of the Richmond/Petersburg vicinity at the right to locate specific battles listed from June
1864 through April 1865.

- organized at Indianapolis December 24, 1863 through March 31, 1864
- left for Washington, D.C. April 24, 1864
- proceeded to Alexandria, Virginia; stayed until June 1864
- siege of Richmond and Petersburg, see map on page 9
- at City Point, Virginia and St. Mary's, Maryland in charge of prisoners,
  April 6-May 12, 1865
- moved to City Point, Virginia and embarked to Brazos Santiago, Texas,
  June 10-July 1, 1865
- duty at Brazos Santiago and Corpus Christi, Texas until November 1865
- mustered out of U.S. Army November 8, 1865
- regiment proceeded to New Orleans, and then up the Mississippi to Cairo, Illinois
- arrived in Indianapolis January 6, 1866
- public reception held in Indianapolis, January 8, 1866

The bold lines indicate the boundary between Union and Confederate states.
The 28th Regiment!

The siege of Richmond and Petersburg

The 28th was heavily engaged in the siege of Richmond and Petersburg, mark its movements during that nine month period.

- moved from Alexandria to White House, Virginia, June 2, 1864; engaged in battle on June 21
- accompanied General Sheridan's cavalry through Chickahominy swamps to Prince George Courthouse suffering frequent skirmishes with the enemy
- participated in siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond from July 1864 through April 1865, including the following battles:
  - Mine Explosion (the "Crater"), Petersburg, July 30, 1864
  - Weldon Railroad, August 18-21, 1864
  - Poplar Spring Church, September 29-30, October 1, 1864
  - Boydton Plank Road, Hatcher's Run, October 27-28, 1864
- stationed on the Bermuda Hundred front lines and before Richmond until April 1865
- marched into Richmond, April 4, 1865

Richmond and Petersburg vicinity, 1864-65

This map adapted from Guernsey and Alden, Harper's Pictorial History of the Great Rebellion, pp. 344, 693.
What Was the Battle of the “Crater”? 

On July 30, 1864 a battle, known as the “crater” or “mine explosion” took place. It was part of the Union siege of Petersburg, which was held by the Confederate army. The capture of Petersburg was necessary in order to capture Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy.

The 28th was assigned to the 2nd Brigade of the 4th Division. Nine regiments of black soldiers made up the 4th Division of Burnside’s 9th Army Corps. During the siege at Petersburg/Richmond, regiments consisting of 55,178 men (both black and white) were added to the forces of the Union Army of the Potomac.

The Union carried out a unique plan. Troops tunneled 585.8 feet under a Confederate fort. They carried 8,000 pounds of gunpowder into the “mine.” The explosion of the gunpowder was to destroy the Confederate position to allow the Union forces an important victory by clearing a path to Richmond.

Instead of victory, there was disastrous defeat. When the mine explosion created the “crater,” there was great disorder, and many Union soldiers were killed or wounded.

President Lincoln ordered a hearing to investigate what had taken place. The hearing lasted seventeen days, and an official report was issued containing the testimony.

Chaplain White of the 28th Regiment read newspaper reports blaming the black troops for the “crater” defeat. He wrote on August 8 to the Christian Recorder, which published the letter on August 20:

At a given hour all the officers of the colored troops were notified to have their men in readiness and at a certain place. This order was carried out to the crossing of a T. Afterward a charge was made, every officer heading his men. . . . I was with the boys, and intended to follow them to the last. Just at this juncture the earth began to shake, as though the hand of God intended a reversal in the laws of nature. This grand convulsion sent both soil and souls to inhabit the air for awhile, and then return to
be commingling forever with each other.

... when the [Second] Division of Colored Troops went into the action, they charged over the First, and carried two lines of rifle-pits. They made no stop there; for our Colonel (Charles S. Russell, of Indiana), who led the gallant Twenty-eighth, told the boys, that he intended leading them to Petersburg that day.

... the victory of that day was as certainly ours as anything could be. ... When I saw our colors waving over the enemy's works, I, with numbers of others, said: "Boys, the day is ours, and Petersburg is sure."

For several rods the dead lay thick, both white and colored, Union and rebel. It was a sad sight. Recollect, the colored troops went as far as they were ordered to go, and did just what they were told to do, both in going in and remaining there; and, in coming out, the brave officers who led them in, when they saw that bad management had taken place somewhere, and thinking that remaining longer would endanger that portion of the army, through wisdom and good policy, ordered the retreat.

Testimony by Brigadier-General Edward Ferrero, from the official record of the battle investigation, indicates that black troops entered the battle "in the most gallant manner... without hesitation..." The black troops captured Confederate "prisoners and a stand of colors..." The troops were forced to retreat under heavy fire.

The inquiry found that leadership and planning were the key factors in the defeat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
<th>Captured or Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Second Brigade</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>320</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fourth Division</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>416</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>1,787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The official inquiry report included statistics on losses. This excerpt includes the 28th Regiment.

The Engineer's Report
Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pleasants was the engineer who planned and directed the construction of the mine. His report described the size of the crater and the activity after the explosion.

... The size of the crater formed by the explosion was at least 200 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 25 feet deep.

I stood on top of our breastworks and witnessed the effect of the explosion on the enemy. It so completely paralyzed them that the breach was practically 400 or 500 yards in breadth. The rebels in the forts, both on the right and left of the explosion, left their works, and for over an hour no shot was fired by their artillery. There was no fire from infantry from the front for at least half an hour; none from the left for twenty minutes, and but few shots from the right...
Richmond Falls

The final assault against Petersburg was April 2, 1865. Confederate forces withdrew from Petersburg and Richmond on April 2 and 3.

The Union army—including the 28th Regiment—took possession of the city on April 4. Chaplain White wrote to the Christian Recorder on April 12. His letter, excerpted below, was published on April 22. It begins with the entry of troops into the city:

... After which the doors of all the slave pens were thrown open, and thousands came out shouting and praising God and father or master Abe, as they termed him. ...

Among the densely crowded concourse there were parents looking up children who had been sold south of this state in tribes, and husbands came for the same purpose. ...

... Among the many broken-hearted mothers looking for their children who had been sold into Georgia and elsewhere, was an aged woman, passing through the vast crowd of colored inquiring for a man by the name of Garland H. White. ... Some of the boys knowing that I lived in Ohio, soon found me, and said: "Chaplain, here is a lady that wishes to see you." ...

"This is your mother, Garland, whom you are now talking to, who has spent twenty years of grief about her son." I cannot express the joy I felt, at this happy meeting of my mother and other friends. ... I have witnessed several such scenes among the other colored regiments. ...

Among the first to enter Richmond, was the 28th U. S. C. T. ...
The War in the West

The surrender of General Lee to General Grant on April 9, 1865 marked the end of the war. There was still, however, much unrest in the West, especially in Texas.

The 25th Corps—including Indiana’s 28th Regiment—sailed to Texas, arriving July 1, 1865 to help keep order.

Chaplain White wrote from Corpus Christi on September 19. The letter appeared in the Christian Recorder of October 21, 1865.

No set of men in any country ever suffered more severely than we in Texas. Death has made fearful gaps in every regiment. Going to the grave with the dead is as common to me as going to bed, for I also attend on such occasions, in other regiments. . . . Chaplains are very scarce out here. . . .

I have spent a great portion of my time at the hospitals, and I never witnessed such fearful mortality in all my life. I have not seen a lemon, peach, apple or pear, nor corn enough over all that part of the country through which we have passed, to fatten a six months’ pig. . . .

We hear of the rebels still holding their slaves, and treating them more cruelly than ever. . . .

. . . . I am pleased to say that the health of the troops is decidedly better, and mortality greatly abating. All the troops have just been paid off. . . .

Our relatives should not look for us before our time is out. We send our love to all our friends at home, and beg them to be of good cheer, as the worst is over.

Home Again

On November 8, 1865 the 28th Regiment was mustered out of service in Texas. The troops proceeded to New Orleans and up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. The regiment arrived in Indianapolis on January 6, 1866 with 33 officers and 950 men. There was a public reception on January 8. The regiment was discharged on January 9.

The public ceremony on January 8 was briefly described in the Indianapolis Daily Journal, January 9, 1866. The paper concluded: “The occasion was a very pleasant one, and was a large nail in the great platform of equal justice.”

Chaplain White was the final speaker. His remarks have apparently not been preserved. In his letter of September 19, 1865 from Corpus Christi, Texas, Chaplain White had much to say about why blacks were fighting:

. . . . We left our wives and little ones to follow the stars and stripes from the Lakes to the Gulf, with a determination never to turn back until it should be proclaimed from Washington that the flag of the Union waved over a nation of freemen. Yes, freemen upon the battle field; freemen in Texas, as in Ohio, and freemen at the ballot box, as at the cartridge box. . . .

White’s hopes were not totally achieved by the end of the Civil War. The battle for civil rights was a much longer one.
Map Activity

Border Identification

Each group of lines below is an "aerial view" showing parts of the borders between states. Using the map on pages 8 and 9, identify the states represented by each group. Name the state capital for each of the identified states. We've completed the first one for you.

Solve the Rebus

Union + S = a that was

586 [figure]. They even by I.

On July 30, 1864, + der

* represents the highest level of government in the United States
An Apple for Everyone

A Note Regarding Resources: Items are listed on this page that enhance work with the topic discussed. Some older items, especially, may include dated practices and ideas that are no longer generally accepted. Resources reflecting current practices are noted whenever possible.

Selected Resources

Student Reading


Excellent intermediate to advanced student reading on this black Civil War regiment. Includes a good index and very good bibliography for students and adults.


Simple and informative reading.


This is volume four of the Sourcebooks on the Civil War Series. The series includes documents, photographs, and illustrations from the Library of Congress. Highly recommended for students and adults.

General Sources


Using primary sources, Cornish weaves together an overview of black soldiers’ activities during the Civil War.


Reproduces several documents and photographs of black soldiers during the Civil War.


Discusses relationships between white officers and black soldiers from recruitment through aspects of the war experience.


Includes numerous sketches drawn during the war and historical accounts of events.


Informative look at the black experience during the war.


Collection of Civil War sketches that appeared in Leslie’s paper.


Interesting history which examines blacks’ roles in the Civil War and in the general political climate as they moved toward freedom.


Personal look at the Civil War through black Union soldiers’ letters.


Valuable statistical information and reports.


Standard source on Indiana history during this period.


This valuable volume includes the “Civil War Years.” It provides important context about attitudes and activities with regard to blacks and black soldiers.


Essential resource for the comprehensive study of the Civil War.

Early Histories


These books provide valuable early perspectives but are generally undocumented.
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