

Forgotten Freedom Fighters:

Indiana Blacks in

Massachusetts Regiments

by

Alan D. Gaff

The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was one of the first regiments of black troops raised in the Northern states. Even though the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had agreed to recruit, organize, and provide officers for this regiment, there were not enough black males of military age within the state's borders to fill its ranks. On February 23, 1863, two days after the first squad of soldiers reported at Camp Meigs in Readville, Governor John A. Andrews dispatched George L. Stearns to scour the loyal states for potential fighting men. His first recruit was Lewis H. Douglass, son of the former slave, writer, and prominent abolitionist lecturer, Frederick Douglass. Within a few weeks Stearns had established a series of recruiting stations that stretched from Boston to St. Louis.

George Stearns selected John M. Langston, a mulatto graduate of Oberlin College and successful Ohio lawyer, to be his chief agent in the Midwest. Langston would address public meetings in black communities throughout Ohio and Indiana, explaining the laws regarding enlistment of black soldiers and generally stimulating patriotic sentiment. John Langston immediately decided that Indiana's Fifth Congressional District (the counties of Delaware, Fayette, Henry, Randolph, Union, and Wayne) should be an important stop on his speaking tour.

Located in east central Indiana, the Fifth District, according to the 1860 Census, contained more black residents than any other Congressional district in the state. Four-fifths of those blacks lived in Randolph or Wayne County. Wayne County contained a large number of Quaker citizens, whose anti-slavery sentiments created a favorable atmosphere for the settlement of free blacks. Richmond, the county seat and Indiana's second largest city, had a structured minority society that included an African Methodist Episcopal Church, Sabbath school, temperance lodge, Masonic lodge, and Masonic auxiliary. The spiritual leader of the region's black community was the Reverend William P. Quinn, Bishop of the A. M. E. Church and a native of Hindustan who had migrated to America by way of Gibraltar and England. Appointed a missionary to the flock in Ohio and Indiana in 1835, Quinn organized his Richmond church the following year. He established a second house of worship in Dublin, Indiana, in 1848 and during the Civil War founded two more churches in Cambridge City and Newport.

Although the black population of Wayne County in 1860 totaled but 870 persons, Richmond was part of a much larger cultural community that embraced the surrounding counties, both in Indiana and Ohio. Attendance was so high at regional gatherings that railroad companies often ran special half-fare trains to accommodate the crowds. There was also another railroad that carried thousands of blacks through Wayne County – the Underground Railroad. Until they moved to Ohio in 1847, the Quaker couple Levi and Catherine Coffin opened their Newport home to escaped slaves en route to freedom in Canada. Levi Coffin’s network of agents became so successful that not a single escapee entrusted to his care was ever retaken, leading some to call him the “President of the Underground Railroad.” Coffin’s Quaker neighbors, ably assisted by Newport’s black residents, continued the work after his removal to Cincinnati.

The second largest settlement in the Fifth District was located in Randolph County, where the black population was concentrated in three distinct areas: Greenville, Cabin Creek, and Snow Hill. The Cabin Creek and Snow Hill settlements were small farming communities in Nettle Creek and Washington townships. Greenville, largest of the three, straddled the Ohio state line northeast of Spartanburg and contained an A. M. E. Church and the Union Literary Institute, a manual labor boarding school. Samuel H. Smothers, formerly a Wayne County schoolteacher, served as principal of the Institute, whose endowment paid for the educations of both male and female students. Despite only nine months’ attendance at a common district school, Smothers acted as editor for a student publication titled *The Students’ Repository*. Smothers had already started to assemble articles for the first issue when Langston began his recruiting drive, but, due to lack of manpower to run the press of the *Winchester Journal*, the *Repository* did not appear until September. *The North American Review* praised Smothers’ publication, while its subscribers included the Boston Athenaeum, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and James Russell Lowell, editor of *Atlantic Monthly*.

Acceptance of blacks in the Fifth District was highlighted by the political victories of Congressman George W. Julian, an outspoken abolitionist and fervent campaigner for black suffrage and civil rights. A founder of the Republican Party, Julian’s views had been circulated through the columns of the *Indiana True Republican*, a weekly newspaper published in Centerville by his brother Isaac. During the war’s first months, Julian had advocated use of blacks in non-combat roles, such as cooks, teamsters, and laborers. Following Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, Congressman Julian spoke out strongly in favor of employing black soldiers to suppress the rebellion:

What we need is action, instant, decisive, defiant action, scourging faithless men from power, sweeping away obstacles, and kindling in the popular heart the fires of a new courage and hope. The government should arm the colored men of the free States as well as the slaves of the South, and thereby give effect to the proclamation of freedom.

Statements like this convinced John Langston that Indiana’s Fifth District would prove to be fertile ground for his recruiting effort.

Despite his optimism, Langston’s initial efforts in the Newport and Cabin Creek settlements were disappointing, the local press noting that the blacks “don’t rally very

extensively.” Undaunted, he moved on to Richmond where he addressed a huge public gathering in Starr Hall on May 7. The topic of his speech, “The Duty of the Colored Man in This Crisis,” was aimed directly at the black residents, but Langston’s appeal was widely praised by their white neighbors. After collecting money to purchase a flag for the 54th Massachusetts, a white businessman offered some resolutions that were loudly and unanimously approved by the crowd:

Resolved, That we tender him our sincere thanks for the pleasure he has afforded us, and extend to him the right hand of sympathy and friendship in his honorable efforts in enlisting his fellow citizens in that army of the Union.

Resolved, That the present perilous state of the country demands the united effort of all her citizens, white and black, to aid in its salvation, and that, therefore, we owe the same obligation to the families and dependents of the black men who offer their lives a sacrifice for our defence and safety that are due to the families of the soldiers of our own blood.

After listening to Langston’s impassioned oratory, a squad of young black men stepped forward and signed the roll of the Massachusetts regiment.

Following his brief campaign in Randolph and Wayne counties, John Langston moved on to other Midwest cities and towns. He delegated future recruiting efforts to W. G. Robinson, a black Richmond barber described by the *Richmond Palladium* as “a man of intelligence and respectability and worthy of the confidence of all.” Robinson enthusiastically canvassed the district and neighboring Ohio counties, forwarding about sixty more volunteers to Massachusetts. Principal Samuel Smothers described the wave of patriotism that swept the Greenville community, as well as communities across the nation:

There is considerable excitement in our neighborhood at present. Several of our young men have enlisted, and gone to Mass. to join the Colored Brigade, and a number of others talk of going. We now have a glorious opportunity of striking the fetters off of our enslaved brethren, and I rejoice, that our people are eagerly embracing it, by nobly responding to the call of Massachusetts, and enlisting by thousands.

Incomplete records show that at least 150 Indiana black men enlisted for service in the 54th Massachusetts. Thirty-nine of these resided in the Fifth District.

As squads of black Hoosiers departed for the Bay State, Editor Isaac Julian questioned whether Indiana would receive credit for recruits mustered into the service by another state. His suspicions were well founded – all Midwestern blacks sent east *were* credited to Massachusetts by the War Department. Governor Oliver P. Morton, worried over the potential loss of more Indiana manpower, queried Governor Andrew about rumors that additional black regiments were to be raised in Massachusetts. Although Andrew replied that no such plans existed, recruiters from other agencies swooped into Indiana in search of black recruits.

First to appear was John Langston, who now sought volunteers for the 5th Regiment, United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.), raised under the authority of the

Bureau for Colored Troops which the War Department had established to coordinate the organization of black soldiers. Although Langston restricted his activities to Ohio, some Hoosier men crossed over the state line to join that regiment in the summer of 1863. Agents for the 1st Michigan Colored Regiment appeared soon after, followed shortly by recruiters from a Rhode Island heavy artillery regiment. In order to receive credit for future enlistments, Governor Morton requested permission to raise a battalion of black men that could be applied to Indiana's quota. To keep men available for this new unit, Morton issued a regulation that "recruitment of colored troops in this State for companies or regiments organizing in other States, is henceforth positively prohibited and must cease." Indiana's new organization, the 28th U.S.C.T., came up short of Morton's goal. Due to the number of blacks who had enlisted elsewhere, only six companies could be filled in Indiana, the remaining four companies being raised in Maryland.

The press always bemoaned that Indiana had been late in recognizing the worth of black troops. The *Winchester Journal* expressed its indignation against the Morton administration and its political cowardice:

Now that it is too late to do much good our State authorities have gone into the work of enlisting colored soldiers. . . . If this had been done long ago, as it should and might have been, instead of deferring to the fear of unfavorable influence on the prospects of our political organization, we would now have credit for all the colored soldiers who were enlisted in Indiana by agents from other States. This County would have her quota under the last call nearly or quite made up if we had credit for our colored men who are in Massachusetts regiments.

The editor of the *New Castle Courier* agreed with those feelings and castigated Morton's short-sightedness, complaining, "If it had not been for the existence of an insane prejudice on the subject, we might have had credit for large numbers who now swell the ranks of regiments formed in some of our more wide-awake sister States."

Oliver P. Morton, a native and life-long resident of Wayne County, was a politician and a very practical man. He realized that, despite the favorable opinion held by some of his neighbors, a majority of Hoosiers had no use for black families. Pandering to this anti-black sentiment, Morton used simple logic to sell the employment of black soldiers to white voters at a Fourth of July celebration:

Even if the negroes will not make as good soldiers let us make what use of them we can. If they are only a quarter as good let us have the quarter. If they can be made to save the blood of our fathers, brothers and sons, shall they not be employed? . . . We shall garrison the South with negroes, and every one we enlist enables one of us to stay at home.

Most in the crowd would have subscribed to the crude concept that "a rebel had as well be shot to death by a negro, as kicked to death by a mule."

Horace Greeley explained the unique situation that faced Indiana's first black recruits, stating, "To this Massachusetts Fifty-fourth was set the stupendous task to convince the white race that colored troops would fight – and not only that they would fight, but that they could be made, in every sense of the word, soldiers." Speaking of his

first recruits, John Langston said, “Its *personnel* was of the highest character. Many of the first colored families had representatives in it, and many of the very best young colored men were numbered among its troops.” Captain Luis F. Emilio described the volunteers that assembled at Camp Meigs in the spring of 1863, “Only a small proportion had been slaves. There were a large number of comparatively light-complexioned men. In stature they reached the average of white volunteers. Compared with the material of contraband regiments, they were lighter, taller, or more regular features.” Except for the chaplain, all commissioned officers were white until Stephen A. Swails mustered as second lieutenant of Company F on May 14, 1864.

By May 11, 1863, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw’s 54th Massachusetts had been completed, so surplus arrivals were assigned to the 55th Massachusetts, commanded by Colonel Norwood P. Hallowell. Some non-commissioned officers and clerks were transferred to the 55th to aid in its organization. Seventeen of the Fifth District’s black men arrived in time to be assigned to the 54th, all but one serving in either Companies H or K. Later arrivals went into the 55th, most serving in Company G, with others scattered among companies A, C, D, and H. Records for the latter regiment give some interesting insights into its composition. Of the original 980 enlisted men, 247 had once been slaves, 550 were classified as “pure blacks,” 430 were of “mixed blood,” and 219 were married. The average age was just over 23 years and two months, while the average height was 5’ 7.” Although 319 could read and write, only 52 claimed to be church members (if their parents had only known!). Farming was the occupation of 596 men, the remainder claiming employment in forty-six other professions. These statistics mirror those of the 54th Massachusetts.

Colonel Hallowell remembered those early days at Camp Meigs in the following description:

The squads of recruits which arrived at Readville for the 55th could hardly at first have been called picked men. They were poor and ragged. Upon arrival they were marched to the neighboring pond, disrobed, washed, and uniformed. Their old clothes were burnt. The transformation was quite wonderful. The recruit was very much pleased with the uniform. He straightened up, grew inches taller, lifted, not shuffled his feet, began at once to try, and to try hard, to take the position of the soldier, the facings and other preliminary drill, so that his ambition to carry “one of those muskets” might be gratified.

Hallowell, noting that cleanliness was paramount in camp, said “not a scrap of loose floating paper or stuff of any kind was permitted.” There were, of course, some hard cases. These were dealt with strictly, Colonel Shaw, seconded by Colonel Hallowell, using the stick rather than the carrot, so that “unruly members of the 54th and 55th were stood on barrels, bucked, gagged, and, if need be, shot, – in fact, treated as white soldiers were in all well-disciplined regiments.”

The 54th Massachusetts left that state on May 23, 1863, for duty in the Department of the South. Assigned to the forces operating against Charleston, South Carolina, this regiment fought its first engagement July 16, 1863, on James Island. Two days later, Colonel Shaw led the 54th Massachusetts in the assault on Fort Wagner, an attack

memorialized by the 1989 film *Glory*. The regiment participated in the siege of Fort Wagner, the battles of Olustee, Florida (February 20, 1864) and Honey Hill, South Carolina (November 30, 1864), and then spent the rest of the war performing various duties in the latter state. The 54th Massachusetts was disbanded on Boston Common September 2, 1865. Of its 1,364 enlisted men, 271 had been killed, died of wounds or disease, died as prisoners of war, or remained missing in action.

The 55th Massachusetts left Camp Meigs July 21, 1863, for service on the South Atlantic coast, suffering its first casualties in an engagement on James Island, July 2, 1864. The regimental record included expeditions in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, with heavy losses at Honey Hill on November 30, 1864. The regiment had 1,129 enlisted men in its ranks during the war, of whom 178 died in battle, succumbed to wounds, or died of disease or in prison. Colonel Hallowell correctly pointed out that his men had also engaged in “many minor affairs, not large enough to be dignified by the name of battles,” explaining, “There were reconnoissances and raids, rifle-pits were charged and captured, prisoners were taken, and the resources of the enemy removed or destroyed.”

Indiana’s black soldiers suffered along with their comrades in the disease-ridden Southern camps, as well as in the skirmishes and battles of the 54th and 55th Massachusetts regiments. Of the seventeen Fifth District residents in the 54th, four were killed in action, two sustained wounds (one being shot in two different battles), and two died of disease. The twenty-two men in the 55th Massachusetts were luckier, only three receiving wounds while three others died from disease.

Officers were proud of those who performed well under fire, and sought to reward those who had proven themselves worthy, including several Fifth District soldiers. Captain George Woodward recommended that his first sergeant, William H. Evans, be given a furlough to Indiana, having “always been a faithful and efficient soldier – he was severely wounded in the recent advance on James Island S.C. (July 2nd 1864) and is still suffering from the effects of the wound there received – and he will not, in my opinion, be able for duty with his Co for a long time.” A canister shot had penetrated Evans’ upper thigh just two inches below his groin. Lieutenant William Roberts sought a month-long furlough for Sergeant Charles Oglesby, writing, “he having been in the service over two years wishes to visit his wife and family & as he has been faithful in performing his duties as a soldier I would recommend that a furlough be granted.” Captain J. C. Hall, commanding Company D of the 55th Massachusetts, gave two reasons for allowing Stephen Pediford to return home. First, he had been “a true and faithful soldier performing all his duties with cheerfulness and alacrity.” On a more compassionate note, Hall explained, “His reason for going is to provide a home for his mother, who has been made homeless by a cruel and drunken stepfather.” On the other hand, officers had no use for bad soldiers, such as Wayne County resident John Steth, who had managed to enlist although suffering from a long-standing case of rheumatism. His regimental surgeon said of Steth, “An improper enlistment. Good for nothing. Has never earned his salt since joining the regiment.” A note on Steth’s discharge certificate noted, “No claim for pension.”

Men of the 54th and 55th Massachusetts had an additional battle to fight that had nothing to do with firing their muskets. This contest pitted them against the War Department, as explained by the state adjutant general:

The colored men whom we enlisted were entitled to be paid and treated as white soldiers, but difficulties arose. The colored soldiers were not paid the same compensation as white troops. The government allowed them but ten dollars a month, inclusive of clothing, while white troops were paid thirteen dollars a month, exclusive of clothing, making a monthly difference of seven dollars, and no distinction was made in regard to non-commissioned officers, sergeants and corporals. They had been enlisted in the same way as white troops, had been mustered in, and were under the same laws and orders, and were subject to the same casualties. This distinction caused dissatisfaction, and the heroes of Fort Wagner refused to accept the government pay of ten dollars a month. They demanded, and justly so, the same pay as white troops doing the same duties.

Colonel Hallowell explained, “Seven times were our regiments mustered for pay. Seven times they refused, and pointed to their honorable scars to plead their manhood and their rights.” Promises by the state to make up the difference were rebuffed – they served in the United States army and would accept only the payment due them from the Federal government!

Many were “sadly in need of money” for impoverished families, but they adamantly refused to take less than what was due them. Mutiny became a distinct possibility and, according to one officer, “a part of the 55th did one morning stack arms, not in an angry, tumultuous way, but in a sullen, desperate mood that expressed a wish to be marched out to be shot rather than longer bear the cries from home and longer endure the galling sense of humiliation and wrong.” A few men broke from the majority and accepted payment, including Dublin’s Thomas Cannon of the 55th, all of whom came “highly recommended by their commanders as brave and good men, and had been fifteen months in service without pay.” One Bay State paymaster said simply, “They were totally destitute, and part had families.” Again it was Colonel Hallowell who asked rhetorically, “It is all very well and good, of course, to praise the bravery of these men as soldiers, but with what words may we express our admiration of the dignity, self-respect, self-control, they showed in their conduct as men as well as soldiers in the matter of pay?” The War Department finally acknowledged that black and white soldiers deserved the same wages and the two Massachusetts regiments received their long-awaited back pay in September of 1864.

Men of the 54th and 55th Massachusetts regiments, including those long-forgotten Hoosier volunteers from east central Indiana, had proven themselves to be warriors both on the battlefield and in the fight for equal pay. Their efforts had been a giant step forward towards racial equality, although obviously much remained to be done. When John Langston addressed a Memorial Day ceremony in 1873, he spoke to those black Indiana volunteers, and thousands more just like them, who had left their homes and families, bound for Massachusetts and determined to change the world:

Our freedom does not mean simple emancipation, mere release of body, self-ownership or freedom of locomotion. It is all of those, but far more beside. It is the enjoyment of free thought, free speech, citizenship, the ballot; but above all the opportunity to rise and achieve, thereby becoming great and influential among our countrymen, to cultivate all those things which pertain to dignified life, and the highest interest of our country.

LETTERS FROM PRIVATE WILLIAM EDRINGTON,
COMPANY K, 54TH MASSACHUSETTS

A native of Brookville, Indiana, William E. Edrington was the son of Gustavus V. Edrington, who moved to Centerville, Indiana and opened a barber shop in the Jones building during the war. In addition to cutting hair, Gustavus had a soda fountain and sold ice cream, one of his customers being Isaac Julian, editor of the *Indiana True Republican*. William worked as a farm hand until his enlistment, but eventually followed his father into the barbering profession. A cordial relationship between the Edrington and Julian families led William to write the following letters which appeared in the *True Republican*. Following the war, William came home, became a barber, married, and started a family in Ohio, but dropped out of sight after filing for a pension in 1890.

Army in the Field, and
Department of the South,
Headquarters, Morris Island,
South Carolina, Oct. 12, 1863.

Mr. Editor, – Sir, Having the time and opportunity, I thought I would give you a brief sketch of army life in the South. I will mention our first engagement with the enemy.

We landed on James Island, where we met the enemy in very large force, their pickets were stationed all around us. The fight began early in the morning, of July 16th, but, owing to superior numbers, our little band of patriotic heroes were compelled to fall back.

Our little force, composed of three companies, B, H and K, the latter of which I am an humble member. There were five killed and seven wounded in Company K. There was but one Indiana boy wounded in Company K [Joseph Wilson]. He was a brave and noble soldier, he formerly worked for Mr. J. H. Thomas, of Richmond.

After the Gunboats and Light Artillery had played upon them for one hour and a half, the rebels retreated back to Seceshville. Finding the enemy in too large a force, our General in command, thinking it best, we evacuated the Island. We then all got ready and went aboard the *General Hunter*, and landed on Folly Island about 10 o'clock. We were then landed on Morris Island, and marched to this place, which we now occupy as our camping ground. We were then brought to a halt, and a couple of hours for rest allowed us, as we were nearly exhausted, we then prepared for the charge which proved so disastrous to us. We then marched within three hundred yards of the fort and, by orders from the Colonel, we fell upon our knees. Solid shot and shell went whistling over our heads. They having passed, we arose to our feet. The Colonel, speaking aloud, said: "Boys are you ready to take that fort?" "Yes! yes!" Springing towards the fort, with not a gun loaded, but with our glittering bayonet to defend ourselves with, we reached the fort, the rebels pouring grape and cannister into us, all the time, cutting our boys down, like grass before the mower's scythe. One of my bunk-mates, a resident of Newport [Thomas R. Ampey], fell among those cruel traitors. How hard it was to part with that noble companion, though he fell in a good cause. Also, that noble color bearer, that carried that noble flag, it was hauled from the staff, but he, clinging to the staff, brought it safe back to camp. He escaped uninjured. But, alas, that brave and noble Colonel, that marched at the head of his regiment, waving his sword over his head, fell dead – in the fort. We also lost our Captain.

The order to retreat being given we fell back in some disorder, about 600 or 700 yards from the fort, where the rear guard was stationed. The 9th Maine being drawn up as a support for the gallant 54th, they being somewhat excited, fired volley after volley into our boys, killing and wounding a great many. But the gallant 100th N. Y. supported us, as a hen that gatherth her brood under her wings.

Our number, in killed and wounded, is estimated at, or near 400. I must say, and thank God for it, that I have been spared, while many of my companions have fallen for that glorious Union, that must and shall be preserved.

I have no doubt that the letter I wrote to my parents after the charge on Fort Wagner relieved their minds of much anxiety on my account. Some of the boys are home on furlough, and I hope to be able to pay you all a visit, soon. We have been doing fatigue and picket duty every day, since the fight, and were under fire all the time from five or six different points. Our regiment is generally very healthy. I have stood it better than I expected to. We dug trenches day and night, until we reached the parapet of the fort. The land batteries then opened on the fort. The fleet, composed of the Ironsides and

Monitors, then steamed up near the fort and opened fire upon it, and shell came whistling over our heads from the land batteries. We entered the fort about daybreak the next morning, taking but few prisoners. There was plenty of provisions in the fort, we all eat of the rebs crackers and meat. The soldiers seem to relish it very much. The rebs did not leave but two animals in the fort, (one being a jackass, the other a mule.) One of the Marines wishing to try their speed mounted one's back, rode it nearly to death and pronounced it unfit for service. From all I can learn, they are a couple of recruits that had retreated from Charleston, as provisions were scarce, they fell into the hands of the Yankees. I am sorry to say that we have deprived the Gen. of his tobacco. A few more such fights and we will break into some of their strongholds. For a specimen – Fort Wagner is one they skedaddled from, leaving behind them, their guns. The Fort being very strong, having very splendid bombproof, magazines, &c.

I must close my letter as it is getting late.

William E. Edrington

Headquarters, Morris Island,
S. C., Aug. 3^d, 1864

Mr. Editor. – I wish to inform the relatives and friends of the soldiers of this Regiment that they will confer a favor upon us by directing their letters to this regiment according to its established name, which is the so-called 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, and I will also embrace the opportunity of remarking that the friends and relatives will confer another favor upon the Regiment in answering all letters as speedily as possible, which are sent to them from the regiment. No one knows in civil life how much a soldier appreciates a letter from those whom he regards as near and dear to him. In many instances our soldiers will beg paper and ink enough to write to some dearly beloved wife, brother or sister or friend, who would apparently shake their hand off at home, and after receiving their letters, they are not punctual enough or carelessly forget to answer them. I know this from experience by the return of soldiers from home, they will mention of such and such a one that received letters from us and he must write again. They don't know that some of the letters sent to them cost a very big price, for many of the soldiers who can't write themselves have to pay others to do it for them, and sometimes it is almost impossible for a soldier to get pen, ink or paper or pencil. Any wife that is a wife, or friend that is a friend, or relative that is a relative should never think it too much trouble to write to a soldier two, three or four times before getting an answer from him, for that very soldier probably can't get means to write with, as he may be on picket duty 48 hours where every moment demands the greatest vigilance to keep himself out of the way of sharpshooters or being detected by his own men for sleeping on post, is certain death, and by the time the soldier gets back to where he might possibly write a few lines, he is so exhausted that without even eating probably, he falls asleep, and when he wakes, some thief likely has stolen his pen, ink and paper, or it has rained

and destroyed his paper, and thus he can't write after all. But I can't enumerate half the obstacles labored under by a soldier. But this I do say, that all persons receiving letters from soldiers should answer them immediately, and if they care anything about the brave defenders of justice, right and equality, they should write to their brothers and defenders of our country without being written to first. I have seen soldiers go from day to day asking for letters and, on a continual reply in the negative, they would look so downcast that I would feel sorry for them in my heart. I have seen others after a long suspense get a letter, and it seemed to illuminate their very souls with joy.

Let the friends of the soldier write to him, and if you know the whereabouts of the Regiment, write to him first and then write again, and cheer him up while lying from day to day under ball and shell of your and his enemy, and do away with this idle and mean habit.

I have the honor to remain,

Wm. E. Edrington,
54th Reg't Mass. Vols. Co. K

Headquarters Dep't of the South,
Morris Island, Nov. 2, 1864

Mr. Editor – Sir: – Since I penned my last to you, we have been met with quite a change, which you may be informed of. What we have long contended for came at last – the paymaster with the full amount of pay from date of enlistment: \$13 up to May; from May, \$16. Now, Mr. Editor, we as soldiers enlisted for three years unless sooner discharged. We have thus far fought the battles of our country with the honor that is just to every true patriot. So, by the way, we have gained that can be left for the brave who never falter. But a curse to those who by every means have tried to cheat the soldier of color out of his rights. We received the honor of guarding six hundred rebel prisoners, – their rank being from first lieutenant to colonel. Some of them have been prisoners twenty-two months. But still they think it rough treatment, while in the post field hospital here, they received if anything, better treatment than Old Abe's boys. We are relieved from guarding them, they have sailed for a point unknown to us.

The health of the regiment is good. We are divided into detachments of one, two and three companies together. I will close until you hear from me again.

I remain, yours truly,

Wm. E. Edrington,
54th Reg't Mass. Vols.



PRIVATE ISOM AMPEY,
COMPANY K, 54TH MASSACHUSETTS INFANTRY

Born in New Garden Township, Wayne County, Indiana, Isom Ampey was the son of James and Dicey Ampey, former North Carolina slaves who had been freed by George Mendenhall in 1829. James had died by 1850, so Dicey watched over her youngest eight children, first in Dalton Township, then on a small farm one-half mile northeast of Newport. By the time of the Civil War, two older sons had left home, leaving James and Isom to work the fields. Isom and his elder brother Thomas were among the first to sign up for the 54th Massachusetts, the younger boy emerging unscathed from his military service.

The Ampey family did, however, suffer its share of loss during the war. Thomas was among those killed in the storming of Fort Wagner. George W., one of Isom's younger brothers, enlisted in Company B, 28th U.S.C.T. in December of 1863. His regimental surgeon sent George to L'Ouverture Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia, on May 31, 1864. An army doctor reported on the case: "He entered our Hospital with the disease of Insanity. Since his admission he has been gradually becoming worse. At times he becomes so boisterous and unmanageable that he throws pillows and stones at sick members of the Wards; So that he has ceased to be a safe member of the Hospital and ought to be transferred to some Insane Asylum." On June 27 George transferred to St. Elizabeth Hospital in Washington, D.C., where he remained until discharged on January 5, 1866.

Isom moved to Michigan after the war and met Mary Crumbo, whom he married in 1866. The couple located at Bloomingdale, Michigan, where they lived on a small

farm and raised five children. The veteran became prominent in the Grand Army of the Republic and held numerous state offices until his death in 1905.

LIST OF BLACK SOLDIERS FROM INDIANA'S
FIFTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT WHO SERVED IN
MASSACHUSETTS UNITS

FIFTY-FOURTH MASSACHUSETTS INFANTRY

Ampey, Isom, Company K, Private; born New Garden Township, Wayne County, Indiana; resided Newport, Indiana; farmer; 21; 5' 11"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 12, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; detached to the Quartermaster Department April, 1864; mustered out August 20, 1865.

Ampey, Thomas R., Company K, Private; born Newport, Indiana; resided Newport, Indiana; laborer; 26; 5' 8½"; brown complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; killed July 18, 1863, in the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina.

Broady, George W., Company H, Private; born Newport, Indiana; resided Newport, Indiana; laborer; 28; brown complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 13, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; wounded July 18, 1863, in the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina; wounded in the left hand and hip November 30, 1864, at Honey Hill, South Carolina; mustered out August 20, 1865.

Burket, Elisha, Company H, Private; born Ohio; resided Newport, Indiana; farmer; 35; 5' 8"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted April 21, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; killed July 16, 1863, at James Island, South Carolina.

Charles, George T., Company E, Private; born Richmond, Indiana; resided Richmond, Indiana; barber; 24; 5' 9"; light complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted May 12, 1863; mustered April 23, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865.

Edrington, William E., Company K, Private, born Brookville, Indiana; resided Centerville, Indiana; laborer; 21; 5' 7"; brown complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865.

Lewis, Alfred, Company K, Private; born Allen County, Indiana; resided Spartanburg, Indiana; laborer; 26; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865, as a Corporal.

- Lewis, Daniel D. H., Company K, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Richmond, Indiana; laborer; 21; 5' 3½"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865.
- Lewis, George, Company K, Private; born Monmouth, Ohio; resided Richmond, Indiana; barber; 23; 5' 5½"; brown complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; died of disease July 1, 1865, at Charleston, South Carolina.
- McCowan, George T., Company K, Private; born Rush County, Indiana; resided Richmond, Indiana; farmer; 23; 5' 7"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 12, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865
- McCowan, Pleasant, Company K, Private; born Rush County; resided Richmond, Indiana; laborer; 19; 5' 8½"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865, as a Corporal.
- Raimer, Newman, Company H, Private; born Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; resided Newport, Indiana; laborer; 18; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted April 29, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; died of disease December 3, 1863, at Morris Island, South Carolina.
- Redmond, William H., Company K, Private; born Dayton, Ohio; resided Newport, Indiana; farmer; 21; 5' 9½"; brown complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1865.
- Shaffer, John, Company H, Private; laborer; 22; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Newport, Indiana; enlisted May 13, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; mustered out August 20, 1864, as a Corporal.
- Wilson, John H., Company K, Private; born Fayetteville, North Carolina; resided Richmond, Indiana; blacksmith; 22; 5' 7½"; brown complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863, as a Corporal; wounded and supposed killed July 18, 1863, in the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina.
- Wilson, Joseph, Company K, Private; born Greensboro, North Carolina; resided Newport, Indiana; blacksmith; 27; 5' 8"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 12, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; wounded July 16, 1863, at James Island, South Carolina; mustered out August 20, 1865.

Winslow, John W., Company K, Private; born Lewisville, Indiana; resided Lewisville, Indiana; laborer; 24; 5' 9½"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 5, 1863; mustered May 13, 1863; killed February 20, 1864, at Olustee, Florida.

FIFTY-FIFTH MASSACHUSETTS INFANTRY

Bowlin, Edward, Company G, Private; born Farmland, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 20; 5' 10½"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Bowlin, James, Company C, Private; born Franklin, Ohio; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 26; 5' 10½"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 21, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; wounded November 30, 1864, at Honey Hill, South Carolina; returned to duty February 17, 1865; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Cannon, Thomas, Company C, Private; born Hartford, North Carolina; resided Dublin, Indiana; farmer; 22; 5' 10"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 21, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; deserted from Knight Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut, May, 1864; reported voluntarily at Richmond, Indiana, July 1864; returned as a convalescent; deserted September 16, 1864, from Distribution Camp Alexandria, Virginia; returned and wounded in the left thigh November 30, 1864, at Honey Hill, South Carolina; discharged July 14, 1865, because of his wound.

Cotton, Wiley W., Company G, Private; born Farmland, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 19; 5' 5½"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1863.

Crawford, John W., Company A, Private; born Richmond, Indiana; resided Richmond, Indiana; farmer; 22; 5' 11½"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 13, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865, as a Corporal.

Evans, William H., Company A, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Wayne County, Indiana; farmer; 23; 5' 8"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 13, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; wounded in the hip July 2, 1864,

- at James Island, South Carolina; discharged July 16, 1865, as a First Sergeant, for disability caused by wounds received July 2, 1864, at James Island, South Carolina.
- Hill, John, Company G, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Economy, Indiana; farmer; 18; 5' 4³/₄"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1863.
- Means, Andrew J., Company G, Private; born Henry County, Indiana; resided New Castle, Indiana; farmer; 19; 5' 10"; light complexion; brown eyes; brown hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; died October 4, 1863, of typhoid fever at Folly Island, South Carolina.
- Oglesby, Charles, Company G, Private; born South Carolina; resided Greenville, Indiana; farmer; 22; light complexion; gray eyes; black hair; enlisted June 4, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865, as a Sergeant.
- Outland, Alfred, Company G, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 18; 5' 7¹/₄"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.
- Outland, King S., Company G, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 23; 5' 8¹/₂"; dark complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.
- Pediford, Stephen W., Company D, Private; born Guilford County, North Carolina; resided Henry County, Indiana; farmer; 20; 5' 7¹/₂"; brown complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted May 23, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.
- Perkins, John, Company H, Private; born Farmland, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 19; 5' 7"; light complexion; brown eyes; brown hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 22, 1863; discharged September 10, 1864, for disability at Folly Island, South Carolina.
- Riley, William, Company G, Private; born Farmland, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 23; 5' 8³/₄"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; died October 3, 1863, of typhoid-malarial fever at Folly Island, South Carolina.
- Robbins, Simeon, Company G, Private; born Butler County, Ohio; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 23; 5' 9¹/₂"; dark complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Roberts, Charles, Company G, Private, born Butler County, Ohio; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 21; dark complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Smothers, George W., Company G, Private; born Stoney Creek Township, Randolph County, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 18; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Smothers, Thomas, Company G, Private; born Stoney Creek Township, Randolph County, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 19; 5' 3³/₄"; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Steth, John W., Company A, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Wayne County, Indiana; blacksmith; 24; 6' 3"; dark complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 13, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; discharged September 15, 1864, for disability at Folly Island, South Carolina.

Ward, Emanuel, Company C, Private; born Wayne County, Indiana; resided Centerville, Indiana; farmer; 24; 5' 6¹/₂"; black complexion; dark brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 21, 1863; mustered May 31, 1863; mustered out August 29, 1865.

Williams, George W., Company G, Private; born Farmland, Indiana; resided Farmland, Indiana; farmer; 21; 5' 9¹/₂"; dark complexion; black eyes; black hair; enlisted June 5, 1863; mustered June 15, 1863; mustered out September 15, 1865.

Williams, Thomas, Company A, Private; born Newport, Indiana; resided Newport, Indiana; blacksmith; 24; light complexion; brown eyes; black hair; enlisted May 13, 1863; died July 30, 1864, of consumption, as a Corporal, at Folly Island, South Carolina.

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