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RECORDS OF THE FIFTH-FOURTH MASSACHUSETTS INFANTRY REGIMENT (COLORED),
1863-1865

Introduction

Records of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (Colored), 1863-65, are reproduced on the 7 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1659. The records consist of letters and endorsements sent and received; orders issued and received; descriptive lists; quarterly, monthly, and annual returns; muster rolls; and miscellaneous papers. These records are a part of Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94.

Background

Although no regiments of black troops were officially mustered into Federal service before January 1863, black troops were organized before that time. Some black regiments were organized in 1862 without War Department authorization, including: Native Guard Regiments raised by Gens. Benjamin F. Butler and John W. Phelps in Louisiana; the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers (the first black regiment to actually participate in combat) raised by James H. Lane; and the 1st Regiment of South Carolina Colored Volunteers organized by Gen. David Hunter in the spring and summer of 1862. These early efforts failed, due in large part to lingering Northern concerns about the unauthorized use of black troops in combat.

The Second Confiscation Act and the Militia Act of July 17, 1862, authorized President Lincoln to receive blacks into military service as soldiers, but he stated that he was still not ready to commit Negroes to combat. On August 25, 1862, the War Department gave official sanction to the policy of recruiting Negro soldiers by authorizing General Rufus Saxton in the Department of the South "to arm, uniform, equip, and receive into the service of the United States such number of volunteers of African descent as he deemed necessary, not to exceed 5,000." President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, which was issued as War Department General Order 1, January 2, 1863, specifically authorized free blacks to be "received into the armed service of the United States."

The recruiting of black soldiers by the War Department after the Emancipation Proclamation was slow until Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton sent Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas into the Mississippi Valley in March 1863 with the authority to recruit and organize free and contraband blacks for U.S. volunteer service. The recruiting effort was successful and led to the establishment of the Colored Troops Bureau on May 22, 1863, by War Department General Order 143. This Bureau, directly under the Adjutant General's Office, was made responsible for recruiting colored troops, commissioning officers to command them, and organizing and maintaining the records of the various colored troop organizations. Maj. Charles W. Foster was appointed chief with the title of Assistant Adjutant General. All black regiments were now to be designated as U.S. Colored Troops and the first of these was mustered into Federal service on June 30, 1863, at Washington, DC. Ultimately, the Corps d'Afrique and other State organizations were redesignated U.S. Colored Troops, but a few units raised in Massachusetts (including

the 54th), Connecticut and Louisiana retained their original State designations.

The 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored) was conceived by Massachusetts Governor John Andrew. Although it was a Massachusetts volunteer regiment, the majority of its men actually came from other States. The regiment's enlisted personnel were black, including two sons of the prominent black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, but its officers were white. Governor Andrew selected Robert Gould Shaw to command the unit; and Shaw selected his staff, nearly all of whom had military experience. The first recruits were raised at Boston on February 9, 1863, and by the end of the following month four companies had been organized and mustered into service. Three more companies were mustered on April 23, and the remaining three on May 13, 1863. The regiment, which consisted of approximately 1,200 men at its inception, was officially organized at Camp Meigs, Readville, MA, on May 13, 1863, to serve three years. Its field and staff components consisted of: Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, Adjutant, Quartermaster, Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel, and two Colonels. There were ten companies, usually with a captain in charge of each company. (See appendix.)

On May 23, 1863, the regiment left the State under orders to report to Gen. David Hunter, commanding the Department of the South. It arrived at Hilton Head, SC, on June 3 and on the same day proceeded to Beaufort, SC. A few days later the regiment was ordered to St. Simon's Island, GA, where it reported to Col. James Montgomery of the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers (Colored). While there it took part in an expedition up the Altamaha River to Darien, GA. It returned to Hilton Head on June 25 and formed part of Gen. Alfred H. Terry's expedition to James Island, SC, in July. It went into action for the first time at Secessionville, SC, where it received the brunt of the enemy's attack and suffered 45 killed, wounded, and missing.

The regiment then proceeded to Morris Island, which it reached on the evening of July 18, numbering 600 effective men; on that night it was ordered to lead the assault on Fort Wagner, SC. Advancing to the outer works, it planted the regimental flag on the parapet, but the struggle was soon seen to be hopeless and the attacking forces were withdrawn. The remnant of the regiment, together with a few fugitive men from other commands, was rallied about 700 yards from the fort by Captain Luis F. Emilio, the only officer above the grade of lieutenant not killed or wounded. This position was held throughout the night in expectation of a sortie by the enemy and in the morning the 54th Massachusetts was relieved by the 10th Connecticut. The 54th's total casualties in killed, wounded, and missing were 261, including Cols. Shaw and Edward N. Hallowell.

The regiment remained on duty in the trenches and in fatigue duty throughout the siege, and when the Confederates evacuated the fort on September 7, it was among the first to enter. Col. Edward N. Hallowell took active command of the regiment on October 17, having recovered from wounds received during the assault of July 18. The ranks of the regiment had now been augmented by 100 new recruits and by the return of many of the convalescents. It engaged in strengthening the works until January 1864 when it formed part of Gen. Truman Seymour's expedition to Florida. There it participated in the battle of Olustee, where it lost 87 men killed, wounded, and missing out of 500 engaged.

The 54th returned to Morris Island on April 18 and remained there throughout the succeeding summer and autumn. Eight companies under Lt. Col. Henry N. Hooper moved to Hilton Head in November 1864 and were assigned to Col. Alfred S. Hartwell's 2d brigade as part of the Coast Division under Gen. John P. Hatch. Moving with this division to Boyd's Neck on the Broad River with this division on November 29, six companies were engaged at Honey Hill, SC, on the 30th and formed part of the reserve at

Deveaux Neck, December 9. The division then moved to Graham's Neck and Pocotaligo and entered Charleston, February 27, 1865, where it was joined by the 54th's companies B and F, which had been left at Morris Island.

The regiment moved to Savannah in March 1865 and remained there until the 27th. It arrived in Georgetown, SC, on the 31st of March and formed part of a provisional division under Gen. Edward E. Potter. In April it served under Potter on a 20-day expedition into central South Carolina during the course of which it was engaged in constant skirmishing and marching. On the 17th the enemy was met in some force at Boykin's Mill, where the 54th lost 2 killed and 20 wounded. It returned to Georgetown on the 25th and to Charleston on May 6, and then served by detachments on guard and garrison duty in various parts of the State until August 17, 1865. Three days later the 54th was mustered out of service at Mount Pleasant, SC. It reached Boston by steamers *C.F. Thomas* and *Ashland* in two detachments, on August 26th and 28th. On September 1, 1865, the men were paid and discharged on Galloupe's Island. After marching that day through the streets of Boston, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored) was finally disbanded on the Boston Common.

Records Description

The records reproduced in this microfilm publication were maintained in accordance with Army regulations which required that specific types of records be kept by individual volunteer regiments and companies in the field. They are divided into two major subgroups, the first of which is bound record books consisting of letters and endorsements sent, a register of letters received, orders issued and received, casualties, regimental and company descriptive books, and company morning reports. The second subgroup is unbound regimental papers consisting of letters and telegrams received, orders issued and received, quarterly and monthly returns, rosters, casualty lists, courts-martial proceedings and sentences, morning reports, descriptive lists of deserters, lists of men detailed, recommendations for appointments, records of resignations and discharges, company inspection reports, and muster rolls. These records eventually were retired to the Adjutant General's Office for preservation where they were subsequently used to establish proof of Civil War military service in the Union Army. To facilitate this use, the information from the records was carded by the Record and Pension Office during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and placed in individual compiled military service records.

Bound Records

Letters Sent

Copies of the letters sent, June 11, 1863-August 1865, are arranged chronologically in a single volume. There is a name index at the beginning of the volume. Included are fair copies of letters and reports dispatched by the 54th's commanding officers or their adjutants. Most of the letters deal with the overall administration of the regiment, but some also include summary reports of battles participated in by the regiment (such as the assault at Fort Wagner) There are also letters of transmittal; requisitions for uniforms, foodstuffs, and equipment; and records relating to personnel administration. Of particular interest are letters sent to Massachusetts Governor John Andrew and Secretary of War Edwin A. Stanton concerning the issue of equal pay for the black troops in correlation to their white counterparts serving in the Union Army.

Endorsements Sent

Frequently, instead of writing a letter in response to an incoming communication, the regimental commander or adjutant wrote a reply or forwarding statement on the incoming letter and either returned the letter to the sender or forwarded it to another officer involved in the matter. These replies or forwarding statements, known as endorsements, were copied into a volume, usually with the summary of the contents of the incoming communication. The endorsements copied into this volume, Jan. 16, 1864-Aug. 2, 1865, are arranged and numbered chronologically.

Register of Letters Received

According to the recordkeeping practices of the time, registers of letters received were maintained in bound volumes as a permanent record of receipt and disposition of incoming letters. An entry was made in a register for each incoming communication. The entry included: a unique file number, assigned upon receipt, consisting of both the number itself and the calendar year during which the letter was received; the name or official designation of the writer; the date and place of origin of the communication; the date of its receipt; an abstract or summary of its contents; and usually some indication of its ultimate disposition, such as "filed" or "forwarded". Cross-references to related correspondence such as letters sent "LS," or endorsement book "EB," frequently appear. The documents themselves were filed in accordance with their assigned numbers.

The 54th's register of letters received is fragmentary, with entries arranged chronologically, January 1-23, 1864. There is a name index in front of the volume. A few letters in the unbound series of letters received correlate to the register entries.

Regimental and Company Order Books

The regimental order book consists of general and special orders, issued between March 4, 1863 and July 23, 1865. Arranged by company and thereunder chronologically, the orders contain information from Army Headquarters that affected the regiment as a whole. Entries in the company order book are arranged chronologically and cover the period between January 1, 1863 and December 30, 1865. The company book includes special orders; i.e., orders that relate primarily to matters affecting individuals such as authorization for leave, changes of duty stations, transfers, and other personnel matters. At the end of the company book there is a record of casualties, arranged by name of soldier. Notations indicate "killed in action"; "wounded in action"; "missing in action"; and "discharged".

Regimental and Company Descriptive Books

The single volume regimental descriptive book, 1863-1865, contains rosters of commissioned officers for different dates; lists of commissioned officers (by rank) and noncommissioned staff officers; lists of promoted officers transferred from and to the regiment and officers resigned and deceased; and an alphabetical list of enlisted men and noncommissioned officers with personal data and remarks.

The contents of the two volumes of company descriptive books, 1863-1865, are arranged by company. They contain lists of commissioned officers, noncommissioned officers, enlisted men, men transferred, and men discharged; registers of deaths with date, place, and cause; registers of deserters; and descriptive rolls giving personal data.

Company Morning Reports

The contents of the two volumes of daily morning reports, covering the period March 1863-August 1865, are arranged by company, thereunder chronologically. The reports for each company show the name of the company commander; station; date; number of officers of different ranks; noncommissioned officers, farriers and blacksmiths, artificers, privates, and recruits present for duty; number on special duty, sick, and in arrest or confinement; strength of the company present and absent; and information relating to number of horses and alterations since the last report. Signatures of the first sergeant and the company commander appear on the reports. A record of each day's activity is given in a special remarks column.

Unbound Records

Letters and Telegrams Received

The unbound letters and telegrams received, Mar. 9, 1863-Sept. 12, 1865, are arranged chronologically. Included are letters received from various departmental commands, staff officers, company commanders, and other Government officials such as Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Governor John Andrew. Filed among the letters are telegrams, circulars, orders, court martial proceedings and sentences, lists of men detailed, company rosters, and recommendations for appointments. The letters relate to a wide variety of subjects including the crucial issue of equal pay for the regiment's soldiers as compared to other regiments serving the Union. Some of the letters correspond to entries in the registers of letters received, but most are unregistered.

Orders Issued and Received

Orders issued and received, June 16, 1863-July 30, 1865, are arranged chronologically. These consist of directives to the companies that made up the 54th, relating to general administration of the regiment, duty assignments, drilling and training of the troops, desertions and courts-martial. Included also are circulars, memorandums, and directives in the form of letters received by the regiment primarily from the Adjutant General's Office, Headquarters, Department of the South. Many of the orders received deal with administrative procedures; troop assignments and movement; courts-martial; appointments, promotions, leaves of absence, and resignations.

Returns

Army Regulations required every commander of a body of troops to submit returns to the Adjutant General at specific intervals (usually monthly) on forms provided by that office. There is a section of the return, the "Record of Events," that contains information summarizing military operations in which the unit took part. The regimental returns, May 1863-July 1865, for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment are arranged monthly and quarterly and contain information about all the companies that made up the unit. The company returns, May 1863-July 1865, are arranged by company, with some companies having fragmented or incomplete returns. There are incomplete returns for the regimental Field and Staff elements, April 1864 only. In addition to regimental and company returns this series also includes chronologically arranged Quarterly Returns of Deceased Soldiers, Sept. 30, 1863-June 30, 1865; Annual Returns of Alterations and Casualties, May 1863-March 1865; and Casualty Returns, July 1863-June 1865, arranged by company.

Muster Rolls and Miscellaneous Rolls

The muster rolls, March 1863-September 1865, and other related rolls, March 1863-April 1866, are arranged by type of roll, thereunder by company, and thereunder chronologically. They consist of muster-in rolls, muster-out rolls, descriptive rolls (physical makeup of the regiment), allotment rolls (issuance of clothing and equipment) and hospital rolls. A muster roll is a list of all troops present on parade or otherwise accounted for, made on the day of muster or review of troops under arms in order to take account of their number, condition, and state of their arms and accoutrements. It was usually recorded on a form furnished by the Adjutant General's Office. Muster and descriptive rolls typically name the personnel of the regiment, with the names of commissioned and noncommissioned officers coming first, followed by the names of privates in alphabetical order. They also give the date and place of enlistment; by whom enrolled and for what period; date of muster into service; date of last pay and period covered, together with amount received; and remarks, which include disposition of any absentees, and notes of desertions and deaths. In addition, the muster and descriptive rolls furnish information on place of birth; age at date of muster; previous occupation; color of hair, eyes, and complexion; bounty paid and amount due; clothing accounts; and remarks. The "Record of events" section of the muster roll contains information summarizing military operations in which the company took part.

Related Records

Additional records relating to the 54th Massachusetts Regiment can be found in other series of records in RG 94. Among the records of the Colored Troops Division, 1863-1889, is a compilation of historical extracts and official papers concerning the military service of blacks, from the colonial period through the Civil War. Entitled *The Negro in the Military Service of the United States, 1639-1886*, the compilation has been reproduced as Microfilm Publication M858. The letters received by the Colored Troops Division, include consolidated personnel-type files relating to officers and enlisted men of the 54th. Information concerning the regiment's stations, movements, and battles in the "record of events" section were carded from the regimental returns and muster rolls and microfilmed on roll 211 of *Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations* (M594). Also in RG 94 are compiled service records of soldiers who served in the 54th and the microfilmed *Index to Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served With United States Colored Troops* (M589). Additional information can be found in registers of sick and wounded, field hospital records and other medical records. The papers of Gen. Quincy Adams Gillmore who commanded the Department of the South at the time of the siege of Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863, contain significant information, including reports of the 54th and other units that participated in the operation.

Other record groups having information pertaining to the 54th include: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105; Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau (Civil War), RG 110; Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, RG 393; and the War Department Collection of Confederate Records, RG 109. The multivolume War Department publication, *War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861-1865*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), has been microfilmed as M262. It includes printed official battle reports and correspondence relating to the 54th and the operations and engagements in which it participated.

APPENDIX

REGIMENTAL AND COMPANY OFFICERS
54TH MASSACHUSETTS INFANTRY REGIMENT (COLORED)

Colonel	Robert Gould Shaw
Colonel	Edward N. Hallowell
Lieutenant Colonel	Norwood P. Hallowell
Surgeon	Lincoln R. Stone
Assistant Surgeon	Charles P. Bridgham
Adjutant	Garth W. James
Quartermaster	John Ritchie

COMPANY A

Captain	John W. M. Appleton
1st Lieutenant	William H. Homans

COMPANY B

Captain	Samuel Willard Mann
1st Lieutenant	James M. Walton
2d Lieutenant	Thomas L. Appleton

COMPANY C

1st Lieutenant	James W. Grace
2d Lieutenant	Benjamin F. Dexter

COMPANY D

Captain	Edward L. Jones
1st Lieutenant	R. H. L. Jewett

COMPANY E

Captain	Luis F. Emilio
2d Lieutenant	David Reid

COMPANY F

Captain	Watson W. Bridge
2d Lieutenant	Alexander Johnston

COMPANY G

1st Lieutenant	Orin E. Smith
2d Lieutenant	James A. Pratt

COMPANY H

Captain	Cabot J. Russel
2d Lieutenant	Willard Howard

COMPANY I

Captain	George Pope
1st Lieutenant	Francis L. Higginson

2d Lieutenant Charles E. Tucker

COMPANY K
Captain William H. Simpkins
2d Lieutenant Henry W. Littlefield

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